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Research Article

Gaining Votes in Europe against Europe? How National Contexts Shaped the Results of Eurosceptic Parties in the 2014 European Parliament Elections

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Abstract

In the wake of the harshest economic crisis since 1929, in several European countries there has been a rise of Eurosceptic parties that oppose EU integration. The 2014 European Parliament elections were a fundamental turning point for these parties. In this article, after a theoretical discussion on the concept of Euroscepticism, we provide an updated classification of Eurosceptic parties after the 2014 European Parliament elections. We show the cross-country variability of such parties' results and present two hypotheses aiming at explaining Eurosceptic parties' results, one related to each country's economic context and one related to each country's political-institutional context. Through a comparative approach and the use of quantitative data, we test the two hypotheses by creating two standardised indices of economic and political-institutional contexts. Three important findings are shown: Eurosceptic parties perform better in either rich, creditor countries or in poor countries; Eurosceptic parties perform better in countries with peculiar political-institutional features, such as high levels of party system instability and a more permissive electoral system; finally, and crucially, favourable political-institutional contexts seem to be more important than favourable economic contexts for Eurosceptic parties' electoral results.

Keywords

European Parliament; EP elections; Euroscepticism; political parties

After the European Parliament (EP) elections of 2014, many commentators pointed out that 'Eurosceptic' parties gained many votes and obtained a relevant number of seats in the European Parliament. This work aims at analysing the electoral results of Eurosceptic parties and shedding some light on how the national contexts influenced their performance. We proceed as follows: in the first section we select the definition of Euroscepticism used in this work and present an up-to-date classification of Eurosceptic parties; the second section identifies Eurosceptic parties' electoral results in the 2014 EP elections and shows their characteristics; in the third section the hypotheses are presented; in the fourth section we connect Eurosceptic parties' results and the economic and political-institutional frameworks of the European countries by presenting a typology of Eurosceptic parties' results; the final section delivers our conclusions.

EUROSCEPTICISM: DEFINITION AND PARTIES' CLASSIFICATION

How can we define Euroscepticism? A good definition is Taggart's: 'Euroscepticism expresses the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration' (1998: 366). Starting from this definition, Szczerbiak and Taggart have separated Euroscepticism into two concepts, soft and hard Euroscepticism: the latter 'implies outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration and opposition to their country joining or remaining members of the EU' (2001: 10), while the former is related to a more contingent opposition concerning some EU policy areas or is related to the defence of the national interest.

This definition has been criticised by several authors, such as Kopecky and Mudde (2002), who have proposed an alternative way to identify opposition to / support for the European Union (EU) by building a four-fold typology of pro-EU or anti-EU parties based on the distinction between 'diffuse support' (for the idea of European integration) and 'specific support' (for the application of European integration). In a similar vein, Flood (2002) has developed a classification into six types (from EU-rejectionist to EU-maximalist), based on parties' support of a country's membership of the EU and/or a country's participation in particular institutions or policies. Moreover, Rovny (2004) has built a four-fold typology based on two categories of magnitude (that is, Szczerbiak and Taggart's hard-soft distinction) and of motivation (that is, ideology-driven opposition versus strategy-driven opposition). Finally, Krouwel and Abts (2007) have created a typology which is created by two axes: the first one regards the targets of positive or negative attitudes, while the second deals with different types of political evaluations of the targets. Nonetheless, these alternative classifications have fostered criticisms by many scholars (see for instance Conti 2003; Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008; Vasilopoulou 2013), who have advanced the necessity to move away, among other things, from two extreme problems: non-mutually-exclusive categorisations (the fact that a party can fall into more than one category) or extremely refined and over-specific categorisations (that may risk not finding empirical confirmation in reality). Regardless of the fact that scholars have interpreted Euroscepticism through dichotomous categorisations, multi-dimensional typologies or, as undertaken by Hooghe and Marks (2007), as a continuum, all scholars have tried to distinguish between parties that are Eurosceptic and parties that are not.

Finally, in 2008, Szczerbiak and Taggart, addressing scholars' critiques, redefined their original definition of hard Euroscepticism that now no longer includes the rejection of EU membership as the key element identifying the category but is meant as a 'principled opposition to the project of European integration as embodied in the EU' (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008: 247). Therefore, they suggested that 'a party's stance on its country's EU membership is not, in fact, such a caesura as described in our original hard-soft conceptualisation' (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008: 243).

We believe that this redefinition made by Szczerbiak and Taggart in 2008 can be a good starting point. Still, the increasing spread of anti-EU discourses and attitudes (Usherwood and Startin 2013) have basically made all parties have at least some soft Eurosceptic attitudes (Flood 2009). Indeed, the category of soft Eurosceptic parties is no longer useful, since it risks being over inclusive. A more fruitful way to identify Eurosceptic parties would be that of focusing on the attitude towards the European integration process, as stressed by several authors (Flood 2002; Conti 2003). As a result, in this light Eurosceptic parties are not only those that explicitly push for the withdrawal of their country from the EU, but also those that express a very negative attitude towards European integration.

Following this conceptualisation, we provide a fresh classification of Eurosceptic parties after the 2014 EP elections. Indeed, notwithstanding the large amount of literature on the topic, there is no up-to-date classification of Eurosceptic parties based on empirical data. The existing literature has either provided partial classifications, based on a limited number of countries (Taggart 1998; Kopecky and Mudde 2002; Külahci 2012; Pirro and Van Kessel 2013¹) or classifications that are out-dated (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002; De Sio and Legnante 2010), given the large changes occurred in the European party systems in more recent years.

To pursue the goal of devising a classification of Eurosceptic parties, we have created a database made up by 308 parties, namely, all parties that contested the 2014 EP elections in the 28 EU member states and received at least 0.5 per cent of the national share. For each party we have reported the score obtained on European integration-related issues according to two well-known

expert survey datasets: Chapel Hill (Bakker et al. 2015) and EUandl (2014). They provide parties' positions on a set of EU-related variables based on Likert scales.²

We have thus classified each party according to its attitude towards Europe. We have analysed parties' scores on EU integration issues³ and selected only those parties that oppose EU integration. When there were some conflicting results for Eurozone parties' scores, we relied on Euro-related questions.⁴ The rationale behind this choice is straightforward: given the fundamental importance of European Monetary Union for countries in the Eurozone, parties belonging to these countries should be treated in a different way from parties coming from countries which are outside the monetary union. Indeed, the Eurozone's party systems tend to be more pro-European than those that are outside (Külahci 2012: 190). Therefore, opposing the Euro for parties within the Eurozone is a signal of strong Eurosceptic attitudes that should be taken into account. Finally, in cases of missing or incomplete data, we have used other sources, especially party platforms or manifestos and the reports of country experts in De Sio, Emanuele and Maggini (2014).

This classificatory effort has produced a final list of 60⁵ Eurosceptic parties from 23 European countries, reported in Table 1.

Table 1: List of Eurosceptic parties after the 2014 European Parliament Elections

Country	Eurosceptic parties
Austria	Freedom Party (FPÖ); EU-STOP; The Reform Conservatives (REKOS); Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ)
Belgium	Flemish Interest (VB)
Bulgaria	Attack (PPA); National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB)
Croatia	-
Cyprus	Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL); National Popular Front (ELAM)
Czech Republic	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM); Party of Free Citizens (SSO Svobodni); Party of Common Sense (ROZUMNI); Workers' Party of Social Justice (DSSS)
Denmark	Danish People's Party (DFP); People's Movement against the EU (FOBE)
Estonia	Conservative People's Party (EKRE); Estonian Independence Party (EIP)
Finland	True Finns (PS)
France	National Front (FN); Arise the Republic (DLR); Workers' Struggle (LO)
Germany	Alternative for Germany (AfD); National Democratic Party of Germany (NDP)
Greece	Golden Dawn (LS-CA); Communist Party of Greece (KKE); Independent Greeks (AE); Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS); United Popular Front (EPAM)
Hungary	Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)
Ireland	Sinn Féin (SF)
Italy	Five Star Movement (M5S); Northern League (LN); Brothers of Italy (Fdi)
Latvia	Union of Greens and Farmers (ZZS); Socialist Party of Latvia (LSP)
Lithuania	-
Luxembourg	Communist Party of Luxembourg (KPL)
Malta	-
Netherlands	Party for Freedom (PVV); Socialist Party (SP); Reformed Political Party-Christian Union (SGP-CU); Party for the Animals (PvdD); Article 50
Poland	Congress of the New Right (KNP); United Poland (SP); National Movement (RN)
Portugal	Democratic Unitarian Coalition (CDU); Workers' Communist Party (PCTP/MRPP) National Renovator Party (PRN)
Romania	Greater Romania Party (PRM)

Country	Euro sceptic parties
Slovakia	Slovak National Party (SNS); People's Party – Our Slovakia (L'SNS)
Slovenia	-
Spain	-
Sweden	Green Party (MP); Sweden Democrats (SD); Left Party (V);
United Kingdom	United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP); An Independence from Europe (IndEU); British National Party (BNP); Sinn Féin (SF); Democratic Unionist Party (DUP); Ulster Unionist Party (UUP); Traditionalist Unionist Voice (TUV)

EUROSCEPTIC PARTIES' RESULTS AND PARTY CHARACTERISTICS: A PATCHY FRAMEWORK

Euro sceptic parties after the 2014 EP elections gained 135 seats out of 751, 18 per cent of the total EP seats, increasing their presence in the parliament by 63 seats compared to the 2009 elections. Interestingly, the mean of the results of all the Euro sceptic parties in the EU is 6.8 per cent, substantively the same as that recorded in the 2009 EP elections (see Table 2). However, looking only at mean values could be misleading. Indeed, in the 2014 EP elections, 60 Euro sceptic parties obtained 0.5 per cent or more of valid votes, whereas in the 2009 EP elections this number was lower (45). Furthermore, in the European elections of 2014 the number of Euro sceptic parties that got more than 15 per cent of valid votes doubled with respect to 2009, rising from four to eight.

Table 2: Electoral results for the main Euro sceptic parties at the EP elections (vote differences in percentage points between 2009 and 2014)

Country	Party	Party Name	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (change from 2009)	Seats (change from 2009)
Cyprus	AKEL	Progressive Party of Working People	27	2	-7.9	0
Denmark	DF	Danish People's Party	26.6	4	+11.3	+2
United Kingdom	UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party	26.6	24	+10.0	+11
France	FN	National Front	24.9	24	+18.6	+21
Italy	M5S	Five Star Movement	21.2	17	new	new
Austria	FPÖ	Freedom Party	19.7	4	+7.0	+2
Ireland	SF	Sinn Féin	19.5	3	+8.3	+3
Sweden	MP	Green Party	15.4	4	+4.4	+2
Hungary	Jobbik	Movement for a Better Hungary	14.7	3	-0.1	0
Portugal	CDU	Democratic Unitarian Coalition	13.7	3	+2.3	+1
Netherlands	PVV	Party for Freedom	13.3	4	-3.7	0

Country	Party	Party Name	Votes (%)	Seats	Votes (change from 2009)	Seats (change from 2009)
Finland	PS	True Finns	12.9	2	+3.1	+1
Czech Republic	KSCM	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia	11.0	3	-3.2	-1
Sweden	SD	Sweden Democrats	9.7	2	+6.4	+2
Netherlands	SP	Socialist Party	9.6	2	+2.5	0
Greece	LS-CA	Golden Dawn	9.4	3	+8.9	+3
Latvia	ZZS	Green and Farmers' Union	8.3	1	+4.5	+1
Denmark	FmEU	People's Movement against the EU	8.1	1	+0.9	0
Poland	KNP	Congress of the New Right	7.2	4	new	new
Germany	AFD	Alternative for Germany	7	7	new	new
Netherlands	SGP-CU	Reformed Political Party-Christian Union	6.8	2	0	0
Sweden	V	Left Party	6.3	1	0.6	0
Italy	LN	Northern League	6.2	5	-4	-4
Greece	KKE	Communist Party of Greece	6.1	2	-2.3	0
Czech Republic	SSO	Party of Free Citizens	5.2	1	+3.9	+1
Total/Mean (N=60)*			6.8	135	0.0	+63

Note: we have not reported in the table the results of another 35 Eurosceptic parties which received between 0.5 per cent and 5 per cent of valid votes. Those Eurosceptic parties below 0.5 per cent have been excluded from the analysis.

Source: Authors' elaboration on official data from <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/elections2014-results/en/election-results-2014.html>.

Still, data regarding the overall progress in Eurosceptic parties' electoral results may actually hide a high heterogeneity. In fact, Table 2 shows the electoral results of the main Eurosceptic parties both in percentage terms and in seats. Eurosceptic parties that gained 5 per cent or more of valid votes are 25, whereas those that won less than 5 per cent are 35. The main Eurosceptic parties belong to countries from different parts of the EU and to different party families.

According to Hooghe, Marks and Wilson (2002: 985) 'the conventional Left/Right dimension ... structures European integration. Political parties located toward the Left extreme and the Right extreme - peripheral parties - are significantly more Euro-skeptical than parties toward the Center'. Table 3 reports the positions of the main Eurosceptic parties according to their position on the left-

right continuum. Among the main rising Eurosceptic parties there is a certain degree of ideological heterogeneity. First, populist and right-wing Eurosceptic parties have registered electoral progress in these elections. These parties have conservative, xenophobic and populist political orientations and generally oppose Europe (Mudde 2007; Pirro and Van Kessel 2013). More on the far right, there are radical and anti-Semitic national parties, such as the Greek Golden Dawn and the Hungarian Jobbik. There is also another consistent group of parties of the radical left, mainly belonging to the European Left Party (GUE-NGL).

Table 3: Left-Right and GAL-TAN positions of Eurosceptic parties. Descriptive statistics

Party characteristic	Category	N
Left-Right Dimension	Extreme Left	9
	Centre-Left	6
	Centre	3
	Centre-Right	7
	Extreme Right	25
GAL-TAN Dimension	Extreme GAL	1
	Moderate GAL	7
	Centre	2
	Moderate TAN	6
	Extreme TAN	20

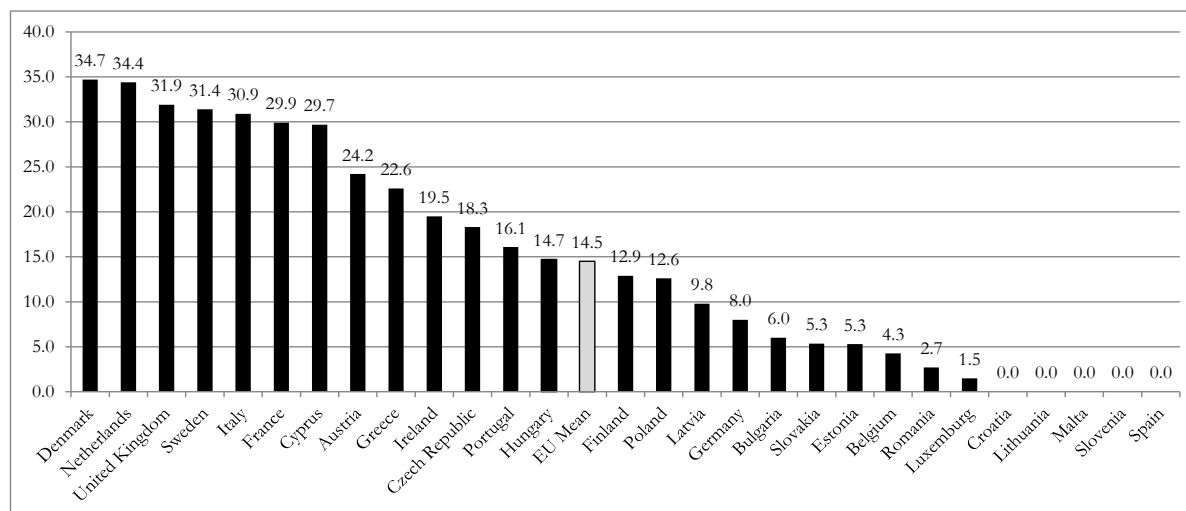
Note: In the Extreme Left category we have collapsed the values ranging from 0 to 1.9, in the Centre-Left the values ranging from 2 to 4.4, in the Centre the values ranging from 4.5 to 5.5, in the Centre-Right the values ranging from 5.6 to 8, in the Extreme Right the values above 8. Conversely, in the Extreme GAL category we have collapsed the values ranging from 0 to 1.9, in the Moderate GAL the values ranging from 2 to 4.4, in the Centre the values ranging from 4.5 to 5.5, in the Moderate TAN the values ranging from 5.6 to 8 and, finally, in the Extreme TAN the values above 8. Values for the Dutch SGP-CU are the means of the values given to SGP and to CU in Bakker et al. (2015).

Source: For the Left-Right Dimension, authors' elaborations on data taken from Bakker et al. (2015) and from parties' political platforms; for the GAL-TAN Dimension, authors' elaborations on data taken from Bakker et al. (2015).

Consistent with Hooghe, Marks and Wilson (2002), the largest group is the extreme-right category, followed by the extreme-left category. As also posited by Taggart (1998), parties coming from different points of the left-right continuum can have the same level of Euroscepticism. Table 3 also reports the values of the main Eurosceptic parties on the GAL-TAN dimension (Green/Alternative/Libertarian – Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist) (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002: 985). This dimension of party competition powerfully structures variations on issues arising from European integration. This cleavage could influence national parties' stances towards the EU, since TAN-wing parties are seen as 'the most clearly-defined group of Eurosceptic parties' (Bartolini 2012: 158). The emergence of this new dimension of political conflict is related, according to some authors (Kriesi et al. 2008), to the transformative power of globalisation, which has created a new 'integration-demarcation' cleavage, with latent structural potentials of 'winners' and 'losers'. The mobilisation of the globalisation 'losers' by new political challengers has not added a new dimension of conflict to the existing national political space but, instead, has transformed the existing dimension of cultural conflict and enhanced its relative saliency compared to the traditional economic dimension. As shown in Table 3, there are more Eurosceptic parties on the TAN wing than on the GAL one, consistent with the authors' expectations.

Departing from party-level results, Figure 1 reports the national variations in the electoral results of Eurosceptic parties.

Figure 1: Total vote share received by Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 EP elections, by country



Source: Authors' calculations on official data.

The overall mean, obtained by aggregating the results of Eurosceptic parties in each country, is 14.5 per cent, substantively higher than that recorded in the 2009 EP elections (10.8 per cent). Hence, the 2014 EP elections were characterised by a general rise of Eurosceptic parties even at country level. However, there is a wide cross-country variability. In five countries (Croatia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia and Spain), there are no Eurosceptic parties at all, while in other countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Romania and Slovakia), they only play a minor role in the respective party systems. On the left side of the histogram, we find countries where Eurosceptic parties have received a large share of votes. Note that among the countries that fall above the EU mean of 14.5 per cent, only the Czech Republic and Hungary belong to the post-communist bloc. The rest of the countries are composed of North-Western European polities (Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and Southern European nations (Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Portugal).

HYPOTHESES

How can we explain the cross-country variability of Eurosceptic parties' results? We introduce two hypotheses related to the effect exerted by national contexts. Many scholars have recently underlined that 'context matters' (Lane and Ersson 1987; Marsh 2002; Maggini and Emanuele 2015), especially for electoral behaviour. Therefore, in order to understand the variation in Eurosceptic parties' results we need to resort to two types of contextual characteristics: economic and political ones. We put forward two hypotheses: the first deals with the economic conditions of European countries, while the second one is related to the national political and institutional frameworks.

Starting with our first hypothesis, Hernández and Kriesi (2015) have connected the economic conditions of European countries after the 2008 crisis and the results of prime ministers' parties, of governing parties and, to a lesser extent, of opposition parties in national political elections. Their analysis has shown that prime ministers' parties and governing parties were punished by electorates after the 2008 crisis because of dire economic conditions, while new parties, like a certain number of

Eurosceptic parties, have generally benefitted from the effects of crisis. Moreover, according to Pirro and Van Kessel (2013), populist radical right parties in four European countries (Hungary, Slovakia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) have become more and more sceptical towards the European Union in recent years, also because of the EU reaction to the 2008 crisis, which has strongly influenced the economic measures brought about by national governments. Indeed, after 2008, the financial and sovereign debt crisis has affected Europe, but it did not have an immediate impact: the 2009 European elections did not show particularly clear effects of the crisis (De Sio and Legnante 2010). In subsequent years, the European Union has emerged as a key player. Many states have negotiated bailout deals with the 'Troika' committee (European Commission, European Central Bank and International Monetary Fund) that have strongly limited, if not temporarily cancelled, their economic policy sovereignty. Also, many other Eurozone countries had to take economic measures with a strong impact on the everyday life of ordinary people. Given the importance of Europe in regulating national economies, a bigger politicisation of this issue could be expected, and it would obviously boost Eurosceptic parties.

In this regard, we hypothesise a territorial differentiated pattern in the electoral performance of Eurosceptic parties, which would have been stronger in two (albeit very different) subgroups of European countries. The first subgroup is made by debtor states that had to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Troika (Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain). The second subgroup is made up of richer creditor countries of the Eurozone (for example Austria, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) and by countries with high economic status outside the Eurozone (Denmark, Sweden and the UK). In the former subgroup, austerity policies could have created a strong social malaise, preparing fertile terrain for populist and anti-EU parties; in the latter subgroup conversely, a populist and Eurosceptic protest could have collected the resentment of citizens 'forced' to finance debtor countries, fearing the loss of their prosperity (for example, citizens coming from a net payer country would be less willing to support the EU than citizens coming from countries that strongly benefit from EU's funds because they could think that not only are they giving more money to the EU but they are also supporting 'irresponsible' countries). In a third, intermediate group that includes countries with macroeconomic variables mostly in line with EU averages, we expect a less strong success for Eurosceptic parties and a general lower salience of European issues. Moreover, in this intermediate group we also find Central and Eastern European countries, which have strongly benefitted from EU structural funds since their entry into the EU. These funds represent a fundamental engine of economic development and therefore we expect a non-linear relationship between the economic context and Eurosceptic parties' results.

Our second hypothesis concerns the role played by the political and institutional context. To begin with, we expect a greater success of Eurosceptic parties in contexts of higher party system instability. Indeed, it seems there is a relationship between the stability of a party system and the emergence and success of (partially or totally) new and of non-mainstream parties (Sikk 2005, 2012; Tavits 2008). Indeed, many Eurosceptic parties are non-mainstream parties that challenge the established actors of the system. In some cases, they are genuinely new parties (Sikk 2005), like the Italian Five-Star Movement, in others they are old parties that have remained for a long time at the fringe of their political system and have only recently become important actors, like the French *Front National*. In both cases, we expect they have benefitted from contexts of accelerated party system change and fluid electoral markets. In other words, being generally non-mainstream or extreme actors of the political system, Eurosceptic parties could have performed well where there are significant voting shifts between elections rather than in contexts of strong electoral partisan allegiances. Second, we expect that Eurosceptic parties, being generally located at the extremes of the political continuum, as shown in Table 3, have performed better in highly ideologically polarised contexts. Third, there could be 'incentives created by political institutions such as the electoral

system, types of legislature or the spatial distribution of power within the polity' (Szczurbiak and Taggart 2003: 17).⁶ Since Eurosceptic parties are often new challengers in the political landscape, and in many cases also small-sized parties, we expect that they have been advantaged in contexts with lower institutional barriers to entrance into the electoral arena of new political actors. Finally, EP elections in general are a favourable context for new challengers because party system instability and electoral fluidity are higher than in national elections, whereas partisan cues and institutional constraints are more relaxed and turnout is lower, as stated by the second-order-election framework (Reif and Schmitt 1980).

TOWARDS AN EXPLANATION: THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL-INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS

The Economic Context

Regarding the economic contexts, our first hypothesis assumed a non-linear relationship between the economic performance of a country and the Eurosceptics' success. In particular, we expected a larger success for parties with Eurosceptic views in two opposite groups of countries: the richer, creditor countries and the debtor states, while in an intermediate group of countries we expected less strong success for Eurosceptic parties.

To test this hypothesis, we have considered different variables: GDP per capita, public debt-to-GDP ratio and the unemployment rate (all measured in 2013), the variation of these variables between 2013 and the beginning of the crisis (2008). Moreover, we have added a dummy for having signed or not a memorandum of understanding with the Troika. Descriptive statistics of these variables are reported in Table 4.

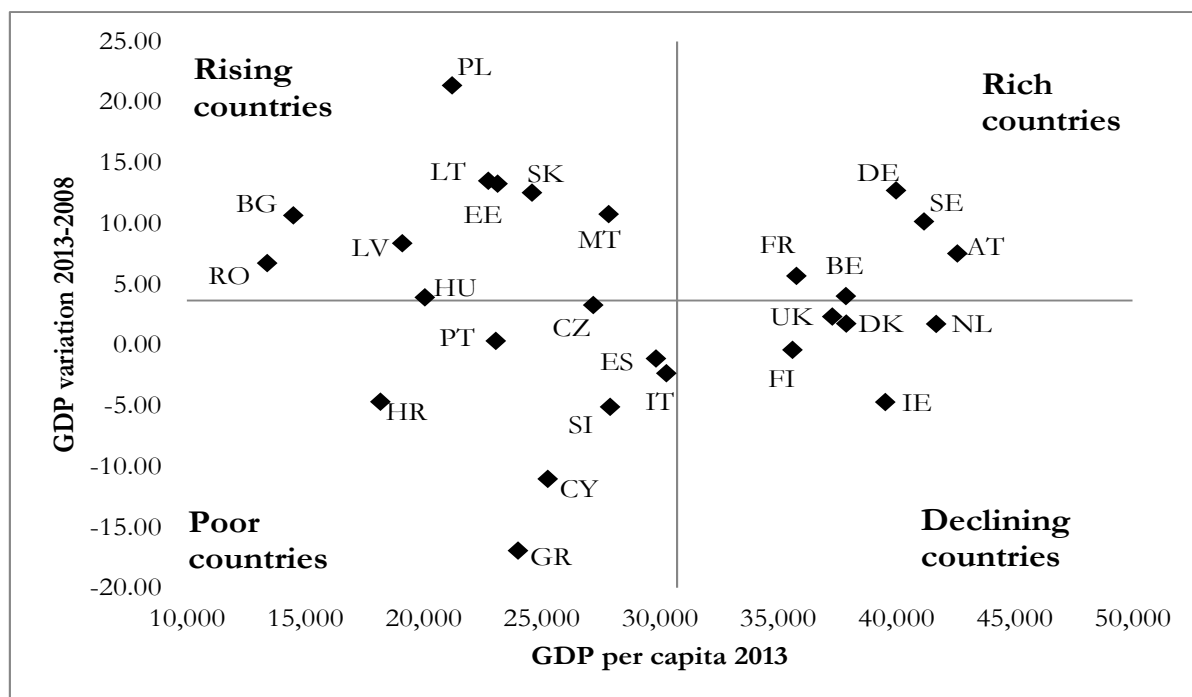
Table 4: Variables of the economic context. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Max.	Min.	Std. Dev.	N
GDP per capita in 2013	30,736	78,670	13,396	12,781	28
GDP variation 2013-2008	771	4,510	-4,899	2,179	28
Public debt to GDP ratio in 2013	72.3	173.8	11.3	38.2	28
Debt/GDP var. 2013-2008	26.0	78.7	2.2	20.9	28
Unemployment rate in 2013	11.2	27.3	4.9	5.5	28
Unemployment var. 2013-2008	4.8	19.6	-2.2	4.6	28
Troika	0.8	1.0	0.0	0.4	28

Source: International Monetary Fund (World Economic Outlook Database, April 2014).

Although these statistics concern different aspects of the economic status of a country, they consistently contribute to depicting a very clear overall economic situation, which can be synthetically summarised by the chart in Figure 2.

Figure 2: 2013 GDP per capita and GDP variation 2013-2008 in the EU (Luxembourg excluded)



Source: Authors' elaborations on data taken from International Monetary Fund (World Economic Outlook Database, April 2014).

Figure 2 plots the GDP per capita in 2013 against its variation during the crisis. The GDP per capita has been used because it tells us the general economic status of a country (rich or poor) while the GDP variation clarifies the path followed by the country during the crisis (rising or declining). The chart is divided into four quadrants, according to the mean values of both variables, thus creating four possible economic situations. A substantial group of wealthy countries can be easily identified, headed by Luxembourg that, with a GDP per capita of 78,670 EUR, has been left out from the figure for general visualisation reasons. The group of rich countries has not followed a homogeneous pattern during the crisis: some countries have continued to grow economically (Germany, Sweden and, to a lesser extent, Austria), while others have started to decline (for example, Ireland). On the left part of the chart, we find those countries with a GDP per capita lower than the European average. Many Eastern European countries are located in the 'rising countries' quadrant, having experienced high rates of economic growth even in times of crisis. Conversely, on the lower-left quadrant there are those countries that have suffered the most from the economic crisis. Among them we note Cyprus, Greece, Portugal and Spain, which had to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Troika.

Looking at Figure 2, the assumptions hypothesised in section 2 about the non-linear relationship between the economic context and the electoral performance of Eurosceptic parties seem to find empirical confirmation. Eurosceptic parties have scored their best results in both rich countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK and in declining countries such as Cyprus, Greece and Portugal. At the same time, the Central and Eastern countries that have strongly benefited from EU structural funds have generally increased their economic strength during the last years. This is compatible with Hernández and Kriesi's findings (2015) regarding the fact that after the 2008 economic crisis, governing parties in Western Europe have been more severely punished by voters (therefore, in several cases, favouring Eurosceptic parties) than parties in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, these findings are also compatible with Tilley and Garry's research (2007) on

citizens' support for European integration in Europe. Tilley and Garry have found that support for European integration is higher in Central and Eastern European countries than in Western European ones. It seems logical to continue Tilley and Garry's argument by saying that Central and Eastern European countries, having generally benefitted from steady economic growth even in the harshest moments of the economic crisis, have not had a favourable economic framework for the emergence or the rise of Eurosceptic parties (as we will show below).

However, the economic context does not successfully explain some other cases, like Spain (whose poor and declining economy has been put under the Troika's control but where no party has assumed hard Eurosceptic positions) or Germany and Luxembourg (where a strong economy has not fostered Eurosceptic parties' success).

These contrasting findings suggest that the economic context does not give us a totally clear picture regarding the performance of Eurosceptic parties. In order to reach a more comprehensive explanation, we therefore also take into account the political and the institutional context.

The political-institutional context

The political structure of the competition and the set of electoral rules contribute to shaping the political setting, namely the arena where parties decide their electoral strategy and voters decide how (and if) to vote. It is therefore clear that the features of the electoral arena, being close to the act of voting, may significantly affect both the electoral supply (the decision of a Eurosceptic party to stand for the elections) and the electoral demand (the decision of voters to support a Eurosceptic party), thus contributing to explaining the variable performance of Eurosceptic parties in the 28 EU countries.

As stated before, our second hypothesis is related to the influence of the political-institutional context on Eurosceptic parties' success. Obviously, the political-institutional context we are dealing with is not that of national elections but that of the European elections. We know that, despite a strong link between the two certainly existing (political actors and voters are the same in the two contexts), European elections are second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980) and this results in different behaviour for both parties and voters. Furthermore, despite many observers hypothesising that the 2014 EP elections could have become the first truly 'European' elections, thus showing the features of first-order elections, empirical evidence suggests that the second-order model still holds (De Sio, Emanuele and Maggini 2014). Hence, when we refer to concepts like party system instability, electoral fluidity, partisan cues and so on, we refer to the European elections contexts, where generally instability and fluidity are higher than in national elections and partisan cues are more relaxed (as stated by the second-order model).

To assess the features of the political-institutional context in the 28 EU member states we consider five different aspects, each measured by a different variable, whose descriptive statistics are summarised in Table 5.

Table 5: Variables of the political and institutional context. Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Max.	Min.	Std. Dev.	N
Turnout change	24.4	46.0	-3.2	12.8	28
Total Volatility	21.8	50.4	9.0	10.1	28
ENEP	5.9	9.9	2.2	2.0	28
Ideological distance	6.4	9.2	1.5	1.9	28
Mean district magnitude	19.6	96.0	2.8	21.4	28

Source: Authors' elaboration on official data.

The first variable concerns the level of electoral participation. The second-order elections theory claims that the level of voter turnout in EP elections is lower than in general elections as the stake in EP elections is lower (Reif and Schmitt 1980). By measuring the turnout change between the national and the European elections in each country, we can understand how much EP elections are peculiar with respect to the 'normal' parliamentary elections of a given country: the higher the turnout difference, the higher the probability that many voters of mainstream parties have abstained given that the national government is not at stake, thus opening a window of opportunity for non-mainstream parties.

The second variable we use is that of electoral volatility (Pedersen 1979) that is, the net aggregate change between two subsequent elections (in our sample, the 2009 and the 2014 EP elections). We assume that a high level of electoral volatility has favoured the success of non-mainstream parties since it means that traditional loyalties are weaker and voters are more likely to change their established voting choices. The mean level of vote change in the 2014 EP elections was 21.8, much higher than the general level registered in parliamentary elections.⁷ Furthermore, despite the large difference that usually occurs between Western and Eastern European countries, the latter being characterised by much greater levels of instability in parliamentary elections (Powell and Tucker 2014), data on EP elections show much more balance.⁸

Two other variables that we consider are the 'format' and the 'mechanics' of the party system (Sartori 1976). The format of the party system is measured through the ENEP⁹ (Effective Number of Electoral Parties) developed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979). Our expectation, according to Downs's model (1957), is that as the party system gets more fragmented, the opportunities for Eurosceptic parties are higher, since the ideological and programmatic distance between parties reduces and voters more easily transfer their voting choice from one party to another. Moreover, in contexts of high party system fragmentation, established parties are generally less strong (each party holds a lower share of votes) and thus more easily challengeable by newcomers.

As regards the mechanics, we measure the degree of ideological distance between parties. Following Mainwaring (1999), we rely on Sani and Sartori's measure of 'ideological distance' (1983), based on expert judgments. Therefore, we have computed the ideological distance of a party system as the absolute difference between the mean of the farthest left-wing and that of the farthest right-wing party in a given country according to the parties' left-right position (on a 0-10 scale), as in Bakker et al (2015).¹⁰ The underlying assumption is the following: given that Eurosceptic parties are generally extreme parties, a more ideologically polarised party system would have been favourable for their emergence since voters in those contexts usually tend to support parties located at the edge of the ideological spectrum.

Finally, the last variable we introduce is related to the electoral system for the EP elections. Even if a decision of the Council (Dec 772/2002) has introduced some common principles to harmonise the

elections for the EP,¹¹ the electoral systems for the EP elections may vary significantly between the 28 member states. In order to assess how disproportional the electoral system for the EP elections is in each state, we have calculated the Mean District Magnitude (MDM), that is, the ratio between the number of representatives to be elected in each state and the number of districts in which they have to be elected. The higher the MDM, the higher the proportionality of the system. Since Eurosceptic parties are often new challengers in the electoral arena and in many cases also small-sized parties, we hypothesise that they are advantaged by a permissive electoral system. Thus, the more proportional the system, the higher the probability that Eurosceptic parties have decided, believing that they would have had good chances to win seats, to stand for the election with their own label. At the same time, even voters could be more likely to support parties they consider as 'viable' and instead would abandon parties generally considered as having little chance of winning a seat.¹² These five variables contribute to shaping the political and institutional setting of each national context.

National Contexts and Eurosceptics' Results: a Typology

In order to assess the impact of the economic and political-institutional contexts, a multivariate regression model would have probably been the most accurate solution. Yet, the number of observations is too small (N=28) to perform a reliable statistical analysis. However, we can achieve interesting results even through the building of a four-fold typology of economic and political-institutional contexts, comparing the averages of the countries' shares of votes received by the Eurosceptic parties.

The first step consists of combining the seven aforementioned economy-related variables (see Table 4) into a synthetic, composite index of economic context. The new index is the mean of the previous variables expressed in standardised form.¹³

As seen before, the hypothesised relationship between the economic context and Eurosceptic parties' performance is not linear. Thus, we consider as 'favourable' economic contexts both the top and the bottom quartiles of the distribution of the index (i.e., both those countries with the strongest and the weakest economic frameworks), while the two middle quartiles are considered to be 'non-favourable' contexts.

The second step is to do the same for the five variables of the political-institutional context. Even if the five 'political' variables deal with different aspects of the political and institutional framework, what is important here is only the way they affect the performance of Eurosceptic parties. The hypothesis is that the higher the turnout decrease between national and EP elections, the higher the level of volatility, party-system fragmentation and polarisation, and the higher the Mean District Magnitude,¹⁴ the better the results of Eurosceptic parties in a given country. Therefore, countries that fall above the median value will be considered as having had a 'favourable' political-institutional context, while countries falling under the median as having had a 'non-favourable' context. Thus, a high level of the index in a given country means a high probability of success for Eurosceptic parties in that country and vice versa.¹⁵

The last step is the intersection of the two indices, and the building of a four-fold typology, presented in Figure 3. Through a comparison of the mean national share of votes received by the Eurosceptic parties in each of the four situations, the combined influence of the two contexts succeeds in explaining the success or failure of the Eurosceptic parties in most of the countries. Where both the economic situation and the political setting produce positive incentives for success for the Eurosceptic parties, the mean national share of these latter is a remarkable 20.5 per cent. On

the contrary, where both contexts seem to produce constraints for Eurosceptic parties' good performance, the mean national share of votes for these parties is only 8.4 per cent.

Figure 3: A typology of Eurosceptics' results according to the political and the economic context

<i>Economic context</i>	Favourable economic context but unfavourable political context AT CY EE HR IE LU 11.5 MT	Favourable economic and political contexts DE DK EL ES IT PT 20.5 SE
	BG FI HU LV LT PL 8.4 RO Unfavourable economic and political contexts	BE CZ FR NT SK SI 17.7 UK Favourable political context but unfavourable economic context
	<i>Political context</i>	

In the first subset of cases (upper-right quadrant) we find seven countries, among which there are three countries which themselves reside among those which have the highest results of Eurosceptic parties (Denmark, Italy and Sweden) and two other cases above the mean (Greece and Portugal). However, even Germany and Spain fall into this quadrant, with the former showing a weak 8 per cent, despite the remarkable increase of the Eurosceptics' result with respect to 2009 (0.3 per cent) and the latter showing no Eurosceptic parties at all. These seven countries share features of the political-institutional context favourable for Eurosceptic parties. At the same time, from an economic point of view, some of these countries show a high economic status (Denmark, Germany and Sweden) and some others are some of the countries that have suffered the most from the crisis (Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain).

The opposite subset of countries showing negative incentives for the rise of Eurosceptic parties (lower-left quadrant) includes member states with an average vote share of Eurosceptics strongly below the mean value. Only Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Finland and Poland, show a quite significant result. Many Central and Eastern European countries fall into this quadrant.

In the other two quadrants the structural incentives are not consistent: in the upper-left quadrant the economic context is favourable but the political one is non-favourable, while in the lower-right quadrant the situation is completely reversed. Among the countries located in the upper-left quadrant, in three out of seven countries (Austria, Cyprus and, to a lesser extent, Ireland) Eurosceptic parties have played an important role. Conversely, in the lower-right quadrant, three out of seven countries (France, the Netherlands and the UK), which displayed an intermediate economic status but a particularly unstable political-institutional context, show Eurosceptic parties' results well above the average.

Notice that the mean share of Eurosceptic parties when only the political-institutional context is favourable is considerably higher than in the opposite situation of favourable economic context (17.7 per cent against 11.5 per cent). This evidence seems to suggest that the political-institutional context drives the Eurosceptic parties' electoral performance more than the economic context.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has analysed the results of Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 EP elections and has explored how national contexts shaped their performance. We have firstly analysed the concept of 'Euroscepticism' as defined in the scholarly literature and we have presented an updated classification of Eurosceptic parties. Secondly, starting from the differentiated patterns of support for Eurosceptic parties, we have formulated two main hypotheses to explain such support, to be empirically tested. These hypotheses are related to national economic situations and to national political-institutional contexts. We have discovered that by taking into account the economic and the political-institutional contexts, that is, the incentives and the constraints they provide to Eurosceptic parties, we are able to explain why many Eurosceptic parties have performed better or worse in specific countries. Such a finding emerges from a four-fold typology, based on two standardised indices of economic and political-institutional contexts that identify four subsets of countries, in which Eurosceptic parties perform differently. Specifically, Eurosceptic parties are likely to perform better in either rich and 'creditor' countries or in poor countries, possibly affected by superimposed economic policies. Moreover, Eurosceptic parties are also likely to obtain better results in countries with specific political and institutional features, such as high de-mobilisation with respect to the previous general election, high levels of party system instability, higher ideological distance between parties, and more permissive electoral systems. Furthermore, we have discovered that for Eurosceptic parties' fortunes having a favourable political-institutional context seems to be more important than having a favourable economic context.

This article opens room for further empirical analyses. For instance, certain relevance could be given to the role of political entrepreneurship – that is, the decision to politicise and to make salient the EU cleavage – in order to understand Eurosceptic parties' results in unfavourable contexts. This could be an interesting point to address in future works, and could help us shed further light on the rise of Eurosceptic parties in and after the 2014 EP elections.

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¹ Taggart's contribution (1998) is related to Western Europe; Kopecky and Mudde (2002) focus on Eastern European countries; Pirro and Van Kessel (2013) deal with populist radical right parties; while Külahci's comparative study (2012) takes into account almost exclusively large countries.

² Respectively, a 1-7 by Chapel Hill and 1-5 by EUandl.

³ For example the party position on the following issue: 'European integration is a good thing' (EUandl 2014).

⁴ For example the party position on the following issue: 'The single European currency (Euro) is a bad thing' (EUandl 2014).

⁵ As mentioned earlier, minor parties that received less than 0.5 per cent of the national vote share in the 2014 EP elections have been excluded. Further notice that during the campaign for the 2016 UK EU membership referendum, the Sinn Féin and the UUP were in favour of the UK membership of the EU.

⁶ According to Szczerbiak and Taggart (2003: 17), some interesting hints regarding the influence of these factors can be found in Aspinwall (2000), Lees (2008) and Raunio (2008).

⁷ Note that Mair (2011) has identified a level of 20 as the reference point beyond which an election can be considered as 'highly volatile'.

⁸ The average level of volatility in post-Communist countries is 24.2, while that of Western countries is 20.

⁹ $ENEP = 1/\sum p_i^2$ where p is the party's national share of votes. As regards the 'other parties' category, we have followed the averaging of extremes method advocated by Taagepera (1997).

¹⁰ This measure is based on the variable *lrgen* in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. Such a variable provides a measure of the overall ideological stance of a party by taking into account both economic issues (left: more government spending; right: fewer taxes) and democratic freedoms and rights issues (the so-called GAL-TAN dimension).

¹¹ MEPs have to be elected with a PR system, using either the party list vote or the single transferable vote system.

¹² These effects, both from parties' and voters' sides, are the so-called 'psychological effects' of the electoral systems; see Duverger (1951) and Cox (1997) on this point.

¹³ To get a meaningful index, the sign of some variables has been inverted so that higher values of all variables mean a better economic status and vice versa.

¹⁴ Following previous empirical research, we expect a non-linear impact of the variable, since 'the impact of any marginal seat in the proportionality of the electoral system will tend to be lower than the previous one' (Simon 2013: 42). Given this underlying assumption, we have transformed the variable into its natural logarithm.

¹⁵ When one builds a synthetic index starting from different variables or items, it is important to check for reliability and validity (Drost 2011). As regards reliability, we have estimated internal consistency of our two composite indices of economic and political contexts. 'Internal consistency measures consistency within the instrument and questions how well a set of items measures a particular behaviour or characteristic within the test' (Drost 2011: 111). Therefore, we have run the well-known Cronbach's alpha test. The composite index of economic context (consisting of seven items) show an (almost) excellent value for the coefficient alpha (0.88). The coefficient alpha for composite index of political context is lower (0.40). Yet, coefficients of internal consistency are sensitive to the number of items: the lower the number of items, the lower the coefficient alpha. As Drost states (2011: 111-112), 'a 5-item test might correlate .40 with true scores, and a 12-item test might correlate .80 with true scores'. Furthermore, we are conscious that the five 'political' variables deal with different aspects of the political and institutional framework of each country. Yet, we have selected them according to the literature (among others, see Lees 2008) as factors affecting the performance of Eurosceptic parties. These variables, therefore, are well-established measures in comparative research and are often part of comparative political and economic datasets. This ensures their content validity, being also able to 'travel' across (European) countries. Furthermore, the composite indices, being composed of the aforementioned variables, cover the domains and dimensions of the overall concepts they aimed to measure, namely the 'political opportunity structures' (Tarrow 1994) and the structure of the economic conditions of each national context we hypothesised to favour Eurosceptic parties' success.

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