

ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR UNDER SHOCK –
EUROSCEPTICISM, DOMESTIC EXTREMIST VOTING AND THE ROLE OF THE FINANCIAL CRISIS

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In the course of the financial crisis, it has been argued that the effects of the crisis lead citizens to support more strongly extremist positions and especially extremist parties. This effect is said to be mediated by the citizens' degree of euroskepticism, which is on one hand negatively affected by the outcomes of the financial crisis itself and, on the other, influencing citizens' electoral behavior in favor of extremist parties. In this paper, we develop a finely grained causal model by arguing, first, that citizens' level of euroskepticism increases in times of crisis, and, second, that euroskepticism has a substantial effect on citizens' favorability of voting extremist parties, given that the polarization of domestic discourse about EU politics is high. Based on the cases of Hungary and Slovakia, we test our argument by a new and self-administered survey data set. Our empirical findings lend credence to our theoretical expectations, but nonetheless call for further confirmatory analyses on a wider range of cases in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, politicians, the media, and the public alike wondered about how the effects of the crisis influence citizens' attitudes toward the European Union and toward the cohesion among countries (or: political and economic integration) in general. Examples for such a public debate include British plans to potentially leave the EU altogether; then there is perceived inability of the EU member states to agree to effective common solutions to overcome the crisis, and most recently we witnessed the widely discussed decision by Swiss voters to limit immigration to Switzerland. That too, appears to be linked to a probable retreat from treaties with the EU. Especially this last case has resonated strongly with the media and was interpreted as mirroring anti-EU sentiments also common among the citizenry within the EU. As such, this has represented arisen call for extremist parties (such as the French Front National or the Dutch Freedom Party) as this leads them to expect to do well in the upcoming European elections.

When observing this discourse, we notice an interpretation that makes an implicit or explicit causal connection between the European financial crisis, citizens' euroskepticism, and their likelihood of voting extremist parties. However, this seems somewhat at odds with scholarly research, which has thus far seemed remarkably unconcerned about the aftermath of crisis in terms of public political opinion, or, at least, unsure of the potential impact of the financial crisis on national political actors. In this paper, we want to fill this gap by proposing a two-step argument.

First, we argue that the financial crisis should have had an (negative) effect on the attitudes of citizens toward the European Union. Within this step, we differentiate between two different explanatory approaches, one from a more rationalist and the other from a more socio-psychological perspective. From a rationalist perspective, the vulnerability argument assumes that citizens are aware of the effects of the financial crisis and evaluate the European Union and its institutions in terms of problem-solving capabilities. From a more socio-psychological perspective, it is reasonable to argue that the financial crisis leads to a nationalist backlash in citizenries of the EU member states. *Second*, we argue that more euroskeptic citizens should be more likely to vote for extremist parties but that this influence is mediated by the institutional context. The likelihood of voting extremist parties should only increase for euroskeptic citizens in countries in which extremist parties are the sole actors representing eurosceptic positions or in which the polarization of EU politics in the domestic elite discourse is high. Given that both steps of the argument can be confirmed empirically, it

seems plausible to argue that the financial crisis makes citizens more euroskeptic and hence, in specific institutional settings, more likely to vote for extremist parties.

To analyze both parts of our argument empirically, we turn to a new survey conducted in Hungary and Slovakia. These two countries are especially suited as test cases out of the following reasons. Both are highly comparable in most institutional factors such as similar size, similar historical and cultural legacy, similar export dependence on Western countries are, a similar starting public favorability toward EU accession and EU actors. In addition, both countries have been hit hard by the crisis. Yet, they differ in two key aspects which are of interest here. For one thing, the two countries diverged with respect to their policies of economic liberalization and European integration. Additionally, in Hungary, we observe ruling and mainstream parties to exert euroskeptic positions, while this is not the case for the mainstream and ruling parties in Slovakia.

In the course of the paper, we will first discuss previous findings in the literature before then proposing our own argument. After that, we will introduce our case and data selection and then present and discuss our (preliminary) empirical findings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has already been substantial research about the Euroscepticism of both citizens and elite actors. The debate about what it actually means to be a Eurosceptic is arguably most prominent in the literature on political parties. Based on an original definition established by Paul Taggart (1998: 366) Euroscepticism can be thought of as expressing “the idea of contingent, or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration’. Subsequently, authors distinguished further between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Euroscepticism (Taggart and Sczcerbiak 2001: 7) and have attempted to further fine-tune the concept and develop alternative typologies (see Kopecky and Mudde 2002, 300-325). In the literature on public opinion toward the European Union, its basic ideas and its actors, the conceptual distinction of Euroscepticism has not been to the forefront of research. Rather, public opinion researchers were interested in the causes and, more recently, in the effects of citizens’ attitudes toward European integration and the EU.

Research on the causes of citizens positive or negative EU attitudes so far have suggested that public opinion toward the European level is actually dependent on the citizens' national identity/pride, on their own preferences toward international economic interaction, toward supranationalism in general, and their disposition toward the cooperation with other countries (cf. Boomgarden et al. 2011, Lubbers and Scheepers 2010; Banducci et al. 2009; McLaren 2002, 2007; De Vries and van Keersbergen 2007). In addition, researchers have argued for quite some time that citizens are taking cues when asked about their opinion toward the EU (Anderson 1998). From this perspective, citizens take on the position on the EU presented by those elites in which citizens have trust. This argument has been taken as confirmed given empirical finding that citizens who trust their governments (who in the EU member states is most of the time assumed to be europhil) also trust the EU and its actors (see also for the cues provided by Eurosceptic parties, De Vries and Edwards 2009). From such a vantage point, it was reasonable to expect there to be some research on the influence of EU attitudes on citizens behavior in EU referenda (e.g., Hug 2002; Kaufmann and Waters 2004; Wagschal 2007; Hobolt 2007), but only little to no research on the effects of citizens’ EU attitudes on the domestic attitudes or behavior of citizens has gone on. Differently stated, our work shifts the focus on the direction of causation as flowing from attitudes toward the supranational level 'downward' to national ones.

This stands in contrast to the bulk of work in which public opinion toward international politics or foreign policy is thought of as having little to no effect on electoral decision-

making in the national context, making it therefore unnecessary for parties in international negotiations to be responsive to the attitudes of citizens. While this might have been true for the European context in the 1980s and 90s, US scholars have already shown for those decades that US public opinion toward international politics was indeed not as incoherent and relatively disinterested as had been previously thought. Instead the latter did in fact turn out to have an influence on governmental actors when making decisions. Such a view has only recently gained more prominence in research on public opinion and party politics alike. Drawing on closely related concepts, researchers do now explore the consequences of European integration for electoral politics both at the European *and* the national level (e.g., Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008a; b; van der Brug and van der Eijk 2007), emphasizing not only that European issues are becoming increasingly influential in electoral decision-making in European elections (see e.g., Krouwel and Abts 2007), but also indicating that Euroscepticism makes citizens more likely to vote for rightwing parties (Werts et al. 2013). Still, the question of how Europe actually affects party competition and electoral behavior has been answered differently so far—ranging from Mair's (2000) reserved notion of a 'limited impact' to metaphors of a sleeping giant who is just about to awake (de Vries 2007; van der Eijk and Franklin 2007; Green-Pedersen 2012;).

The rise of interest in the (potential) effect of EU attitudes on national attitudes, electoral decision-making and, hence, politics might be considered the result of the increasing salience of the EU as a political issue. As the relevance of European decision-making and policy outputs more shape ever more profoundly the everyday life of citizens, the latter are more likely to evaluate their national parties by the stance they take on European integration. Hence, a development like the European financial crisis should, on one hand, have increased the salience of European politics to an all-time high, while it should on the other have decreased trust in, and positive feelings toward the EU and its actors. In consequence, we will argue first in the theory section that the financial crisis has made citizens more aware of, and more skeptical toward the EU.

Furthermore, and secondly, we will claim that this has effects on domestic party systems. Beginning roughly with the referenda in France and in the Netherlands on the EU constitution in 2005, there has been an increase in the political success and influence of Eurosceptic parties which in turn has affected the national-level policy-making—examples include the True Finns, the Sweden Democrats, the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands (PVV), Jobbik in Hungary, PiS in Poland, and others (Markowski and Tucker 2010). While the successes of some of these parties date back to times before the European financial crisis and, by

extension, the institutional crisis,¹ the underlying arguments were clearly all centered on questions of national autonomy. In the Central and East European context, such concerns became acute in the wake of the accession negotiations and the strictures membership placed on these countries.² In other member states, the back and forth about the Lisbon treaty also resulted in debates about national sovereignty. In contrast to previous extremist parties who programmatically concentrated themselves on domestic issues, this recent ascent of populist parties seems to indicate a change in the sense that they have ascribed considerable salience to their opposition to Europe (see on Euroscepticism and parties Linden and Pohlman 2003; Neumayer 2008; Ray 2007). If one agrees with the assumption that parties are formed whenever there is a certain number of citizens stating a political demand that is insufficiently addressed by the party system, then those parties of a new type mirror such an increase in citizens' Euroscepticism.

As our second point, we will therefore argue that, indeed, Euroscepticism causes citizens to vote for extremist parties in national elections.

THEORY

Research on the effect of crises on public opinion has long been a topic in PO research. This involved especially research on the so-called rally-round-the-flag-phenomenon, which denotes the increase in support for the US president in times of national crises. These have also been viewed as factors affecting citizens' attitudes toward international relations. However, since 2008, few studies have been carried out, either directly or indirectly, on the effect of the financial crisis on domestic political attitudes and positions. Here, we propose to conceive of the financial crisis as causing an increase in Euroscepticism as well as in a deepening of nationalist feelings among the citizenry, which in turn raises the likelihood of voting for Eurosceptic and extremist parties. In the subsequent part, we seek to show the causal mechanism by advancing a two-step argument. First, we want to show why—from two

¹It is true that right-wing populist parties had already gained electoral prominence in certain European countries (e.g., the Swiss People's Party, the Freedom Party in Austria, Lega Nord and Alleanza Nazionale in Italy) much earlier and it is also correct that typically these parties represented eurosceptical viewpoints. However, their Euroscepticism had not been particularly salient as these parties were predominantly domestic protest parties.

²The extent to which the EU imposed criteria to measure the progress of candidate countries was called 'conditionality', an index of which provided a rough gauge of the burden that the national political systems had to bear. The greater the cost and the higher the conditionality, the greater was the potential for political opponents of the government to exploit the accession process and the greater was also potentially the voter backlash (Steunenberg and Dimitrova 2007).

different theoretical viewpoints—the financial crisis should lead to more citizens becoming eurosceptical. Second, we will advance the idea on why eurosceptic citizens should be more likely to vote radical parties than non-Eurosceptics and why this should differ over countries, hence elaborating on the findings of Werts et al. (2013).

Theorizing the Development of Euroscepticism

First, on the effect of the financial crisis on the Euroscepticism of citizens. We propose two different theoretical viewpoints here: one from a rationalist-materialist, the other one from a psychological cultural perspective. Both of these viewpoints lead one to expect an increase in Euroscepticism. However, the two view points differ in explaining the increase in Euroscepticism. We label the two viewpoints the vulnerability-perspective (rationalist-materialist) and the nationalist backlash-perspective (psychological-cultural).

The vulnerability perspective.

The *vulnerability perspective* argues that—because of the crisis—'Europe' has now firmly moved into the focus of electorates and European issues are linked in voters' minds to important economic and social concerns that affect people's everyday lives. We would further assume that within the context of the information available to voters, they are likely to react *rationally* to the financial crisis in the sense of supporting policies that appear to minimize the perceived harm not only to the nation as a whole (sociotropic behavior) but to the voter's own situation (pocketbook behavior). This does not require for voters to have detailed factual information but rather to have formed an opinion based on a number of clues and sources whether a given course of action poses greater or lesser risks or is seemingly better or worse for the country.³ To the extent that voters perceive the Euro crisis as evidence of European integration gone too far or judge the benefit of a nation going it alone greater than the benefit of joint European action, they are likely to become more Eurosceptic and oriented toward the nation state. Likewise, voters who witness their personal fortunes decline as a result of austerity measures perceived to be imposed by Brussels' or powerful member states are likely to adopt views towards Europe that are increasingly hostile.

By the same token, voters who perceive the European Union or European-level action as helpful for improving their respective situations because banks and thus individual deposits

³For example, this is akin to voters' responses in US surveys to questions of whether they perceive their country to be "on-track" or "off-track".

may be safer, interest rates lower, credit more available, and currencies more stable than what may be assumed to be the case otherwise. In that case, we would expect citizens to view Europe more favorably. This can be compared to what Boomgaarden et al. (2012) have called the functioning and the performance of European institutions. If European involvement appears preferable to a citizen, we would expect the crisis to lead to a decline in Euroscepticism. To arrive at this conclusion, voters not only make a calculated guess about Europe but also about the alternative, that is the ability and responsiveness of national governments, political decision makers, and parties. In short, this does not require a significantly positive disposition toward Europe but is simply a matter of rationally choosing the lesser of two evils. As a result, citizens who may be unhappy with the state of European affairs but fear their country to be worse off either by being left to fend for itself or after a period of European disintegration and chaos are likely to be less Eurosceptical. It is quite reasonable to desire stability and predictability in times of crisis. It is equally rational to choose perceived capability over perceived incompetence. Likewise, in times of uncertainty voters may turn to institutions they trust more than those they trust less. This is not a complicated concept and can be readily understood by the public. It is also evident to voters that steps toward disintegration are rather irreversible and any damage done is likely to be permanent. Voters who consider their country more vulnerable may be frightened by such a scenario and at least adopt a wait-and-see position. Moreover, in countries known for the relatively poor capacity of governments, voters may still regard EU institutions and Western governments as more competent and trust them more to manage the crisis better than their own politicians.

Summing up, from the viewpoint of the vulnerability-argument, the European financial crisis and its economic aftermath may on the one hand result in an increase in the Euroscepticism of citizens if citizens live in a country which they perceive to be in a difficult economic situation AND if citizens at the same time distrust the European institutions to represent the national interest. These expectations can be formalized in the following way:

H1. From the perspective of the vulnerability argument, a citizen is more likely to be eurosceptical if a citizen considers his/her country to be economically vulnerable as a result of the financial crisis and if s/he trusts national institutions more than European institutions.

The nationalist backlash perspective.

The *perspective of a nationalist backlash* pursues the argument from a rather different angle in that the global financial crisis by itself has made people aware of the fact that the interconnectedness, both economically and politically, between countries especially in the European Union is actually much greater than they may have assumed. The impact of the financial crisis in one country (or even on the businesses of a single bank) is massively felt in another country, without the latter being able to sanction the former, or the latter country being responsible for the financial crisis in the first place. While the interdependence between countries and their economies has been shown to be positive or, at least, favorable for the countries and their citizenries in ‘normal’ times, financial crises make citizens aware that with an increase in interdependence there is in most cases a decline in national autonomy. Nonetheless by itself, the issue interconnectedness between countries seems not to be sufficiently concrete or interesting to the voting public at large, particularly as long as things go well and citizens are comfortable. However, in times of crisis, the salience of the question of interdependence may quickly rise and gain significant currency. As a consequence, the (highly salient) impression of one's country being influenced by external interests and the decisions taken by others, particularly, when one is already struggling nationally to resolve a crisis that originated elsewhere encounters the following problem: There is the scenario that the country alone will be unable to resolve the (effects of the) crisis and, therefore, intervention by third actors in previously autonomous policy areas and national decision making becomes unavoidable. Obviously, such an impression may result in two possible outcomes concerning the attitudes of citizens and decision makers: First, citizens and governmental actors might recognize that the interdependence between countries is so strong that a supranational solution is necessary and acceptable not only for the crisis, but also in future, ‘normal’ times. Therefore, the insistence on national autonomy is not needed anymore as the nation state will yield to the superior ability of problem solving by supranational organizations and arrangements. Note that such a perspective is highly risk-acceptant and—following the findings in political psychology (e.g., Ehrlich and Maestas 2010; Jost et al. 2003; Feldman and Stenner 1997, also: Schoen 2007)—based on a general openness of citizens. This is because global and/or supranational governance has not been experienced previously and thus the risks associated with such a solution are not calculable at this point. Secondly and alternatively, citizens might be more status-quo-oriented, closed-minded, and risk-averse than was implied in the previous view. Although citizens understand the interconnectedness between countries, voters who perceive their national identity to be

dissolving and are relatively closed-minded at the same time may wish for a return of complete national autonomy. The fear of being influenced by outside forces—that is, by third parties such as bigger states and international organizations—runs parallel to the perception of losing one's own (cultural) identity. It is akin to ideas claiming that the social welfare system was shaped by external constraints, which in turn induces citizens to adopt nationalist positions (even if the former are ideologically on left, see Nail and McGregor 2009). Typically, this causes citizens of a certain rigidity to favor protectionism and autarky while inducing them to become increasingly wary of immigration. More generally, it makes such citizens deeply suspicious of (cultural as well as economic) influences emanating from beyond the national borders. Hence, we would expect citizens who perceive their national identity to be dissolving and who are at the same time closed-minded to develop favorable attitudes toward more national autonomy and negative attitudes toward the European Union (for related research, see McLaren 2002, 2007; Curley 2009). We call this—following Brian Burgoon here (Burgoon 2009)—the nationalist backlash.

Summing up, the nationalist backlash-perspective argues that the increased awareness among citizens about the interconnectedness of countries as a result of the attention to this issue caused by the financial crisis will lead certain voters to be more protectionist and favor autarky and, thus shift also to a more Eurosceptical position. The increase in Euroscepticism becomes more likely if the individual perceives national identity to be vanishing, and is at the same time closed-minded in his or her outlook on the world. Hence, the expectations derived from the nationalist backlash-perspective can be formalized as follows:

H2. A citizen is more likely to adopt a eurosceptical position in the course of the financial crisis if s/he perceives national identity to be dissolving and is rather closed-minded.

Next, we need to explain as to how these expectations relate to our two country cases. As was stated in the initial justification for our case selection, Slovakia and Hungary share important traits but differ also with respect in their approach to economic and European integration policy. Even before accession, Slovakia had distinguished itself from the remaining CEE countries by launching a series of landmark economic reforms that limited the role of the government and transferred social and economic risk to individuals. The goal of the center-right governing coalition of Mikuláš Dzurinda, which drafted Slovakia's 'neoliberal turn', was to create unrivaled conditions for foreign investors. Most famously, the country

introduced a 19% flat tax on corporate, personal income, and VAT in 2004. Although the subsequent Slovak government under the Social Democratic Prime Minister Robert Fico had campaigned on addressing some of the inequities of the previous neoliberal policies, no fundamental course correction occurred between 2006 and 2008. In fact, the country appeared to cope well with the global financial crisis and introduced the Euro in 2009, which at the time appeared to provide added safety to a small exposed economy at the mercy of international market forces. Nonetheless, the Slovak economy contracted by almost 5 percent in 2009.

Subsequently in 2011, the country was called to task to contribute to Europe's main bailout fund for the struggling Southern Euro zone economies, particularly Greece. Following a public uproar, Slovakia voted 'no' to expand the powers of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF), thus forcing the center-right government led by Iveta Radičová to resign after a vote of no-confidence. In the end, the EFSF was approved with the backing of the Social Democratic opposition under Fico who returned to power as Prime Minister in 2012. The consequences of these developments were twofold. First, the domestic political crisis contributed to an increase in the salience of the European issue and forced political parties and voters to take a position specifically on Europe. Secondly, the Slovakian case was not the familiar story in which the EU along with the wealthier Euro-zone countries was imposing austerity on a struggling economy, thereby triggering a nationalist backlash, but rather the opposite: Slovak taxpayers were expected to contribute to bailing out countries such as Greece that were considered much wealthier. In short, the motivation for adopting eurosceptical positions was arguably more complex and cannot be fully explained by the nationalist backlash argument. Thus, while Slovaks may have felt pressure by the European Union to act in solidarity, the principle implication was the effect this policy had on individuals' pocketbooks and thus economic calculus.

The Hungarian situation was different in that that country's economic and political system had entered a crisis of sorts well before being affected by the global economic downturn. Domestic Hungarian politics had been characterized by a dramatic rise in authoritarian, anti-international, and illiberal sentiments, resulting in the growth radical ultra nationalist forces such as Jobbik. Most importantly, the developments culminated in a series of political victories for the former 'liberal-turned-nationalist' Prime Minister Orbàn, whose party Fidesz consistently moved to right. In doing so, Orbàn took advantage of an electoral reform giving his party a two-third majority in Parliament. He subsequently introduced policy initiatives and constitutional changes that many Western observers regarded as incompatible with the

standard norms of a Western-style democracy and a member country of the European Union. While Orbàn never campaigned against Europe per se, he constantly provoked his European partners and the EU.⁴ In turn, the European Commission and various EU leaders have criticized Budapest to which Orbàn then adopted the posture of defending the national honor and sovereignty: “*We will not allow Brussels dictating us their terms! We have never let Vienna or Moscow guide us in our history, and now we won’t let Brussels do this! Hungary should have its own corner interests!*” (Orbàn quoted in Stier 2011). It is not surprising that both the growing nationalism and the confrontations with Europe under the Orbàn government have also left their mark on how Hungarians assess their country’s EU membership. In short, by not being in the Euro-zone, Hungarian taxpayers have not been expected to contribute to any bailout funds but Hungary as a whole is nonetheless under close EU scrutiny and has been threatened with stern measures imposed by Brussels as a result of Orbàn’s erratic economic and nationalist policies. By running in a sense against Europe to mobilize domestic support, the Hungarian prime minister has stoked a nationalist backlash as Hungarians became aware of the potential political consequences of their membership in the EU. Summing up, we would expect Slovak and Hungarian voters to diverge somewhat in terms of their motivations for Euroscepticism. In the Hungarian case, we would assume the nationalist backlash argument to fit best the empirical evidence whereas in Slovakia the individual economic assessment should provide more explanatory power.

Theorizing the Effect of Euroscepticism on Radical Voting

After theoretically deriving our expectations on the effects of the financial crisis on citizens’ attitudes toward the European Union and European integration, we now present the second part of our argument—the effect of citizens’ Euroscepticism on national voting behavior. Herein, we follow a (very basic) rational-choice-perspective after which citizens should vote for the party they think offers them the relatively greatest level of benefits compared to the costs (Downs 1957). Hence, as the European Union, the future of European integration and the general European interconnectedness have become major topics of national electoral

⁴As the Orbàn government stands accused of subverting the rule of law, tempering with the independence of the Hungarian judiciary and the Central Bank, curbing free speech, intimidating the political opposition, and violating single market rules by forcibly repatriating foreign-owned property in Hungary, the European Union has threatened to indict Budapest for a breach of Article 7 of the European Union Treaty with the potential consequence of reducing Hungarian voting rights, cutting structural funds, and other forms of economic support.

campaigns, we certainly expect eurosceptical citizens to be more likely to vote for eurosceptical parties on the domestic level. Additionally, we were particularly interested in the connection between Euroscepticism and extremist voting.

This might appear somewhat tautological a question to some readers. Yet, there is a large debate in the literature on how or whether eurosceptical parties differ from extremist (mostly right-wing) parties.⁵ Based on this distinction, it is important to understand that Euroscepticism clearly differs from concepts such as political extremism and populism. The latter category defines the logic of protest parties engaged either in illiberal and radical (ethnic and nationalist) exclusionary politics or an anti-elite and even anti-systemic posturing. Because most major parties of the moderate left and right came to support European integration for pragmatic reasons, protest parties frequently adopted the mantle of Euroscepticism to distance themselves from the mainstream.⁶ As a result, Euroscepticism has often been included in the programmatic mix of protest and populist parties and many of them have subsequently been labeled ‘eurosceptic’. Nonetheless parties like the Hungarian Jobbik are not anti-European per se but firmly focused on domestic politics. They are eurosceptical to the extent that ‘Europe’ conflicts with their nationalist agenda. While such parties tend to represent eurosceptical positions in their manifestos, the positions are frequently not very salient. Thus, we expect that voting decisions in favor of extremist parties is influenced by a citizen’s Euroscepticism if the extremist parties are the only players representing Euroscepticism. Another context effect which is connected but also deviates from this first context effect focuses more strongly on the salience of elite communication via European integration and the European Union in a country. We might still suspect that a party with a

⁵This question is especially virulent in the context of Central and East European. Here, the concept of Europragmatism has been especially relevant in understanding the evolution of sentiments towards the EU (Beichelt 2004). At one point a majority of political parties and the publics in these countries exhibited diffuse but strongly positive sentiments toward membership in the European Union. However, in the course of the drawn-out accession process and by having to comply with the strict conditions of membership that were often regarded by the applicant countries as excessively onerous or even unfair, the diffuse popularity of European integration gave way to a more sober assessment (Neumayer 2008: 136 Henderson 2008: 125). In short, EU membership came to be regarded a matter of economic necessity and political expediency and thus a matter of pragmatism. It was this pragmatic consensus by the political mainstream that caused parties located toward both extreme ends of the political spectrum to adopt positions to the contrary.

⁶⁶Mainstream parties – which have so far taken a rather positive stance toward European integration – might take more skeptical position (see on Euroscepticism and Mainstream parties Harmsen 2010). But then, their programmatic move is often non-credible to the voters. And from the viewpoint of nationalist citizen, mainstream parties which still stick to their euro-friendly position are perceived as reliable but not close toward the own position. Nationalistic citizens’ choices are therewith focused on two types of parties. First, they may cast their vote for new nationalistic and eurosceptic parties which share the positions of nationalistic voters and had no opportunity yet to show how reliable they are. Second, they may choose parties which have had a nationalistic and eurosceptical position before but kept it non-salient but are now interested in making it salient. Both of these parties are then close to a nationalistic and eurosceptical voter’s position and can be perceived as (at least not un-)reliable.

Eurosceptic program might not necessarily behave in a eurosceptical manner in everyday politics. However, whether citizens will vote for them because of their (salient or non-salient) eurosceptic positions might be dependent on the salience of the EU in the communication between elites. That is, if the debate about the EU is rather lively in a country citizens might be more likely to employ their own Euroscepticism and the Eurosceptic position of an extremist party as a heuristic in their electoral decision making. Hence, we should assume the connection between citizens' Euroscepticism and the vote for extremist parties to increase in countries where EU topics are often and publically visibly discussed. These expectations can be finally formalized in the following way.

H 3.A citizen is more likely to vote for eurosceptical parties, the more s/he is eurosceptical

H 4.A citizen is more likely to vote for extremist parties,

4a) the more s/he is eurosceptical and if the extremist parties are the only parties representing eurosceptical positions.

4b) the more s/he is eurosceptical and the more elites polarize the subject of European Union within the political debate.

Again, how do our theoretical expectations relate to the two countries under study here? We argue that – once again – the countries diverge in two important respects. We observe Eurosceptic parties in both countries. Yet, while party Euroscepticism is distributed among mainstream *and* extremist parties in Slovakia, party Euroscepticism in Hungary is restricted to parties like Jobbik. However, and somewhat in contrast, the debate about the EU and other actors seems to be much more polarized in the Hungarian case, making the EU a much more salient topic compared to the Slovakian case. Hence, from the viewpoint of H4a we would expect a persons' Euroscepticism to influence her/his voting decision in Slovakia but not in Hungary, H4b predicts the exact opposite.

DATA, METHODS AND OPERATIONALIZATION

The above hypotheses were developed for a planned survey in Poland, Slovakia and Hungary within the framework of a Marie Curie Project on Euroscepticism. Due to delay beyond the control of the researchers only the surveys on Hungary and Slovakia could be completed to date. The survey of Poland was in the field late in 2013 but due to severe problems with the sample and a potential interaction effect with the events unfolding in neighboring Ukraine, it was decided to repeat the survey portion on Poland in the spring of 2014. Thus, it could not be included in this version of the paper.

As the dependent variable of H 1 and H 2, we chose a variable measuring the development of citizens general state toward European integration (*diff_genstate_eu*, 0 = strongly opposed to 10 = strongly in favor). For testing H 3 and H 4 (voting decision in favor of a eurosceptical or an extreme party), we decided to use two dependent (dummy) variables. Rather than deciding from the outside what party to label as extremist and/or eurosceptical, we chose to take a citizen's party perception into account. Hence, citizens are labeled voters of eurosceptical parties if they exert a voting intention for a party they themselves have evaluated as presenting a radical position towards European integration. That is, a citizen is ascribed the value 1 on the variable 'eurosceptical vote' if s/he has a preference for a party s/he ascribes a position <4 on an eleven-point-scale measuring the party's position toward European integration (*eurosceptical_vote*, ranging from 0 = strongly against to 10 = strongly in favor). In contrast, citizens are labeled voters of extremist parties if they exert a voting intention for a party they themselves have evaluated as presenting a radical position toward civil liberties AND minority rights. That is, a citizen is ascribed the value 1 on the variable 'extremist_vote' if s/he has a preference for a party s/he ascribes a position >6 on an eleven-point-scale measuring the party's position toward civil liberties and a position >6 on an eleven point scale measuring the party's position toward minority rights (both scales ranging from 0 = strongly supporting to 10 = strongly opposing civil liberties/ minority rights).

For the vulnerability argument, several variables are used to test the hypotheses. First, we measured whether citizens perceived the well-being of the state to be negatively affected by the crisis or not (*crisis*, H1a,b). Second, trust in the European Union and trust in national political actors was measured by questions asking for citizens to indicate their trust in several actors representing the citizens' interests. As citizens were asked to indicate their amount of trust on a scale from 1 to 10, we calculated a new variable (*rel_trust*) which subtracts the

citizen's mean trust in national actors (trust in nat. parliament + trust in nat. government divided by two) from the citizen's mean trust in European actors (trust in EP and trust in EC divided by two) (H1a). The formula in mathematical terms might be written as

$$\text{rel_trust} = ((\text{trust_ep} + \text{trust_ec}) / 2) - ((\text{trust_np} + \text{trust_ng}) / 2)$$

Third, we generated a dummy variable (eu_incap) separating citizens who agree to (at least) two of three negative statements on the EU's ability to solve the crisis from all other citizens (H1b). To mirror the connecting AND-condition within the hypotheses, we finally generated interaction effects (crisis*rel_trust, crisis*eu_incap).

For the nationalist backlash argument, two main independent variables were chosen. First, citizens' perception of a dissolving national identity (natiddiss) was measured by a question asking respondents: "In your opinion, how important are the following problems facing the country at the moment? – The loss of decision-making power and erosion of national identity after entry into the EU." Respondents were asked to rate the importance by choosing one of four values (from 1 = no importance to 4 = great importance). As no sound operationalization of closed-mindedness is available, we had to refer to a proxy. For closed-mindedness, we turned to a citizen's position toward minority rights, expecting that the degree to which people are opposed to allowing others the same rights as oneself should be highly correlated to their degree of closed-mindedness. Hence, the closed-mindedness of a citizen was measured by its attitudes toward minority rights (close minded, ranging from 0 = strongly support minority rights to 10 = strongly being against minority rights). To mirror the expectations in H2, we again calculated the respective interaction (natiddiss*closminded).

To measure the independent variables in H3 and H4, we turned to a question asking respondents as to how they would describe their general position toward European integration, the range of which varies from 0 = strongly opposed to 10 = strongly in favor. The original values were then reversed in order to mirror citizens' degree of Euroscepticism (Euroscepticism, higher values now symbolizing stronger criticism).

In addition to the dependent and independent variables, we also included some often-applied control variables such as a respondent's position on the working of market mechanisms (which in CEE countries replaces the usual left-right-placement of respondents, hence called 'ideology' with lower values indicating a higher sympathy for market liberalization) as well as age, education, and gender.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

As our first dependent variable, the development of Euroscepticism in the course of the financial crisis, has ten values, we first ran a simple OLS regression model separately for each country. Model I includes the indicators of H1, Model II includes the indicators of H2, and Model III combines all of the indicators.

Table 1. OLS Regression on development of EU attitudes during the crisis

<i>Development of attitudes toward EU</i>	Model I	Model II	Model III
Hungary			
Negative economic effects of financial crisis	-.41 (.19)*		-.41 (.20)*
Relative trust in EU institutions	.05 (.07)		.02 (.07)
Negative effects * Relative Trust	.15 (.07)*		.17 (.07)*
Perceived Dissolution of Nat Identity		-.03 (.15)	.07 (.15)
Closed Mindedness		.16 (.10)	.15 (.09)
Nat Ident * Closed Mindedness		-.07 (.03)*	-.06 (.03)*
Age	-.01 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	-.01 (.04)
Gender	.22 (.13)	.27 (.14)	.23 (.14)
Education	.03 (.07)	.03 (.07)	.03 (.17)
Ideology	.04 (.03)	.11 (.03)***	.06 (.03)*
Constant	4.18 (.34)***	4.07 (.57)***	4.14 (.60)***
R ² / N	10.1 / 842	6.1 / 834	12.8 / 805
Slovakia			
Negative economic effects of financial crisis	-.72 (.25)**		-.66 (.24)**
Relative trust in EU institutions	-.06 (.10)		-.05 (.09)
Negative effects * Relative Trust	.21 (.10)*		.20 (.10)*
Perceived Dissolution of Nat Identity		-.57 (.18)***	-.54 (.18)**
Closed Mindedness		-.00 (.12)	-.01 (.12)
Nat Ident * Closed Mindedness		.02 (.04)	.02 (.04)
Age	-.01 (.00)*	-.01 (.01)**	-.01 (.01)*
Gender	.08 (.15)	.12 (.15)	.12 (.15)
Education	-.01 (.09)	.01 (.08)	-.03 (.09)
Ideology	-.00 (.04)	.03 (.03)	-.00 (.04)
Constant	5.84 (.44)	6.60 (.74)***	7.20 (.76)
R ² / N	4.3 / 827	5.8 / 829	8.8 / 7.9

Source: Own surveys administered in Hungary and Slovakia. Reported coefficients are unconditional coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Data is weighted by design weights. *p ≤ 0.05, (** p ≤ 0.01, (***) p ≤ 0.001.

In both countries, the interaction between a perception of a negative influence of the financial crisis and the relative trust in the EU exerts a positive, significant, and comparatively strong

effect on the dependent variable. That is, citizens who are aware of negative economic effects of the financial crisis developed more favorable attitudes in the run of the crisis if they perceived the EU institutions more trustworthy in relation to their national political institutions. Also, in both countries did the perception of negative effects of the financial crisis alone exert a negative effect on the dependent variable, indicating that citizens who perceive negative effects but (dis)trust European and national actors equally develop more skeptical attitudes toward the EU in general over time. We expected these indicators to have a stronger effect in Slovakia, but only the somewhat larger coefficient indicating the effect of the crisis perception supports that expectation.

Obviously more in contrast to our expectations is the fact that the nationalist backlash-effect seems to matter more strongly and also differently in Slovakia than in Hungary. For the Hungarian respondents, the effects are as we expected—the interaction between a perceived loss of national identity and a disposition toward stronger closed-mindedness on the side of respondents significantly and negatively affect the development of EU attitudes over time. Contrary to Hungary, Slovakian respondents' EU attitudes are negatively and strongly influenced only by the perception of a dissolving national identity. These findings indicate that the effects of identity perception in Hungary are limited to respondents with certain personality dispositions, while having unmediated influence on citizens' attitude developments in Slovakia. Coming to the socio-demographic control variables, the ideological position (in Hungary) and the age of respondents (in Slovakia) seems to influence the dependent variable, yet to a limited extent.

Moving to the findings regarding H3 and H4 which we plotted in Table 2, we observe that the vote intentions toward eurosceptical (Model I) and extremist (Model II) parties in Hungary are dependent on a citizens' general state toward the EU. This is not the case in Slovakia where only the voting behavior in favor of eurosceptical parties can be explained by the eurosceptical attitudes of citizens. Hence, the perspective of H4b – focusing of the salience of EU topics in elite communication – seems to grasp more of the processes going on in reality than does H4a. We will go deeper into these findings after giving the reader more confidence by presenting the results of our robustness checks.

The findings plotted in Table 2 are actually confirmed when one turns to the presentation of effect sizes by calculating predicted probabilities. Figure 1 plots the predicted probability of voting an extremist party dependent on citizens' Euroscepticism for both countries separately.

Table 2. Logistic Regression on Citizens' Eurosceptical/Extremist Vote

	Model I (Eurosceptical Vote)	Model II (Extremist Vote)
Hungary		
Euroscepticism	.32 (.06)***	.40 (.07)***
Age	-.15 (.08)*	-.35 (.12)**
Gender	-.43 (.26)	.51 (.34)
Education	.18 (.12)	-.21 (.16)
Ideology	.02 (.06)	-.17 (.09)
Constant	-3.96 (.63)***	-3.21 (.93)***
R ² / N	8.3 / 868	13.8 / 868
Slovakia		
Euroscepticism	.31 (.06)***	-.08 (.06)
Age	-.01 (.01)	.01 (.00)
Gender	.03 (.34)	.28 (.24)
Education	.17 (.18)	-.11 (.13)
Ideology	.03 (.07)	-.07 (.05)
Constant	-4.52 (.92)***	1.86 (.59)**
R ² / N	6.6 / 839	1.5 / 839

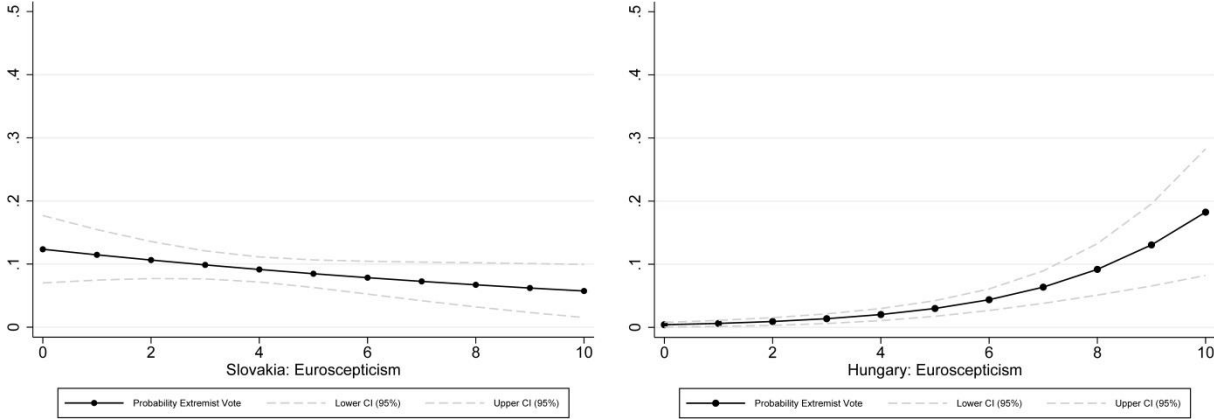
Source: Own surveys administered in Hungary and Slovakia. Reported coefficients are unconditional coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Data is weighted by design weights. * p ≤ 0.05, (** p ≤ 0.01, (***) p ≤ 0.001.

One notices immediately that there is neither a substantive nor a significant effect of Euroscepticism on citizens' vote for extremist parties in Slovakia, while the probability of voting for extremist parties rises substantially for Hungarian citizens who are especially Eurosceptic. The share of Hungarian citizens demonstrating values >5 on the Euroscepticism variable consists in about 30 percent of citizens (Slovakia: 20 percent) while about 15 percent show quite an extreme form of Euroscepticism (values >7). Hence, the rise of the probability for extremist voting from the values 6/7 to 10 still affect a substantial part of the Hungarian citizenry and is not restricted to a small part of the population.

Robustness Checks

To lend more credence to the findings presented above, we applied various robustness checks. First, we checked for multicollinearity issues regarding the OLS regressions but found no indication of inflated variance beside those regarding the variables in the interaction effects. Yet, this problem of multicollinearity in interaction effects has been shown to be overestimated (Brambor et al. 2005). Also, we calculated a correlation matrix between the independent variables. There was no substantially problematic correlation effect between any of the independent variables.

Figure 1. Predicted Probabilities of Citizens' Extremist Vote



Second, due to general problems with the application of OLS regressions, we calculated Model I, II, and III in Table 2 with ordinary logistic regressions. Calculating such models did not change our findings. Third, we calculated the models stepwise. This did actually change our findings in Table 2 – mainly in regard to effects being statistically significant or not – when we dropped ideology from the models. This strongly suggested to us that the ideological self-placement of citizens is connected to their level of trust in national and international actors. Maybe unsurprisingly, citizens more strongly in favor of market liberalization are more likely to exert more trust into EU institutions relative to their national institutions. Fourth, to cope with that problem and to additionally check for problems generated by calculating the models separately for countries, we pooled the data and again calculated a full model with third-term interactions including country dummies (e.g., $natiddiss * closminded * Hungary\ Dummy$) and with and without the ideology-indicator. The findings of these pooled models confirmed the findings regarding the substance and statistical significance of effects in the single-country full models, even when ideology was dropped. Fifth, calculating stepwise regressions for the models in Table 3 did not change any of the findings. However, we

additionally re-calculated these models by including the indicators used in the explanation of the development of citizens' EU attitudes. This did not change our findings regarding the strong effect of Euroscepticism on extremist voting in Hungary, and the lack of such an effect in Slovakia. Having run all these robustness tests, we are confident that the findings presented here are reliable and valid.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Above we argued, first, that the financial crisis should lead to an increase in citizens' skepticism toward the European Union. Second, we proposed that such an increase in euroskepticism should influence domestic politics as a higher degree of Euroscepticism makes citizens more likely to vote not only for eurosceptical but also for extremist parties. Did the findings lend empirical credence to these theoretical expectations? The answer is a cautious Yes, but with important qualifications. First of all, the financial crisis seems to have influenced citizens' euroskepticism by a rationalist mechanism—citizens perceiving the crisis to harm the national economy while at the same time trusting European institutions more (less) than domestic actors develop less (more) skeptical attitudes toward the EU over time (= H1). Second, the financial crisis also seems to matter via a more psychological mechanism, making citizens who perceive the EU as a threat to national autonomy and identity more skeptical toward the EU. Yet, a first caveat comes into play here. This psychological mechanism seems to work for all citizens in Slovakia irrespective of their personality structure (\neq H2), while in Hungary, the effect only takes place for citizens who demonstrated a higher degree of closed-mindedness (= H2). We may speculate here that the more complete absorption of the euro-zone country Slovakia, a nation of half the size of Hungary, may have created a much more pervasive feeling of loss of national identity. Moreover, unlike in Hungary where the cosmopolitan-traditionalist cleavage follows more clearly the left-right party political dimension, Slovakia parochial and traditionalist sentiments are present across the political spectrum.

Regarding the effects of citizens' Euroscepticism on their choice for eurosceptical parties, and third, the findings (non-surprisingly) demonstrate that having eurosceptical attitudes makes individuals more likely to cast their vote for (perceived) eurosceptical parties (= H3). In contrast, whether one is critical toward the EU seems only to influence one's probability to vote for extremist parties in Hungary but not in Slovakia. This seems to cautiously confirm H

4b, which was based on the assumption that the polarization of the domestic EU discourse would in turn make the Eurosceptical sentiments of a citizen to shape his or her decision to vote for extremist parties.

Despite these findings we find our theoretical argument generally supported although we are well aware of the fact that this has been only a first step in the direction of understanding what had been occurring in a complex reality. The limitations clearly stem from the fact that we not only developed and presented several novel ideas on why and how the financial crisis would lead to an increase in Euroscepticism among citizens but that we also tested these assumptions by way of a new and self-administered survey from which data from only two countries have been available so far. However, as we employed quite some robustness checks, we are at least confident that the general idea of our perspectives seems sound as it allows us capture some effects of what transpires in reality. Still, we are looking forward to participate in future research which will hopefully be able to rely on data on a greater range of cases to further corroborate the findings presented here. In any case, further research on the topic is clearly warranted.

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