

Responding to the left: the effect of far-left parties on mainstream party Euroskepticism

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ABSTRACT

Do far-left political parties influence the level of Euroskepticism among mainstream political parties within that same party system? This study seeks to address this question by building on previous work that has examined the effect of both far-left and far-right Euroskeptic parties on mainstream party positions regarding the EU. We theorize that when far-left parties place an emphasis on state control over the economy, mainstream parties in the same party system are less supportive of the EU. To test our theoretical expectations, we use data from the Comparative Manifestos Project in 25 EU member states from 1958 through 2015. The analysis indicates support for the hypothesis that when far-left parties place greater emphasis on a need for state control of the economy, mainstream parties in that party system are more Euroskeptic. Our findings have important implications for understanding the nature of political party dynamics both generally, and more specifically in the European Union.

Do far-left political parties in EU member states' party systems influence mainstream party Euroskepticism? Although there has been significant empirical work on the impact of the far-right on European party politics, the impact of the far-left, with the exception of a few studies (e.g. Meijers 2017), has not been examined closely. Nonetheless, recent political advances of the far-left in Europe, such as Greece's *Syriza*, Spain's *Podemos*, and *La France Insoumise*, have demonstrated the importance of understanding the impact of far-left parties.

Following recent research that shows political parties adjust their positions based on the positions of other parties within a party system (see Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Williams and Spoon 2015; Abou-Chadi 2016; Meijers 2017; Spoon and Williams 2017), we argue that the emphasis far-left parties place on state control of the economy influences the extent to which mainstream parties hold Euroskeptic positions. We posit that this is because far-left parties, through increasing the salience of the issue of state control of the economy, which far-left parties own, provide an incentive for mainstream

parties to take anti-neoliberal and anti-globalization positions, and therefore towards greater Euroskepticism.

To test our theoretical expectations, we use Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) data, finding support for the hypothesis that when communist and post-communist parties in a party system place a greater emphasis on state control of the economy, the mainstream parties in those systems are more Euroskeptic. In the following sections, we define the far-left and discuss the current literature on the impact of peripheral parties (far-right and far-left) on mainstream parties in Europe. We then discuss the role of peripheral parties in shifting mainstream parties on the issue of European integration. Finally, we outline our basic research design and provide the results of our empirical analysis.

What is the far-left?

As March and Mudde (2005) have noted the far-left has fundamentally changed since 1989. The marginalization of communist organizations was a direct result of the collapse of the USSR. However, the collapse of the USSR also led to the transformation and social democratization of the communist left, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe (Ishiyama 1995, 1997). What has emerged on the left is a plethora of different political orientations (March 2008).

March (2008, 1) describes “far-left parties as those that define themselves as to the left of social democracy, which they see as insufficiently left-wing ...” Two primary subtypes exist on the far-left, the “radical left” and the “extreme left.” The “radical left” accepts democracy but favors “workers’ democracy,” and the direct participation of labor in the management of the economy. The “radical left” is anti-capitalist and opposes globalization – which involves trade liberalization, marketization, and privatization, although these parties “no longer [entirely] support a planned economy but a mixed market economy with private enterprise confined to services and small and medium-sized enterprises” (March 2008, 3). On the other hand, the “extreme left” emphasizes both parliamentary, as well as the extra-parliamentary struggle against globalized capitalism, and sees no place for free-market enterprise. Thus, what both versions of the far-left have in common is support for a state role in controlling the economy. Thus, we define far-left parties as both “radical left” and “extreme left” parties.¹

The impact of peripheral parties on mainstream parties

There is a sizable amount of work focusing on how peripheral parties, which “are those that compete for political influence outside of mainstream

¹The typology of a far-left party, whether “radical left” or “extreme left,” should not change the effect that a far-left party has on mainstream party Euroskepticism, as all far-left parties included in this study contest elections.

channels of power” (Williams 2006), influence mainstream political party positions (for example, Williams 2006; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Meijers 2017). The most recent literature on this topic has sought to develop a singular theoretical model, combining spatial understandings of party politics (e.g. Downs 1957), and issue evolution theory (e.g. Meyer and Wagner 2014; Abou-Chadi 2016; Meijers 2017).

Within this research, it is argued that issue entrepreneurs develop new issues over which parties compete (see Meguid 2005; Hobolt and De Vries 2012; 2015). As these issue entrepreneurs, most often in the form of peripheral parties, increase the emphasis they place on these new issues among the public, voters begin to shift towards these peripheral parties (De Vries 2010). In an attempt to lure voters back, mainstream parties change positions, moving towards the positions of the peripheral parties. In essence, peripheral parties, by emphasizing a particular issue that other parties are not discussing, increase the salience of that issue. This emphasis draws voters to that peripheral party, and mainstream parties react by moving towards the peripheral party so as not to lose voters who may find the message of the peripheral party attractive.

While a sizable amount of literature has examined the relationship between peripheral party positions and mainstream party positions in recent years (see March 2011; Abou-Chadi 2016; Meijers 2017 among others), the majority of this literature has focused on the effect of far-right parties on mainstream parties, with a small amount of research focusing on green parties (see Spoon, Hobolt, and de Vries 2014; Abou-Chadi 2016), and even less examining the effect of far-left parties on mainstream parties (see Meijers 2017).

The existing research points to a general rightward movement as a consequence of emerging far-right parties (Williams 2006; Mudde 2007; Abou-Chadi 2016; Meijers 2017). Qualitative work has suggested that far-right parties have been able to influence issue positions of mainstream parties, and thus, shifted the party system rightward (Williams 2006). The recent quantitative work suggests a similar effect, with mainstream parties shifting their positions in response to stronger far-right parties (Pytlas and Kossack 2013; Abou-Chadi 2016). Meguid (2008) has argued that many of the mainstream parties, particularly on the center-right, have sought to accommodate the far-right by moving towards them and co-opting their issues.

Peripheral parties and Euroskepticism

The above singular theoretical model of peripheral party influence on mainstream party positions can be applied to the issue of European integration. Within this singular theoretical model, peripheral parties must place an emphasis on an issue area that has been outside of traditional party

competition, and mainstream parties must be concerned that voters will abandon the party, casting a ballot for the peripheral party. Both of these conditions are present regarding the issue of European integration. Mainstream parties have normally held pro-integration positions, tending to avoid the issue of European integration when possible (see Green-Pedersen 2012; Meijers 2017).

Beginning in the 1990s, the issue of European integration has grown in salience (Hooghe and Marks 2009), due, in part, to entrepreneurial peripheral parties placing greater emphasis on the issue (Hobolt and De Vries 2012). This has led to electoral growth among Euroskeptical peripheral parties.

The concern over the loss of voters to entrepreneurial Euroskeptical peripheral parties led to mainstream parties adjusting their positions, and taking more Euroskeptical stances. Meijers (2017) found that when a far-right party has been more electorally successful in previous elections, mainstream party Euroskepticism increases. This is due to the demonstrated electoral threat of far-right peripheral parties on mainstream parties.²

Further, both mainstream parties on the right and left have been found to respond to far-right Euroskeptical parties (Meijers 2017). Importantly, the finding regarding the effect of far-left Euroskeptical parties is weaker, with far-left Euroskepticism only influencing Euroskepticism among center-left parties. Further, the effect of far-left Euroskepticism is substantively smaller than the effect of far-right Euroskepticism (Meijers 2017).

These findings beg the question, why do far-left parties not have as strong an influence on mainstream party Euroskepticism as far-right parties? The answer to this question may lay in the role of *associative issue ownership*.³

Mainstream parties alter their positions in response to peripheral parties because they are concerned about losing voters to those parties. Put differently, if a mainstream party is not concerned about losing votes to a peripheral party, one would not expect that mainstream party to alter its positions in response to that peripheral party. Associative ownership of an issue by a peripheral party, that is a spontaneous association in the minds of voters between a party and a particular issue, influences mainstream party concern over loss of voters to that peripheral party, with mainstream parties being less concerned with losing votes to a peripheral party on an issue that is not owned by that party. Therefore, mainstream parties will be less responsiveness to that peripheral party when position-taking.

²Theoretically, it is not a precondition that a peripheral party has previous electoral success for a mainstream party to view that peripheral party as an electoral threat. Rather, peripheral parties that have had relatively little recent electoral success can cause concern for mainstream parties if they are focused on an issue that mainstream parties fear will resonate with the public.

³Associative issue ownership is distinct from competency issue ownership (Walgrave, Lefevere, and Tresch 2012). This distinction is important as mainstream parties have been shown to be unresponsive to niche parties in issue areas for which those parties are seen as the competency issue owners. However, mainstream parties are more responsive to niche parties than are associative issue owners (Abou-Chadi 2016).

For example, research has suggested that mainstream parties adjust their positions regarding environmental policy in response to green party success (Spoon, Hobolt, and de Vries 2014). However, one would not expect mainstream parties to adjust their positions regarding the environment in response to an increased emphasis on environmental protection from a far-right party, as these parties are not seen as the associative owners of the ecology issue. Thus, mainstream parties would likely not lose many votes on this issue when a far-right party places greater emphasis on it. In turn, mainstream parties would not change their positions regarding the environment in response to a far-right party placing greater emphasis on it.

This basic understanding also applies to the issue of European integration. While far-left parties do often maintain Euroskeptic positions, these stances are more conditional than Euroskeptic positions among far-right parties. Far-right parties tend towards nationalism (Mudde 2010), leading to inherent rejection of international integration (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2004). Alternatively, far-left parties tend to be internationalist (March and Mudde 2005; Bornschier 2010), which should lead them towards support for international integration (i.e. the EU).⁴ However, their view that the current form of integration threatens left-wing goals leads these parties to prefer reform of the EU, and barring reform, a withdrawal from the EU (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2004).

For example, one can look to the far-right French *Front National* and the far-left *La France Insoumise* in 2017. The *Front National* opposed, outright, the EU and the process of European integration, pushing for France's withdrawal from the bloc. *La France Insoumise*, however, conditionally accepted the EU, calling for reforms, and exit from the bloc if reforms are not made.

More generally, Kopecky and Mudde (2002, 301) point out that the positioning recently seen in France is applicable across other far-left parties. They note that far-left parties in the EU signed a declaration calling for a unified Europe focused on socialist principles, while criticizing the then EU as being, "neo-liberal, antisocial, and undemocratic." This is in contrast to far-right parties that have been quite vocal in their criticism of the entirety of the integration experiment (Kopecky and Mudde 2002).

The opposition to integration in general among far-right parties closely tracks with Taggart and Szczerbiak's (2001) idea of "hard Euroskepticism," whereas the conditional acceptance, but desire to reform the EU fits with their conception of "soft Euroskepticism." In fact, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004) find that far-right parties do tend to be more overtly Euroskeptic in comparison to far-left parties. In essence, far-right parties can be understood

⁴Far-left parties are generally more internationalist; however, some far-left parties do include nationalist positions in their ideology. Regarding this study, this is most evident in the case of the Communist Party of Greece (see March 2008). Importantly, when tests excluding Greece are conducted, the results do not change substantially.

as the associative issue owners (see Walgrave, Lefevere, and Tresch 2012) of “hard Euroskepticism,” in that there is a spontaneous association in the minds of voters between far-right parties and intrinsic support for withdrawal from the EU.

Following this logic, far-right parties emphasizing “hard Euroskeptic” positions should lead to mainstream parties becoming more Euroskeptic as they fear the emphasis placed by far-right parties on the issue of integration will increase the salience of the issue in the public, leading to a loss of voters to far-right parties. However, far-left parties emphasizing “hard Euroskeptic” positions in the same way as far-right parties will likely not have the same effect, as the public does not view these parties as inherently anti-EU. That is, far-left parties are not the associative issue owners of “hard Euroskepticism” as they do not oppose integration in principle, but merely the economic goals they perceive the EU to embody, while far-right parties reject the EU and idea of European integration, “in all its aspects” (Helbing, Hoeglinger, and Wüest 2010, 504). Thus, mainstream parties will be less concerned about losing voters to far-left parties when they make “hard Euroskeptic” appeals. If mainstream parties are less concerned with losing voters, they should be less likely to shift their positions on European integration in response to far-left parties making “hard Euroskeptic” statements, particularly as shifting positions involves a sizable risk for mainstream parties (see Abou-Chadi 2016; Meijers 2017).

This is not to say that far-left parties cannot influence the level of Euroskepticism among mainstream parties in a system. Rather, it suggests that far-left parties will have difficulty influencing mainstream party Euroskepticism through “hard Euroskeptic” appeals.

One can expect, however, far-left parties to be able to influence mainstream party positions in an issue area for which they are the associative owners. Far-left parties are generally seen as the associative issue owners regarding state control of the economy (Halikiopoulou 2014). Thus, as far-left parties emphasize a preference for greater state control of the economy (which is often associated with anti-neoliberal and anti-globalist positions), we expect that mainstream parties will move towards this position so as not to lose voters concerned with this issue.⁵ It is, of course, possible that alternative reasons exist to explain the movement of mainstream party positions, but this is an empirical, and not necessarily a theoretical, question. In our empirical analysis, we seek to control for these alternative explanations.

⁵During the 1990s and early 2000s, political competition in the EU began to focus more on identity/cultural issues, with left-right issues declining in salience (Kriesi et al. 2006). Under these circumstances, one may expect far-left parties emphasizing state control of the economy to have less of an effect on mainstream party positions. However, left-right competition remains important in Europe (Marks and Steenbergen 2002) and recent developments in Europe, such as the Eurozone Crisis, and high unemployment across Europe have increased the salience of economic issues, which should lead to more responsiveness to far-left parties.

Importantly, there are inherent risks to mainstream parties directly responding to peripheral party positioning, even if a peripheral party is only the associative owner of an issue and not the competency owner of an issue. Specifically, if a mainstream party directly responds to a peripheral party that is the associative owner of an issue, that mainstream party risks, “strengthening the according [peripheral] parties, thereby causing partisan realignment away from established parties and toward new parties” (Abou-Chadi 2016, 423).⁶

To avoid these risks, a mainstream party may attempt to adjust positions in a related, but non-identical, issue area. Regarding the issue of state control of the economy, many political parties see a link between free-market economics, neoliberalism, globalization, and the EU. Thus, it would be expected that mainstream parties will grow more Euroskeptic as far-left parties emphasize a need for state control of the economy.

While the issue of European integration does not fit neatly along the left-right dimension (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002), and experts question the actual degree of neoliberalism in the EU (Van Apeldoorn 2009), political parties in EU member states often view the EU as a neoliberal in character and holding a positive view of globalization (see Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2004; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Halikiopoulou 2014).⁷ Thus, when far-left parties emphasize to a greater degree the issue of state control of the economy, i.e. opposition to neoliberalism and globalization, mainstream parties, because they fear they will be seen by the public as pro-neoliberalism, should themselves take positions that are less pro-EU. Simply put, as the owners of the issue of state control of the economy, far-left parties can influence mainstream party positions on this issue by increasing its salience, and associated with the issue of state control of the economy is the issue of European integration. Therefore, following this logic, it can be hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1: The greater the emphasis on state control of the economy among far-left parties in a party system, the more Euroskeptic mainstream parties will be.⁸

⁶The risks to mainstream parties in responding to associative issue owners are lower than the risks from responding to competency issue owners, however, they do exist.

⁷Additionally, evidence from Eurobarometer surveys indicates that the public does tend to see the EU as being particularly pro-business and globalization. In the Eurobarometer 85.2 and 86.2 (these surveys were conducted in the Spring and Autumn of 2016) respondents were asked if they agree or disagree with statements regarding the EU. Specifically, they were asked if they agreed that the EU makes doing business easier. Importantly, in both of these surveys, about two-thirds of respondents agreed that the EU makes doing business easier, with 66.3% of respondents agreeing in Spring 2016 and 69.8% of respondents agreeing in Autumn of 2016. Further, in these surveys, respondents were asked if the EU means the ability to travel, study, and work abroad. In both the Spring and Autumn of 2016, more than half of respondents stated that the EU does, in fact, mean the ability to travel, study, and work abroad, with 51.1% stating this in Spring of 2016, and 53.1% of respondents mentioning this in Autumn of 2016.

⁸Following Meijers (2017), it is possible that only left of center mainstream parties are influenced by greater emphasis on state control of the economy among far-left parties. As such, we conducted

Research design

The dependent variable of this study is the degree of Euroskepticism among mainstream political parties in EU member states.⁹ The data necessary to measure this were derived from the CMP (Volkens et al. 2015). The CMP codes “quasi-sentences” from the national election manifestos of each party that takes part in an election. These “quasi-sentences” are coded as belonging to a particular policy dimension. Once a “quasi-sentence” has been classified into a policy domain, it is coded as either positive or negative. The final CMP data report the percentage of “quasi-sentences” in a particular policy domain that is positive and the percentage that is negative, where applicable. We restrict the data to the manifestos of parties that compete in elections that occurred between 1958 (elections after the Treaty of Rome) and 2015 (the year for which the most recent data exists) in member states of the EU or its predecessors. For parties in those countries that accessed to the EU after 1958, the data begin with the first national election after accession.

To measure the dependent variable, we identified the mainstream parties of a particular country at the time of each national election after accession. This was done using the CMP coding of party family. A mainstream party is defined as belonging to any party family that regularly participates in governing coalitions. Therefore, any party that is social democratic, liberal, Christian democratic, or conservative is included as a mainstream party. Further, we include green parties as mainstream parties after October 1994 as this was the first instance of a green party serving as a governing coalition partner (Germany), and multiple green parties have served in governing coalitions since (e.g. Belgium, France, Italy, Sweden).¹⁰

Following Lowe et al. (2011), the level of mainstream party Euroskepticism, our dependent variable, is operationalized as the difference in the log of the percentages of Euroskeptic and Europhilic “quasi-sentences” in a party’s

eight robustness tests to examine this possibility. These preliminary tests suggest that far-left party emphasis on state control of the economy does not affect left of center parties only, but mainstream parties across the board.

⁹This variable is more accurately the degree of Euroskepticism among mainstream parties in party systems. Belgium consists of two party systems, thus, parties are divided into each party system based on where in Belgium they contest elections. The United Kingdom consists of a party system in Great Britain, and a party system in Northern Ireland. Northern Irish parties are not included due to a lack of data regarding the positions of these parties. Malta is dropped from the dataset due to a lack of longitudinal data. Cyprus is dropped from the dataset as one of its mainstream political parties (AKEL) is also a communist party. Romania is dropped from the analysis as the CMP does not provide data on the manifestos of mainstream parties for more than a single election.

¹⁰As robustness checks, we ran models excluding green parties as mainstream parties, and including green parties as mainstream parties at all times. The results of these tests were similar to the main results reported in this study. See [Tables A1](#) and [A2](#) in the [Appendix](#).

manifesto in a given election.¹¹ Thus, the unit of analysis is the mainstream party-election. The range for this measure in the data is -5.964 (*Partido Popular*; Spanish People's Party in 1996) to 4.218 (United Kingdom Labour Party in 1983), with a pro-EU mean of -2.107 and a standard deviation of 1.704 .¹²

To measure the main independent variable, the emphasis on state control of the economy among far-left parties in a party system, we focus on communist and post-communist parties as identified by the CMP. Focusing on these parties makes sense as they have the longest history of representing the far-left in Europe (March 2008), and are more likely than many other variants of far-left parties to be associative issue owners regarding state control of the economy. Any party that is coded in the CMP as a communist or post-communist party while the country within which the party exists is a member of the EU was used in the operationalization of these measures.

The above decision rule includes both "radical left" and "extreme left" parties, but precludes former communist parties that have become center-left parties by the time the party system in which they exist entered the dataset. For example, the Hungarian Socialist Party is the successor to the communist party in Hungary (Ishiyama 1995), but by the first election after Hungary accessed to the EU (2006), this party had become a social democratic party. Therefore, when we measure the emphasis place on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties, these parties are no longer considered to be communist or post-communist parties, and in the case of those parties such as the Hungarian Socialist Party, they are now mainstream parties.¹³

After identifying communist and post-communist parties in each system, the emphasis on state control of the economy among these parties was operationalized in two ways. The first operationalization is simply the percentage of "quasi-sentences" in the national election manifestos of communist and post-communist parties that were positive towards direct government control of the economy (*per412* in the CMP data).¹⁴

¹¹Lowe et al. (2011, 131) show a log odds ratio scaling method "better reflects spatial politics assumptions about the possible range of ideal points" than using the difference in positive and negative quasi-sentences.

¹²For descriptive statistics for all variables, see Table A3 in the Appendix.

¹³This decision rule does not change the measure of the emphasis on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system. These former communist parties that have become mainstream parties tend to not mention direct government control of the economy in their manifestos, meaning that including them as communist or post-communist parties will not change the overall emphasis on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system. However, if these parties are considered communist or post-communist parties, they cannot be considered mainstream parties. For a list of communist and post-communist parties, see Table A4 in the Appendix.

¹⁴The CMP does not code negative mentions of direct government control of the economy.

In instances in which more than one communist or post-communist party exists in a party system (e.g. Denmark in 1973, Italy in 1987, etc.), the mean percentage of positive “quasi-sentences” regarding direct government control of the economy included in those communist or post-communist parties’ national election manifestos was used. For instances in which a communist or post-communist party does not exist, the emphasis placed on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in that party system is coded as 0. The range for this variable was 0 (multiple party systems in several years) to 21.429 (Finland in 1991¹⁵), with a mean of 0.792, and a standard deviation of 2.109.

The second operationalization of this variable weighted the above measure (emphasis on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in each party system) by the electoral strength of the communist or post-communist party/parties in a country. This is a robustness check, and is consistent with the notion that the influence of a peripheral party may be affected by a party’s previous electoral success (see Spoon, Hobolt, and de Vries 2014; Meijers 2017). Party electoral strength was measured as the proportion of the vote received by a party in a given national election. For example, in the September 1998 Swedish national election, the *Vänsterpartiet* (Left Party) dedicated 3.021% of all “quasi-sentences” in its manifesto to statements concerning direct government control of the economy. Further, the *Vänsterpartiet* received 12.0% of the vote in this election. Thus, the weighted emphasis on state control of the economy for the *Vänsterpartiet* is 0.362 (3.021*0.120). The range for this operationalization is 0 (multiple countries in several years) to 2.159 (Finland in 1991) with a mean of 0.085 and a standard deviation of 0.249.

Importantly, when analyzed, both operationalizations of the independent variable were lagged by one election. For instance, the measures of the emphasis placed on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system from the March 1978 national legislative election in France were linked to the measures of mainstream party Euroskepticism in France in the June 1981 national election.

Additionally, we include multiple control variables in the below analysis. We have included in our models, a measure of “hard Euroskeptic” statements among communist and post-communist parties in a party system. Similar to the dependent variable, Euroskepticism among communist and post-communist parties in a system is derived from CMP data.

Two measures were developed for this variable. The first of these was the mean level of Euroskepticism among all communist or post-communist

¹⁵While Finland had not accessed to the EU in 1991, the main independent variable of this study is lagged by one national election. Thus, this variable is measured in 1991 as the next national election occurred after Finland’s 1995 accession.

parties within a system. This is the difference in the log of the percentages of Euroskeptic and Europhilic “quasi-sentences” in the parties’ manifestos. The second operationalization weighted communist and post-communist party Euroskepticism by the electoral strength of the party/parties. This was done by multiplying the above measure of communist and post-communist party Euroskepticism by the proportion of the vote that each party received in a given national election.¹⁶

To control for the possibility that the overall right–left position of a mainstream party influences its position concerning the EU (see Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002), we include a measure for each mainstream party’s right–left positioning. This variable is operationalized as the log of the right–left score included in the CMP data.

Further, it is possible that the levels of Euroskepticism among far-right parties in a system influence the levels of Euroskepticism among mainstream parties (Meijers 2017). Therefore, a variable indicating the degree of Euroskepticism among far-right parties in a party system is included.¹⁷ This variable is operationalized in two ways. The first is a non-weighted variable, which is measured in the same manner as the non-weighted measure of Euroskepticism among communist and post-communist parties. The second measure weights the level of Euroskepticism among far-right parties by the proportion of the vote they received in a given national election.

To address the possibility that Western and Eastern European countries may have systematically differing levels of mainstream party Euroskepticism, we include a dummy variable indicating whether a party system is within a former communist country. Finally, as national elections do not occur at uniform intervals both within countries and between countries, a variable, indicating in days, the length of time between each national election is also included.

As our dependent variable is continuous, ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is most appropriate. Due to the time-series cross-sectional nature of the data, it is possible that the dependent variable at time $t-1$ influences the dependent variable at time t . Thus, we must consider including a lagged version of our dependent variable in the analysis. However, as the use of OLS regression with a lagged dependent variable may lead to issues with autocorrelation (Plümpfer, Troeger, and Manow 2005), we rely upon a Prais–Winsten transformation technique for OLS. This procedure has been used commonly in the literature (see Spoon, Hobolt, and de Vries 2014;

¹⁶Collinearity does not present a problem as the Pearson’s R correlation between emphasis placed on government control of the economy and Euroskepticism among communist and post-communist parties is 0.164 for the non-weighted operationalizations, and 0.264 for the weighted operationalizations.

¹⁷For a list of far-right parties by country, see Table A5 in the Appendix.

Williams and Spoon 2015; Spoon and Williams 2017).¹⁸ Furthermore, we cluster our standard errors by party system.

Results

Four models testing our hypothesis are presented. Models 1 and 2 test the effect of the emphasis placed on state control of the economy by communist and post-communist parties in a party system on mainstream party Euroskepticism without controlling for communist and post-communist party Euroskepticism. Models 3 and 4 include a measure of communist and post-communist party Euroskepticism in the model. As higher values of the dependent variable denote higher levels of Euroskepticism among mainstream parties, a positive coefficient for an independent or control variable denotes greater Euroskepticism among mainstream parties.

Model 1 reports the results of the test of the effect of unweighted emphasis placed on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system on mainstream party Euroskepticism. The coefficient for the emphasis on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties variable is positive and statistically significant. This indicates that when communist and post-communist parties in a party system devote more space in their manifestos to positive remarks regarding government control of the economy, mainstream parties in that system tend to be more Euroskeptic in the subsequent national election.

Model 2 reports the results of the test with a weighted independent variable. Similar to Model 1, the coefficient for this measure is positive and statistically significant.

Model 3 reports the effect of unweighted emphasis on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a system on mainstream party Euroskepticism while controlling for communist and post-communist party Euroskepticism. As in Models 1 and 2, the coefficient for the emphasis on state control of the economy variable is positive and statistically significant. This suggests that, even when controlling for overt or “hard Euroskeptic” statements among communist and post-communist parties in a system, the emphasis placed on state control of the economy among those same parties still influences mainstream party Euroskepticism. Importantly, the communist and post-communist party Euroskepticism measure is statistically insignificant, indicating that overt or “hard Euroskeptic” manifesto statements by communist and post-communist parties are not systematically associated with mainstream party Euroskepticism.

¹⁸The models reported in this study are random effects. We also ran fixed effects models. The results of the fixed effects models are similar to the results of the random effects models.

Table 1. Emphasis on government control of economy on mainstream party Euroskepticism.

	Model 1 (SE)	Model 2 (SE)	Model 3 (SE)	Model 4 (SE)
Emphasis on govt. economic control	0.038** (0.012)	0.421*** (0.131)	0.037*** (0.011)	0.402*** (0.170)
Far-left party Euroskepticism			0.031 (0.079)	0.192 (0.356)
Mainstream party right-left position	0.007 (0.073)	0.008 (0.074)	0.011 (0.074)	0.013 (0.074)
Far-right party Euroskepticism	-0.022 (0.059)	0.645* (0.462)	-0.018 (0.061)	0.668* (0.458)
Eastern Europe dummy	-0.047 (0.349)	-0.026 (0.360)	-0.035 (0.339)	-0.021 (0.358)
Time to national election	-0.0003*** (0.0001)	-0.0003*** (0.0001)	-0.0003*** (0.0001)	-0.0003*** (0.0001)
Constant	-1.740*** (0.242)	-1.755*** (0.253)	-1.746*** (0.233)	-1.752*** (0.252)
<i>N</i>	737	737	737	737
# of clusters	26	26	26	26
<i>R</i> -squared	0.066	0.068	0.066	0.068
BIC	2633.909	2633.048	2641.668	2640.206

Notes: Table entries are Prais–Winsten regression coefficients correcting for panel-specific autocorrelation in error terms over one period autoregressive (1) with panel-corrected standard errors. The dependent variable in all models is the degree of Euroskepticism among mainstream parties in a party system. The main independent variable in Models 1 and 3 is the unweighted emphasis on government control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system. The main independent variable in Models 2 and 4 is the emphasis on government control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system weighted by the electoral strength of the communist and post-communist party or parties. In Model 3 communist and post-communist party Euroskepticism is unweighted. This variable is weighted in Model 4. Further, in Models 1 and 3, the degree of Euroskepticism among far-right parties in party system is unweighted. This variable is weighted in Models 2 and 4.

* $p \leq 0.10$.

** $p \leq 0.05$.

*** $p \leq 0.01$.

Model 4 reports the effect of weighted emphasis on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system on mainstream party Euroskepticism in that same system while controlling for weighted Euroskepticism among communist and post-communist parties. The variable measuring the emphasis on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a system is positive and statistically significant. Moreover, the weighted far-left party Euroskepticism variable is statistically insignificant, suggesting that overt or “hard Euroskeptic” statements from communist and post-communist parties do not systematically affect mainstream party Euroskepticism.

To more fully understand the substantive effects of the emphasis on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a system on mainstream party Euroskepticism in that same system, we have computed marginal effects plots based on Models 1 and 2.¹⁹

¹⁹Models 1 and 2 were chosen as Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) suggests that these models have the best fit.

Figure 1, which is based on Model 1, shows the marginal effect of unweighted emphasis on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system (*X*-axis) on the level of Euroskepticism among mainstream parties in that same party system (*Y*-axis). The dashed lines represent 90% confidence intervals.

There is a strong positive effect of the emphasis on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties on mainstream party Euroskepticism. When the emphasis placed on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a state is 0, one can expect mainstream parties to be quite Europhilic, about -2.1 (as a point of reference, the British Liberal Democratic Party scored -2.27 in 2005, and according to the 2002 Chapel Hill Expert Survey, were a decidedly pro-EU party in that year). However, as the emphasis placed on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system grows, the degree of Euroskepticism among mainstream parties also grows. When the emphasis placed on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system is 10, a moderate value, we can expect mainstream parties to become more Euroskeptic, reaching about -1.6 (as a point of reference, the British Labour Party scores -1.62 in 2010, and according to the 2009 Chapel Hill Expert Survey, was neutral regarding the EU). If the emphasis placed on state control of the economy

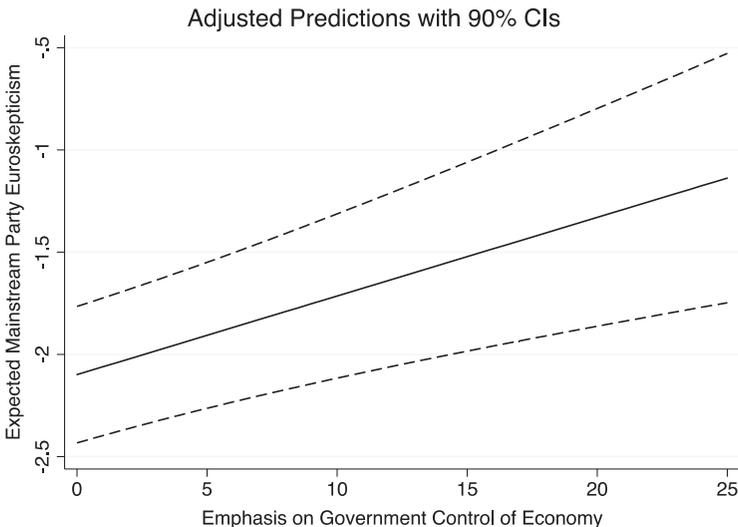


Figure 1. Marginal effects of unweighted emphasis on government control of economy on mainstream party euroskepticism.

Note: This figure is based on Model 1. It shows the marginal effect of the unweighted emphasis on government control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system on mainstream party Euroskepticism in that same party system while all other variables are held at their means. The dashed lines are 90% confidence intervals.

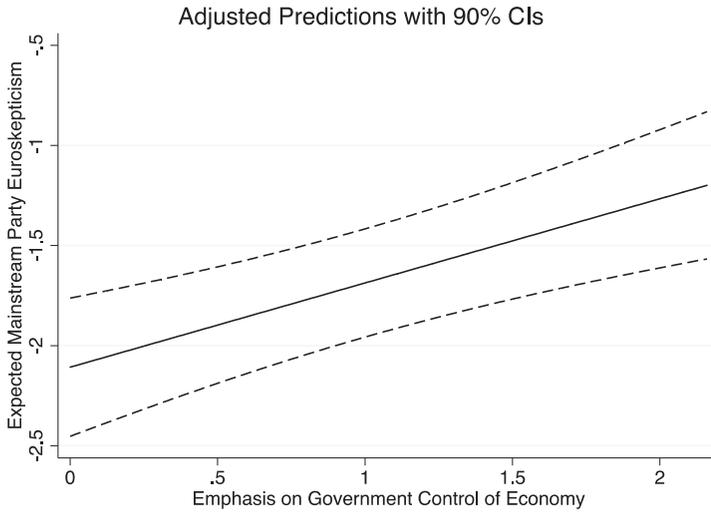


Figure 2. Marginal effects of weighted emphasis on government control of economy on mainstream party Euroskepticism.

Note: This figure is based on Model 2. It shows the marginal effect of the weighted emphasis on government control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system on mainstream party Euroskepticism in that same party system while all other variables are held at their means. The dashed lines are 90% confidence intervals.

among communist and post-communist parties reaches 21.5, which is the maximum value in this dataset, we can expect mainstream parties to have a level of Euroskepticism of about -1.3 (as a point of reference, the *Slovenská národná strana*, Slovak National Party, scored a -1.11 in 2006, and according to the 2006 Chapel Hill Expert Survey, was decidedly anti-EU).

Figure 2, which is based on Model 2, shows the marginal effect of the weighted emphasis placed on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system (X-axis) on mainstream party Euroskepticism in that same party system (Y-axis). The dashed lines represent 90% confidence intervals.

As can be seen, there is a clear positive effect of the weighted emphasis placed on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a system on mainstream party Euroskepticism. When the weighted emphasis placed on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system is 0, one can expect a mainstream party in that system to have a pro-EU score of -2.1 . If the weighted emphasis on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system is 1, expected mainstream party Euroskepticism is -1.7 . Further, if the weighted emphasis placed on state control of the

economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system is 2.16, the highest level in this dataset, we can expect mainstream party Euroskepticism to be about -1.2 .

Overall, these findings are quite robust and support the above hypothesis. In essence, having communist and post-communist parties in a party system place greater emphasis on state control of the economy is associated with mainstream parties being less favorable towards the EU. Importantly, the substantive difference in the effect of the weighted and unweighted measures of the emphasis placed on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a system on mainstream parties in that same system (as seen in [Figures 1](#) and [2](#)) does not appear significant. This indicates that the previous electoral success of communist and post-communist parties in a party system does not greatly influence mainstream party Euroskepticism.

Turning to the communist and post-communist Euroskepticism variable used as a control in Models 3 and 4, the results suggest, similarly to Meijers (2017), higher levels of Euroskepticism among far-left parties in a system do not systematically influence the level of Euroskepticism among mainstream political parties in that same system. It is important to note that this follows logically from the above theoretical perspective, as communist and post-communist parties are not the associative owners of the issue of “hard Euroskepticism.” It should be noted, however, that it is possible that higher levels of Euroskepticism among communist and post-communist parties in a system may influence center-left mainstream party Euroskepticism.

We find little in the way of statistical significance for other controls. The only control variable significant in all models is the time between national elections, which is negative in all models. This suggests that when there is a greater amount of time between national elections, mainstream parties are less Euroskeptic in their manifestos. This may be due to greater governmental stability in many northern European countries that tend to have particularly pro-EU mainstream parties, such as Germany and Luxembourg. Beyond the time between national elections, the only other control that is even marginally significant in any model is the weighted level of Euroskepticism among far-right parties in a system (see Models 2 and 4). In both Models 2 and 4, this variable is positive and statistically significant at the $p \leq .10$ level. This indicates that a high degree of Euroskepticism among electorally successful far-right parties in a system leads to mainstream parties in that same system being more Euroskeptic. However, this effect disappears when the level of Euroskepticism among far-right parties in a system is not weighted by the electoral strength of the far-right parties.

Conclusion

It was argued in this study that mainstream party Euroskepticism in the party systems of EU member states is influenced by the emphasis placed on

government control of the economy among far-left parties in those same party systems. Specifically, we posited that when communist and post-communist parties in a party system place a greater emphasis on the issue of state control of the economy, mainstream parties in those same party systems will be more Euroskeptical. Our findings indicate support for our hypothesis. Indeed, when communist and post-communist parties in a system put greater emphasis on state control of the economy in national election manifestos, mainstream parties in that party system tend to be more Euroskeptical in their manifestos at the subsequent national election. Additionally, no support is found for the idea that overt or “hard Euroskepticism” from far-left parties influences mainstream party Euroskepticism.

These findings provide important insights for our understandings of political party dynamics and support for the EU among mainstream parties. Previous research has suggested that mainstream parties respond to the positioning of peripheral parties (see Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Spoon, Hobolt, and de Vries 2014; Abou-Chadi 2016; Meijers 2017). In line with the reasoning of this previous research (Spoon, Hobolt, and de Vries 2014; Abou-Chadi 2016; Meijers 2017), the above findings indicate that the effect of peripheral party politics on mainstream party politics is not confined to far-right parties. Rather, far-left parties appear to influence the positioning of mainstream political parties.

These results also indicate, in line with previous research (see Spoon, Hobolt, and de Vries 2014; Abou-Chadi 2016), that the effect of peripheral parties on mainstream party positions may rely, to a large degree, on a party being seen as the owner of an issue. The findings of this study suggest that a peripheral party merely emphasizing a particular position does not inherently draw mainstream parties to that position, but instead, a peripheral party’s status as the associative issue owner in a policy area that it is emphasizing influences the ability of a peripheral party to affect mainstream party positions.

Regarding the issue of European integration, these findings suggest that, although mainstream political parties tend to be pro-EU (see Marks, Wilson, and Ray 2002), their positions regarding the EU should not be assumed to be unmovable (also see Williams and Spoon 2015; Meijers 2017; Spoon and Williams 2017). Rather, this study indicates that party competition and position-taking within the party system can drive mainstream parties towards Euroskepticism. Given the institutional structure of the EU, higher levels of Euroskepticism among mainstream parties in even one EU member state could have serious effects on policy-making at the European level (see Ray 2007).

Importantly, this study is one step in understanding the interplay between peripheral parties in a party system and mainstream party positions. It was argued above that peripheral parties will influence mainstream party

positions in those areas that the peripheral party is seen as owning. While the above findings, as well as the findings of Spoon, Hobolt, and de Vries (2014) and Abou-Chadi (2016), suggest support for this theory, more direct testing of this theory is necessary. This can be done by comparatively examining the effect of peripheral parties on mainstream parties in those areas that the public clearly identifies as the issue area associated with a particular peripheral party.

In terms of continuing research on the effect of far-left politics on mainstream party Euroscepticism, future research should build on Meijers's (2017) research, examining whether the emphasis placed on state control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system influences both center-left and center-right mainstream parties equally. It is possible that when communist and post-communist parties put a greater emphasis on state control of the economy, center-left mainstream parties alter positions, but center-right mainstream parties will not.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Appendix

Table A1. Emphasis on government control of the economy on mainstream party Euroscepticism excluding green parties as mainstream.

	Model A.1 (SE)	Model A.2 (SE)	Model A.3 (SE)	Model A.4 (SE)
Emphasis on govt. economic control	0.031*** (0.013)	0.374*** (0.147)	0.031*** (0.012)	0.365** (0.161)
Far-left party Euroscepticism			0.008 (0.081)	0.092 (0.392)
Mainstream party right-left position	0.029 (0.063)	0.032 (0.065)	0.030 (0.065)	0.034 (0.065)
Far-right party Euroscepticism	0.002 (0.057)	0.930** (0.430)	0.003 (0.059)	0.941** (0.419)
Eastern Europe dummy	-0.081 (0.374)	-0.048 (0.385)	-0.078 (0.366)	-0.046 (0.383)
Time to national election	-0.0003*** (0.0001)	-0.0003*** (0.0001)	-0.0003*** (0.0001)	-0.0003*** (0.0001)
Constant	-1.747*** (0.245)	-1.764*** (0.255)	-1.748*** (0.239)	-1.763*** (0.256)
<i>N</i>	700	700	700	700
# of clusters	26	26	26	26
<i>R</i> -squared	0.063	0.067	0.063	0.067

Notes: Table entries are Prais–Winsten regression coefficients correcting for panel-specific autocorrelation in error terms over one period autoregressive (1) with panel-corrected standard errors. Unlike Table 1, the models in this table exclude green parties as mainstream parties. The main independent variable in Model A.1 and A.3 is the unweighted emphasis on government control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system. The main independent variable in Model A.2 and A.4 is the emphasis on government control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system weighted by the electoral strength of the communist and post-communist party or parties. In Model A.3 communist and post-communist party Euroscepticism is unweighted. This variable is weighted in Model A.4. Further, in Models A.1 and A.3, degree of Euroscepticism among far-right parties in party system is unweighted. This variable is weighted in Models A.2 and A.4.

* $p \leq 0.10$.

** $p \leq 0.05$.

*** $p \leq 0.01$.

Table A2. Emphasis on government control of the economy on mainstream party Euroskepticism including green parties as mainstream at all times.

	Model A.5 (SE)	Model A.6 (SE)	Model A.7 (SE)	Model A.8 (SE)
Emphasis on govt. economic control	0.028*** (0.011)	0.297** (0.129)	0.028*** (0.011)	0.284** (0.141)
Far-left party Euroskepticism			0.034 (0.074)	0.178 (0.341)
Mainstream party right-left position	0.006 (0.070)	0.006 (0.070)	0.010 (0.072)	0.010 (0.070)
Far-right party Euroskepticism	-0.006 (0.062)	0.841* (0.518)	-0.001 (0.063)	0.863* (0.522)
Eastern Europe dummy	-0.115 (0.348)	-0.090 (0.360)	-0.102 (0.340)	-0.086 (0.358)
Time to national election	-0.0003*** (0.0001)	-0.0003*** (0.0000)	-0.0003*** (0.0001)	-0.0003*** (0.0001)
Constant	-1.668*** (0.233)	-1.683*** (0.243)	-1.676*** (0.226)	-1.681*** (0.244)
<i>N</i>	770	770	770	770
# of clusters	26	26	26	26
<i>R</i> -squared	0.049	0.052	0.049	0.052

Notes: Table entries are Prais–Winsten regression coefficients correcting for panel-specific autocorrelation in error terms over one period autoregressive (1) with panel-corrected standard errors. Unlike Table 1, the models in this table include green parties as mainstream parties across all years. The main independent variable in Model A.5 and A.7 is the unweighted emphasis on government control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system. The main independent variable in Model A.6 and A.8 is the emphasis on government control of the economy among communist and post-communist parties in a party system weighted by the size of the communist and post-communist party or parties. In Model A.7 communist and post-communist party Euroskepticism is unweighted. This variable is weighted in Model A.8. Further, in Models A.5 and A.7, degree of Euroskepticism among far-right parties in party system is unweighted. This variable is weighted in Models A.6 and A.8.

* $p \leq 0.10$.

** $p \leq 0.05$.

*** $p \leq 0.01$.

Table A3. Descriptive statistics.

Variable	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Mainstream party Euroskepticism	737	-2.111	1.695	-5.964	4.218
Emphasis on govt. economic control	737	0.784	2.115	0	21.429
Weighted emphasis on govt. control of economy	737	0.084	0.249	0	2.159
Far-left party Euroskepticism	737	0.303	1.367	-5.944	4.466
Weighted far-left party Euroskepticism	737	0.019	0.173	-0.630	0.666
Mainstream party right-left position	737	-0.106	0.890	-2.470	3.476
Far-right party Euroskepticism	737	0.065	1.04	-4.635	4.977
Weighted far-right party Euroskepticism	737	0.005	0.110	-0.788	0.663
Eastern Europe dummy	737	0.107	0.310	0	1
Time to national election	737	1314.483	695.258	42	16,058

Table A4. List of communist and post-communist parties by country.

Party system	Communist party/parties
Austria	Austrian Communist Party
Belgium (Flanders)	None
Belgium (Wallonia)	None
Bulgaria	None
Czech Republic	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia
Denmark	Danish Communist Party Left Socialist Party Socialist People's Party Common Cause Red-Green Unity List
Estonia	None
Finland	Left Wing Alliance
France	French Communist Party Left Radical Party Left Front
Germany	Party of Democratic Socialism Communist Party of Germany The Left Party of Democratic Socialism The Left
Greece	Communist Party of Greece Synaspismos: Progressive Left Coalition SYRIZA: Coalition of the Radical Left Coalition of the Radical Left – Unionist Social Front DIMAR Democratic Left Popular Unity
Hungary	Democratic Coalition Together 2014 – Dialogue for Hungary Electoral Alliance
Ireland	Workers' Party Democratic Left Party United Left Alliance Socialist Party
Italy	Italian Communist Party Proletarian Unity Party for Communism Proletarian Democracy Communist Refoundation Party Democratic Party of the Left Democrats of the Left Party of Italian Communists Rose in the Fist Left Ecology Freedom Civil Revolution
Latvia	Concord Centre
Luxembourg	Communist Party of Luxembourg The Left
Netherlands	Socialist Party Communist Party of the Netherlands
Poland	None
Portugal	Popular Democratic Union Portuguese Communist Party Unified Democratic Coalition Left Bloc
Romania	Social Democratic Pole of Romania
Slovakia	Communist Party of Slovakia
Slovenia	None
Spain	Communist Party of Spain United Left
Sweden	The Left Party
United Kingdom	We Ourselves

Note: Not all communist and/or post-communist parties existed within each party system in all years.

Table A5. List of far-right parties by country.

Party system	Communist party/parties
Austria	Alliance for the Future of Austria Austrian Freedom Party Freedom Movement
Belgium (Flanders)	None
Belgium (Wallonia)	None
Bulgaria	National Union Attack
Czech Republic	Association for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia Tomio Okamura’s Dawn of Direct Democracy
Denmark	Danish People’s Party
Estonia	Conservative People’s Party of Estonia
Finland	None
France	National Front
Germany	None
Greece	Golden Dawn Independent Greeks Popular Orthodox Rally
Hungary	Movement for a Better Hungary
Ireland	None
Italy	Italian Social Movement Italian Social Movement – National Right National Alliance Northern League
Latvia	For Fatherland and Freedom - Latvian National Independence Movement National Alliance “All For Latvia!” – “For Fatherland and Freedom - Latvian National Independence Movement”
Luxembourg	None
Netherlands	Centre Democrats List Pim Fortuyn Party of Freedom
Poland	None
Portugal	Popular Monarchist Party
Romania	People’s Party – Dan Dianconescu
Slovakia	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia Slovak National Party
Slovenia	Slovenian National Party
Spain	None
Sweden	Sweden Democrats
United Kingdom	None

Note: Not all far-right parties existed within each party system in all years.