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Understanding Party Positions on European Integration amidst Crises:
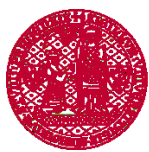
The impact of national and regional crises on political party behavior in Spain and Ireland

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Abstract

Does Brexit cause other national parties in EU member states to change their positions on European integration? Can the effect of Brexit be explained by its exceptional nature or do all crises affect political party positioning on European integration one way or another? By treating Brexit crisis as an independent variable of this study and controlling the results by comparing it to Spanish constitutional crisis and its influence on party positions, one of two things are bound to happen: political parties in other member states affected by the crises will rally behind their government stance and EU institutions, or will respond by shifting policy positions depending on success vs failure story of Brexit outcome. In an attempt to determine, how do crises affect national parties' policy positioning on European integration, it is expected that mainstream parties will remain pro-integrationists as they traditionally have, while Eurosceptic parties will choose to shift their positions on integration depending on EU's handling of the crises.

Introduction

European Union is certainly not a stranger to crises. Eurozone debt crisis, migration crisis, Brexit and contested transatlantic relations after the election of Donald Trump are just a few examples of the challenges that the Union has been plagued by, and just as recent novel coronavirus pandemic has shown, crises always seem to challenge the very foundation of the European Project. The narrative, leading up to and following crises, is almost always built around the question, if European integration is on the verge of collapse, or will it continue? (Cross & Ma, 2015) . Framing crises in terms of existential threat for the European Union has become a new reality the member states are forced to live in (Rittberger & Blauberger, 2018). Regional or global crises tend to pose threats to either the whole European project, or some institutional aspect or policy of the Union, as it was with the Libyan crisis and the collapse of the CSDP (Marchi, 2017), Eurozone crisis and the anticipated dismantling of the Monetary Union or Brexit and the European Union, just to name

a few. Another common denominator of EU-related crises is the rise of critical and Eurosceptic masses and political parties that follow (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018).

Up until now, absolute majority of the scientific literature has been dedicated to Eurosceptic studies on a popular level, where discontent with supranational institutions or outright rejection of European project has been studied and measured through nationwide public polls, such as Eurobarometer surveys, or through expert surveys, often used in country, or party profiling and classification. This paper contributes to the existing literature by asking: *How do crises affect national parties' policy positioning on European Integration?* To answer the question, two different crises: Brexit and 2017 Spanish Constitutional crisis are used as independent variables. To study the effect of these crises on national party politics, qualitative content analysis of programs of largest mainstream and Eurosceptic parties in Ireland and Spain, is conducted. The data obtained from this analysis is crosschecked with the already existing public data from Euromanifesto Project from 2004-2009 and 2014 and the changes in party positions towards the EU is analyzed in the shadow of multiple crises expressed in the form of events represented by above-mentioned independent variables.

One of the side effects of crises as documented in this research, will be blurring line between policy- or vote-seeking parties, an assumption, further supported and evidenced by larger representation of Eurosceptic parties in national and European parliaments, following different crises.

First part of this paper identifies the gap in the scientific literature when it comes to studying "supply-side" of party politics and the impact of crises on their positions. Similar works in this regard will also be explained here with a clear outline of contribution by this research. After

literature review, theoretical framework and working hypothesis will be presented, followed by major findings of the research and a roadmap for further contribution will be outlined.

Literature Review

There are multiple definitions of Euroscepticism in academic literature, however, this paper uses the one provided in Taggart's (1998) seminal article : *A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems,* where Euroscepticism is understood as "the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration" (p. 366). The opposition entails discontent both with the politics of European integration, or the entire European Project, as well as specific institutions or policies at the EU level (Steenbergen, et al., 2007).

Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001) also differentiate between "hard" and "soft" Eurosceptic parties, or parties that reject the entire European project and the parties that engage in "qualified or contingent opposition" to integration or specific policies. While "hard" Euroscepticism is relatively straightforward and entails political movements campaigning for leaving the Union, the term "soft" Euroscepticism has been criticized for having too broad meaning and encompassing any party that disagrees with any EU policy choice (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002). As a result, alternative classifications of Eurosceptic parties have also been provided. Kopecký and Mudde (2002) distinguish between support or rejection of two different concepts – European integration and EU as an institution. Those who support EU are EU-optimists, while those who reject EU are EU-pessimists. At the same time, supporters of the European integration are Europhiles, while the rejecters of European integration are Europhobes. These two categories combined with different concepts gives us a total of four groups as outlined below in the chart:

Table 1: Four types of Party-based Euroscepticism

		Support for European Integration	
		Europhiles	**Europhobes**
Support for the European Union	**EU-optimists**	*Euroenthusiasts* (supports both EU and European integration)	*Europragmatists* (anti-integration and pro-EU and its trajectory)
	EU-pessimists	*Eurosceptics* (supports integration but critical of EU)	*Eurorejects* (rejects both EU and European Integration)

Source: (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002).

This research uses classification offered by Kopecký and Mudde (2002) the justification of which will be provided in Case Selection chapter.

It is also important to differentiate between Euroscepticism expressed by political parties, or party Euroscepticism, and Eurosceptic feelings mobilized and expressed within public opinion, or popular Euroscepticism. While these two concepts are distinct and subject to different methodology, they are not isolated either. Relationship between political positions of masses and elites on European Integration constitutes a part of a broader debate on parties' role in public opinion formation. There is an agreement in academic literature that party positions shape and influence public opinion, as well as public discourse can influence and affect policy positions of both mainstream parties and parties in opposition, such as Eurosceptic parties. Various studies

have repeatedly shown that policy positions of parties are rarely independent of public opinion, since all parties aspire certain goals: would it be getting into office, maintaining power or advancing a certain policy. All these goals are impossible to achieve without electoral support.

Steenbergen, Edwards & de Vries' (2007) earlier work on *Mass-Elite linkages and the Future of European Integration* distinguishes between bottom-up and top-down approaches in integration. While bottom-up approach entails political parties adopting positions that mass public takes on European integration, it is the opposite with top-down approach where mass public adopts the positions of the political elites. One way to understand this relationship is through an analogy to basic teaching of economic science where market price of a product represents an equilibrium between the forces of supply and demand. Policy positioning is a dualistic process where public opinion or discourse represents the demand-side of the equilibrium expecting political parties to adopt positions best suited for public interest, while political parties "supply" these positions to general public, essentially responding to the basic need of electorate approval. Expression of Euroscepticism is no exception to this rule. Political parties are both cause and effect of public Euroscepticism (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018).

It is important to note that neither formation of policy positions by political parties, nor shaping of public opinion, is achieved through mechanistic "mirroring", meaning one side copying positions from another. There are various factors at play and positions are often being contested not only between political parties, but parties and public in general, especially during the times of crises when the viability of established positions and policies is being questioned. There is somewhat generalized idea that up until late 1980s the "European Integration was accompanied by a "permissive consensus" on the part of European citizenry", which meant that European citizens were passive recipients of policies promoted from top-to-bottom. This was later substituted by

"constraining dissensus" (Hooghe & Marks, 2009) which affirms that due to high politicization of European integration by political parties, general public became more aware and involved in EU-related matters and have started to play a decisive rule, together with national political parties, in determining EU policy outcomes and checking and balancing EU competencies and jurisdiction, as opposed to national legislation.

A vast majority of academic literature has been concerned with impact of crises on formation of public opinion on European integration and EU in general. Uncertainty caused by internal shocks, such as Brexit or external shocks of 2016 US presidential election results, have generated what researchers call a "rally effect" and have reinforced pro-EU attitudes in general population (Minkus, et al., 2018; de Vries, 2017). On the other hand, Eurozone debt crisis and migration crisis have reinformed popular Euroscepticism, one of the reasons of which remains EU-related evaluation of these crises by the national citizenry which will be discussed below.

Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018) have also made one of the most comprehensive attempts to trace the link between the impact of the crises and the mobilization of Euroscepticism by political parties. While financial crisis had affected party systems in hardest-hit countries, they found that Brexit had had a very limited impact on national party politics. The only exception and a reverse example was Ireland where Eurozone debt crisis did push Euroscepticism to the fore, Ireland being one of the countries hit hardest at the time, however, Brexit reduced party-based Euroscepticism due to unlikely, but quite natural reasons for Ireland: economic uncertainty and association of Brexit with English nationalism. Additionally, Ireland did see Brexit as an opportunity for Irish "reunification". However, this research predates the official exit of UK from Ireland, which means that sentiments and policy positions might change according to "success vs failure" story: the limitation that the authors address themselves. They also point out that the main focus in academic

literature has been on the ways that parties (Eurosceptic) "map onto new or existing cleavage patterns, while … there has been less explicit work on the impact of the crises on their positions" (p. 1196). My research aims to address that gap by understanding the "supply-side" of political competition and by looking at shifts in policy positions that occur as a result of impending or ongoing crises.

Up until Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018), the effect of Brexit had not been treated as crisis for European integration in academic research. It has often been referred to as "crisis" for the British state and EU as well (Krzyżanowski, 2019; Jessop, 2016; Bennett, 2017; Murphy, 2019; Caporaso, 2018), but the "Domino effect" it would supposedly cause in other member states, even though implied and hinted at often, has not been thoroughly analyzed. By treating Brexit as an independent variable of this study, a contribution is made to political party literature on policy formation and positioning as a response to the crises in question.

Braun, Popa and Schmitt (2019) have conducted a similar research concerning Eurosceptic parties' response towards the financial and migration crises. Dividing the Eurosceptic party lines on far-left and far-right ideological spectrum, they have tried to understand, "what exactly it is that political parties are responding to?" in the shadow of the multiple crisis (p. 801). They have concluded that anti-EU shifts in party politics was not determined by real-life, issue-based repercussions or severity of crises, but rather by EU-related evaluation of these crises by the national citizenry, meaning that if significant number of electorate deemed EU to be responsible for the severity of the above-mentioned crises, political parties did follow the trend and shifted their positions on the right on "soft-to-hard" Eurosceptic scale. This finding reinforces above-mentioned explanation of policy formation in the face of "demanding" public opinion. Earlier, Vasilopoulou (2018) had examined trajectory of party Euroscepticism in Greece following the

debt crisis and conducted a comparative study between Mainstream and challenger political parties. She demonstrated that mainstream parties chose harsher anti-EU stance amidst financial crisis, while challenger parties decided to be more flexible and offer both pro-EU and anti-EU agendas to the electorate. The basis of this finding also largely depended on the effect that public opinion had on policy formation. While this research cannot rule out the influence of public discourse, it is fair to note that crises of our interest, such as Brexit and 2017 Spanish Constitutional crisis differ from financial or migration crisis in terms of their nature. Various studies have repeatedly shown that an individual's economic position can have an impact on their support towards the EU (Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007; Gabel and Whitten, 1997; Christin, 2005; Mau, 2005, cited in Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018, p. 1196). Any crisis that has a direct impact on individual's economic circumstances, such as financial crisis or migration crisis, and their EU-related evaluation, specifically the failure of EU to meet this challenges head-on and mitigate the impact, will contribute to an unfavorable public opinion on the EU that Eurosceptic parties can easily capitalize on. On the other hand, Crises in this study do not affect everyday lives of "ordinary" European citizens (not to an extent of previous crises, the very least), therefore both mainstream and Eurosceptic parties have lesser incentive to respond with fundamental changes in their party programs. The changes that will be made as a response to these crises will more likely be determined by bargaining strategies with the EU and advancing narrow, party-based goals, rather than accountability towards their electorate.

This portion of literature review is dedicated to party positions in national system. Being in the periphery of the party system is sometimes used as an indicator for anti-EU stances, this is why Eurosceptic parties are often referred to as challenger or fringe parties. While many argue that Brexit and the case of British conservatives have debunked this assumption and Euroscepticism is

no longer limited to particular value or belief systems, nor can a position in the party system provide an accurate view of Euroscepticism (Vasilopoulou, 2013), the dichotomy of Mainstream-pro-integrationist and challenger-Eurosceptic parties still holds true in democracies with multi-party systems. However, Eurosceptic parties and mainstream parties or parties holding the absolute majority in parliament or government have different incentives to respond to crises by programmatic change. There is no agreement in the literature as to which one is the first to take up the "opportunity". Researchers have claimed that, mainstream parties are less reluctant to change their positions on the EU amidst the crises, which opens up a new space for Eurosceptic parties (Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2016), while others argue that external shocks present the urgency for fast reaction, therefore, these shocks "have a bigger impact on policy positions of government parties than on those of opposition parties" (Calca & Gross, 2019). While the latter also group also assures that their "reasoning fits just as well for the explanation of non-economic external shocks on party behavior", they note that further research is needed to provide a comprehensive understanding of parties' reactions to unanticipated events, either by adapting or changing their emphasis. Added to that, Mainstream parties or parties in power are susceptible to contagion on party positions from Eurosceptic parties (Meijers, 2015). My research seeks to fill in the gap of other types of external/internal shocks that do not have a direct influence on citizens' everyday lives, but can be a powerful motivator for systemic changes on party positions towards the EU.

Theoretical Framework

The behavioral theory of competitive political parties, which emerged from the rational choice tradition, remains to be the theoretical framework for this study. Based on interparty competition and coalitional behavior analysis, the rational choice tradition, distinguishes three models of competitive political party behavior: the vote-seeking party, the office-seeking party and the policy-seeking party.

All political parties, by definition, are vote-seekers. Elections in democracies serve a basic function of selecting a government. As a result, it is safe to assert that all political parties will exhibit a rational election behavior that is directed solely towards this goal.

In his seminal book, *An Economic Theory of Democracy,* Anthony Downs (1957a, pp. 4-6) provides two steps of economic analysis used for understanding and predicting party behavior: "discovery of ends a decision-maker is pursuing", in other words, what is it that a certain political party or individual is trying to achieve, and "analysis of which means of attaining them are most reasonable". In a world of scarce resources, political agents are pursuing a goal of "maximizing output for a given input, or minimizing input for a given output." (p. 5) Only such behavior can be considered rational, or reasonable. Therefore, vote-seeking party definition implies that parties not only seek votes, but they are also vote maximizers (Müller & Strøm, 1999). The most preferred outcome here is to get the greatest possible number of votes, which increases the probability of winning the majority of contested seats, or, in multiparty systems increases the chance of entering into or forming a ruling coalition.

Office-seeking parties work to maximize their control over political benefits that come with acquiring or remaining in political office (Müller & Strøm, 1999). Therefore, the primary objective

of these parties remains to be controlling the executive branch or as much of it as possible, at least in countries with parliamentary democracies. There is, however, no clear defining line as to where vote-seeking behavior turns into office-seeking or vice versa. Zohlnhöfer and Bandau (2020), for example, reiterate Down's (1957a) classification according to which office-, and vote-seeking parties primary objective is overlapping and somewhat similar, as they are both interested in benefits that come with government positions. However, "office-seeking" is often used to label small or less influential parties in oligarchic "democracies" with a sole purpose and motivation of getting into the office, the statement which can be debated.

On the other hand, policy-seeking parties' primary objective is to implement particular policies they have laid out in their electoral programs. These parties are also less likely to change their policy positions even after the defeat in parliamentary elections, as well as amidst the crises. However, crises do present unprecedented pressure on all three groups to act in a non-traditional way of shifting their positions. Instead of seeking votes, offices or policies, Pedersen (2011) distinguishes intentions and strategies parties take and groups them according to coalition formation, organizational changes or policy positioning.

To go back to what was mentioned earlier, if we know that political parties are trying to achieve a goal of winning elections, then, based on Down's modelling, "parties will formulate policies in order to win elections", not the other way around (p. 28). Shifting policy positions or changing views on political developments amidst crises, should follow the same pattern: the parties will lean towards a view that, based on purely rational calculations, should bring in the highest number of votes, or maximize their outreach to the electorate. Downs demonstrated that in democracies, the majority of voters hold moderate views, which in turn drives political parties to take centrist views.

Down's reductionist view on policy positioning which primarily focuses on policy formation strategies used by government parties to remain in power, holds several questionable assumptions that deprive these views of real-life applicability and is later acknowledged by Downs himself (1957b, pp. 137-139). In real life, political parties, apart from maximizing votes, need to compete for votes with other parties and in the process have to deal with several "unknowns", such as citizens' views and expectations and opposing party strategies. The information needed to overcome this state of "imperfect knowledge" is costly: scarce resources must be utilized to serve the "highest purpose" of vote-maximization, but as a result of being constrained by some sort of institutional setting, such as political accountability and interparty competition, political parties utilize techniques and strategies that minimize the impact on resources but help parties advance their goals: these are persuasion, ideologies and rational ignorance (Downs, 1957b, p. 139).

Persuasion is a traditional campaigning tool employed by political parties to lure in undecided voters. Political parties influence the decision of a swing voter by supplying information that is favorable to the side or position they are supporting. While this seems trivial and somewhat irrelevant for the purposes of this research, policy positioning by carefully selecting and campaigning for policies that are favorable to the cause they are supporting, has extraordinary consequences for studying and analyzing the shift that takes place in party positions on important issues. Even if the facts and ideas that a party is presenting are not entirely unfounded or based on incorrect data, political decisions of target audience can still be influenced by accentuating issues that in the long term win votes or, the very least, livens up the debate and party competition. Therefore, this research will heavily be invested in measuring the variation in allocation of resources in party programs devoted to the same issues overtime which might not explicitly

demonstrate causal inference, but points at a direction that a political party is shifting its positions to.

Another important takeaway from Down's (1957b) rational choice model is the real-life application of party ideologies which makes parties distinguishable and keeps voter's focus and attention to a point where, in order to make a decision, voters find it sufficient to compare ideologies rather than policies. Therefore, parties pursue ideologies for the same purpose of maximizing output or gaining more votes, however this time, by focusing on voters who vote ideologically, rather than by comparing policies, financial and time resources can be drastically reduced. While it is more likely, that unprecedented circumstances than any crisis presents will push parties towards modifying their policy positions, it is less likely that ideological shifts will take place. Once a party has marketized itself as a party of certain economic or political ideology, it is almost impossible for it to alter or abandon its ideology, even in the presence of multiple crises. Changing policy positions is a rational behavior of designing policies that signal voters that parties are "alive" and they react accordingly to the needs and preferences of their citizens, while changing ideologies is an extremely exhaustive and "expensive" scenario that no rational actor will pursue for the fear of losing reputation and being deemed as unreliable. Moreover, in multi-party democracies, parties will try to remain as ideologically distinct from each other as possible in order to maintain relevance in a crowded field.

Despite its simplicity, usefulness and applicability, the behavioral theory of competitive political parties suffers from limitations and shortcomings that many scholars have voiced their concerns about. Namely, the difficulty of attributing competitive party behavior to each of these three models when the criteria are not well specified (Strom, 1990), or often, vague and anecdotal (Evans, 2018).

To account for ambiguity and limitations posed by rational choice tradition categorizing parties into vote, office or policy-seekers, it is necessary to introduce additional determinants to analyze and predict party behavior. This research is inherently a contribution to studies on European Integration, more specifically, Euroscepticism. Therefore, party categorization is needed as it relates to Euroscepticism studies.

Despite having been around since the inception of the idea of the European Project, and having been the object of interest of scientific studies for a few decades now, Euroscepticism was born as a phenomenon that gradually migrated from the margins to the mainstream (Brack & Startin , 2015). With subsequent EU enlargement and evolution of increased EU competencies, both citizens and national parliaments have put a larger strain on member state governments to exercise their right to check and balance EU overreach on domestic matters and maintain a bright line between heavily contested national and supranational competence. The first decade of the 21st century is marked with few obvious examples of popular opposition towards EU's empowerment, such as 2005 French and Dutch European Constitution referendums with a majority of population voting against introduction of the Treaty establishing a Constitution of Europe or 2008 Irish referendum to approve the 28th Amendment of the Constitution Bill, essentially, Irish voters rejecting the Treaty of Lisbon. While a lot of these instances of opposition were largely determined by member states' internal legislation regarding adopting any international agreement that would limit sovereignty of affected countries, they still signaled a rising trend which was later exacerbated by Eurozone debt crisis and Migration Crisis that European Union was not able to control and respond upfront. As a result, Euroscepticism became "persistent and embedded" both at the European and national level (Usherwood & Startin, 2013). Both 2014 and 2019 European Parliament elections and increased number of seats occupied by outright Eurosceptic party

members, combined with the results of Brexit referendum – first major win of the Eurosceptic cause, has propelled many scholars to argue that Euroscepticism has moved from the margins to the fore and transformed from a niche or a fringe idea, previously associated solely to the radical parties of left or right wing, to a mainstream issue where mainstream political parties have taken up and incorporated it into their platforms (Treib, 2020; Bijsmans , 2021; Bijsmans , 2017; Öner, 2020; Meijers, 2015; Duro, 2016; OĞURLU, 2019; Koenig & Bertoncini, 2014). Proponents of this idea point out an example of Brexit and British conversative party, as well as several member states in Central and Eastern Europe, however, Brexit has not been a recent development and has been explained in literature through "British exceptionalism" (Nedergaard & Henriksen, 2018). As for contagion taking place between British Conservative and Labor Parties, it can easily be explained by Down's (1957a) observation that in two-party systems parties will deliberately change their platforms to resemble one another to encourage irrational voting by remaining vague and ambiguous, as empirically demonstrated by Lynch and Whitaker (2018). As for Central and Eastern European countries, Eurosceptic rhetoric by mainstream parties has been used a strategic, bargaining tool with European Union, rather than opposition to the European Project and in fact, parties like Fidesz (Hungary) and Law and Justice (Poland) have argued for deepening cooperation among member states and increasing cohesion (Duro, 2016, p. 44). This goes to show that mainstream parties, or parties with the largest share of votes, have a vested interest in obtaining or maintaining government control, hence exhibit vote-seeking behavior, and they will hold on to their pro-integrationist stances as they traditionally have (Treib, 2020; Bakker, et al., 2015). Therefore, this research takes after widely accepted observation in scientific literature that Euroscepticism, with a very few exceptions that do not apply to this study, has been confined largely to relatively small parties on the ideological fringes or parties in opposition that do not

have an experience of governing or being in a ruling coalition (Ray, 2007). In multi-party systems, these political parties will exhibit a behavior aimed at remaining as ideologically distinct from mainstream parties as possible, act as challengers to mainstream parties and guarantee their relevance.

Resulting from the discussion above, based on logical reasoning, party classification according to rational choice tradition and Euroscepticism studies is combined and following hypothesis will be formulated and tested through this research:

Crisis encourages Mainstream (vote-seeking) parties to maintain their pro-integrationist views and has no impact on their positions on European Integration, while it pushes Eurosceptic (policy-seeking) parties to take a harsher stance on European Integration.

In any given situation, that represents a critical moment, like a shock or crisis for the European Project, one of the two developments are bound to take place: so called, "Domino effect" – massive diffusion and contagion, resulting in spread of Eurosceptic attitudes on popular and party levels and new "Leave" referendums (YERGİN, 2017), and another potential development would have been "Rally effect" – resulting in higher popularity and support for European Integration, a powerful psychological phenomenon of uniting and coming together in the face of a common enemy, challenge or shock, due to perceived threat, and rallying behind the institutions, political leaders and parties promising stability and prosperity of Europe (Minkus, et al., 2018). It is expected that mainstream parties in other member states will come under the influence of "rally effect" following Brexit referendum, while Eurosceptic parties will choose to exacerbate Brexit developments to fit their own narrative of rejection or transformation of the European Union.

Research Design

Concepts and Variables

The independent variables of this research are two Brexit and Spanish Constitutional crisis which are treated as defined as "an extraordinary moment when the existence and viability of the political order are called into question" (Ikenberry, 2008).

The dependent variables are policy positions on European integration of largest mainstream and challenger parties in Ireland and Spain. Policy positioning is understood as "the process of political communication aimed at acquiring by political actor his position in political marketing" (Liutko, 2015).

Case Selection

Our independent variable selection might seem somewhat disconnected, but there is far greater connection between them than it is usually seen on the surface. Brexit in this study is not viewed as a singular event of Brexit referendum taking place on23rd of June 2016, but rather a long, strenuous process stretching through most of 2016, marked by "exit-propaganda" in the UK and complicated relationship with the EU even after signing 2020 Brexit Withdrawal Agreement.

Brexit also opened up a door and legitimized a way for independence or EU-related referendums. On 1st of October 2017 Catalans held a referendum on independence from Spain which resulted in 89% "Yes" vote, but the referendum being non-binding and in opposition of central government's directives, Spain declared its results to be illegal and invoked article 155 of the Spanish constitution which meant suspending Catalonia's autonomous status and imposing direct rule (Wagner, et al., 2019). Following Spain's aggressive stance on Catalonia's right to self-determination, Catalan public and political parties are calling for EU's intervention and involvement to protect Catalan

not-yet-born state and cultural identity. EU dimension and membership perspective if Catalonia were to become independent, has always been very strong in secessionist movements' political discourse. In fact 2012 independence referendum question in Catalonia was "Do you want Catalonia to become a new state within the European Union?". Based on data drawn from multiple expert surveys, Wagner and others (2019) conclude that pro-unity supporters of Spanish territorial integrity who desired for EU non-involvement in the crisis were and remained the most loyal to the European Union, while those who supported independent Catalonia and demanded EU to be involved in mediation or hold a pro-Catalan stance, "displayed higher levels of Euroscepticism" (p. 801). EU's siding with the Spanish government was immediately perceived as a detriment to the Catalan cause. This change in attitudes has not been yet demonstrated at a party level both in Catalonia or central political parties in Madrid.

Dunin-Wasowicz (2017) argues that the Catalan crisis and Brexit stem from the same kind of nationalism rooted in traditional myths of an external enemy (European authorities and institutions in case of Brexiteers and Central power in Madrid in case of Catalan independence supporters), populist calls for patriotism, where opposition to Brexit or to the idea of Catalan independence is regarded as unpatriotic, and promises of economic prosperity by "taking back" the country and becoming "independent". Both of these events are a product of rising nationalist populism sharing a characteristic of common discourse used by populist parties and movements to inspire followers: Manichaean Struggle between the "will of the common people and oppressing, evil or conspiring elite" (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2019, pp. 3-4). The rise of populism predates both Brexit and Catalan referendum, however, we still cannot consider it to be an independent variable since it does not represent a crisis – critical moment – that can push political parties to change their stance, but it inflates the effect these two events have on European party politics.

Additionally, these two crises are treated as being of national and regional importance. Such classification could prove useful when evaluating their impact on party politics.

As for our dependent variables, political parties in Ireland and Spain have been chosen since these two countries have both been hit hardest during the last financial and migration crisis; Brexit has had a significant impact on policy formation in Ireland, especially for Sinn Féin and "People before Profit" while Spain has seen an unprecedented rise in populism in recent years with two most populist and Eurosceptic parties – Vox and Podemos being founded in 2013 and 2014, respectively. Both countries often demonstrate similar public policy positions on Eurobarometer surveys (Standard Eurobarometer 88, Directorate-General for Communication, 2017). Additionally, both on party and popular levels, these countries are considered to be soft Eurosceptics: as demonstrated in Sinn Féin's (2020) general election manifesto stating "Ireland's place is in the European Union, but the European Union does need to change", or Podemos' ideology of redefining sovereignty by revoking or curtailing the Treaty of Lisbon (Podemos, 2014) and both countries have an issue of territorial integrity at hand where nationalism and identity sentiments are strong.

Methodology

In combination of qualitative content analysis my paper utilizes multiple-case study design. There are certain benefits to multiple-case study design: it improves theory testing, and may play a crucial role in understanding of causality by seeking out generative mechanisms responsible for observed regularities (Bryman, 2012, pp. 73-74). As for research methods, qualitative content analysis is chosen because we are studying political parties and their policy positioning which is almost always centered around cultural values, beliefs and assumptions and is communicated through the language of official party literature.

The research process started with collecting manifestos or election programs issued by political parties in Ireland ahead of 2011, 2016, 2020 general elections and party manifestos ahead of 2011, 2016, 2019 Spanish general elections. This period is sufficient to study both pre-Brexit and Pre-Catalan referendum policy positions, as well as developments taking place during and after the crises.

Party manifestos remain to be the primary source of analysis for this research, because:

- They cover all relevant themes, problems, political positions and provide key statements crucial to understanding party behavior

- Manifestos represent the whole party and its positions, not individual statements by political leaders that can be vague, ambiguous, misleading or confusing

- Party manifestos are released before elections which enables "studies of changes in issue emphases and policy positions in a diachronic perspective"

   (European Election Studies 2014: Manifesto Project, 2014)

Using a standard framework, the analyses of party manifestos or election programs will pinpoint to reoccurring patterns, emphases and policy positions of political parties. Even though this research is not using quantitative content analysis, defining units or theme of analysis and providing categories or coding schemes is necessary to group and context a vast amount of qualitative data and provide grounds for interpretation and inferences. In order to draw inferences, deductive method is used and interpretations are incorporated into the theory.

Selection of Parties

Initially, six largest political parties in Ireland were selected for this research. However, at a later stage Social Democrats, Labor Party and Green party were not taken into account, considering

their role in national parliaments which is limited to forming coalitions and assisting major parties form governments. These parties are classified as office-seeking before votes or policies.

The parties the manifestos of which are coded and analyzed are Fianna Fail (conservative and Christian-democratic mainstream party), Sinn Fein (Republic and Democratic Socialist) and Finne Gael (liberal-conservative and Christian-democratic). All these parties have an experience of being in government and have been main actors of Irish party system for almost a century. All three are well-established parties with mainstream political agenda.

Policy positions of five largest parties in Spain are analyzed in this research: three of them, PSOE – *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party), Ciudadanos (Citizens), and Partido Popular - PP (People's Party), are treated as mainstream, established parties, with the exception of Ciudadanos not having an actual experience of running a government but positioning as and maintaining traditional conservative-liberal values combined with pro-union and pro-integration stances. The other two parties, Vox (Voice) and Podemos (lit. "We can") serving as challenger parties to established mainstream parties in Spanish political system.

Findings

Brexit as a national and regional crises for Ireland

Ireland had been affected by Brexit more than any other EU member state. The crisis introduced by Brexit is multi-dimensional for Ireland: economic and political, constitutional and existential in nature (Murphy, 2019). Affecting Ireland's relationship with UK, Brexit also challenges and changes Ireland's relations with the EU.

Following the Brexit referendum results, political parties were quick to assemble and express their positions on Brexit and the challenges that would follow. All of the major parties expressed their disappointment with UK's decision to leave the European Union, but pledged support in national parliament that Ireland's interests would be put first in negotiations that would follow Brexit. The central part of these negotiations was built around The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement 1998 reach between UK and Ireland and majority of political parties in Northern Ireland. The agreement normalized relations between unionists and nationalists and put an end to decades-long conflict in Northern Ireland. On the constitutionality of whether or not Northern Ireland should be united with the rest of the country or should remain a part of United Kingdom, an agreement was reached that all parties concerned would exercise the "principle of consent" and no changes would be made without the decision of the majority (GOV.UK, 1998).

It is no surprise that Brexit referendum opened up a door for discussion on potential Irish reunification (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2018). Sinn Féin was one of the first political parties to put forth the agenda for united Ireland – a claim that was met with harsh criticism from all sides of the aisle and was only previously confined to small, nationalistic voices inside or outside the national parliament.

Despite economic impact of its largest and closest trade partner exiting the Union and long-standing peace process coming under the fire, the worst fear of them all being the imposition of a physical border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. Therefore it is not surprising, that all sides concerned, including EU, reiterated their commitment to protecting the peace process initiated by 1998 Agreement. The Brexit Withdrawal Agreement (2020) was designed to have a minimum impact on trade relations between Ireland and Northern Ireland. According to new protocol, the latter, even though a part of the United Kingdom, would follow many of the same rules as it were

to remain in the European Union, while new regulations would be introduced on the border of Northern Ireland and rest of the United Kingdom: A proposition which has propelled many commentators to claim that UK might be "digging a grave" with Brexit for its own Union, rather than European Union.

As it was mentioned earlier, Ireland remained largely Europhile country, enjoying the benefits of common market and political union, up until Great Financial Crisis which did put Eurosceptic feelings to the fore. These feelings were largely alleviated with massive and generous bailout packages amounting a total of €68 billion, with almost 70% of the funds coming from European Financial Stability Facility (predecessor to European Stability Mechanism). But Brexit crises brings new challenges and opportunities, depending on political parties which will be analyzed below.

Trends in policy positioning of Irish parties

Both Fine Gael and Fianna Fail maintain their status quo and set of beliefs during 2011, 2016 and 2020 elections with a strong emphasis on protecting the peace process and ensuring safe and prosperous transition from Brexit which is deemed as a major challenge for the country. Parties do not exhibit any level of Euroscepticism as they maintain their pro-integrationist and pro-EU views throughout the decade. Quite the opposite, calls are made for further cooperation and deepening integration with the primary interest of protecting Irish citizens.

In 2011 general election manifesto (2011) Sinn Féin positions itself as a party with republican and democratic socialist values and puts emphasis on recovering from and dealing with ongoing financial crisis, quite understandably. The document has no mention of European Union as an actor

but points out at "European" banks' reckless spending and failure to invest back into State. The party position remains clear and committed to Irish unity.

Salience of EU is far more apparent and relevant in 2016 manifesto. Several extensive chapters are dedicated to the plans regarding European integration. After comprehensive analysis of 2016 manifesto several inconsistencies were identified. While discussing the European Union, Sinn Féin employs populist strategies of policy-seeking behavior. More specifically, European austerity agenda comes under heavy criticism while increased influence of member states and their governments on EU legislative process is called for. These observations are still heavily derived from the effects of financial crisis on Irish economy. The party also continues to strongly assert its commitment to Irish unity and challenges UK to respect the peace process. While it is difficult to claim a progressive trajectory on "soft-to-hard" Eurosceptic scale, the party stays committed to its idea of an Union where member states and their democratically elected governments decide the priorities of social and economic welfare of their citizens, rather than supranational institutions. The party is generally in favor of European integration, but remains skeptical of several EU policies and institutions, namely, curbing decisive powers of European Commission and European Union fiscal rules that are deemed as "negative external factors" (Sinn Fein, 2016).

Despite the fact that 2016 elections were held in February, few months before the Brexit Referendum, there is no mention of this event. There is a different tendency in 2020 manifesto where Brexit is widely discussed. Brexit is mainly mentioned in terms of its impact on Ireland and how consequences can be avoided. Sinn Féin sees Brexit as a big threat for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) due to the end of free trade between Ireland and Britain.

The "curious case" of Spanish Euroscepticism

Spain has traditionally always been considered to be a Pro-European country, not only on party level, but popular Euroscepticism does not seem to have a firm ground here as well. Spaniards, both through national and EU-wide surveys, such as Eurobarometer, have proven to be supportive and loyal to the idea of European unity, percentage of general support traditionally being higher than EU average, but there early signs or "symptoms" of concern as early as first decade of this century.

For party politics, 2005 referendum on the European Constitution was a major turning point that revealed the existing fractures among political parties in Spain, as for popular Euroscepticism, deeper analysis show that Spanish citizens do not have "clearly defined ideas toward the EU" or remain indifferent toward the EU. This number is higher than EU average (Egea de Haro & Ruiz Jimenez, 2011, p. 105) and the trend continues. All of these could indicate the increasing trend of Eurosceptic attitudes as there seems to be a room for potential debate and growing concern there.

Fueling of negative attitudes towards the EU historically always seems to coincide with some sort of crisis, usually economic, in Spain. For example, in the early 1990s, the launch of the European Monetary Union (EMU) coincided with deep economic crisis that foreshadowed growing Euroscepticism in Spain. It would not be fair to assume that there was a causal inference between 2005 referendum results and preceding economic crises, as the "No" vote to European constitution was mainly caused by resistance to "hand over" sovereignty towards supranational institutions which was an additional criteria previously not being the main concern in Spanish political discourse. However, it is also necessary to note that despite of any signs of increasing Euroscepticism, neither political parties, not public in Spain has supported withdrawal or any form of opt-out formula.

Pew Research Center in its Global Attitudes Survey of 2017 conducted a very interesting study of public opinion in 9 countries of the European Union, including Spain, almost a year after the Brexit Referendum, in the spring of 2017, and its objective was to find out, whether Brexit referendum result would have (or is having) a domino effect on other major countries in the European Union. When asked if their country should leave or remain in the European Union, 88% of respondents chose to "stay in the EU", but 65% voted in favor of holding a referendum on the subject. What can explain this contradiction? How can Spaniards be loyal to EU but also favor a referendum on leaving in major numbers? One of the many answers to this question is the concept of "lack of democratic legitimacy" that EU has been blamed for and which has been particularly strong part of political discourse in Spain. This survey which is somewhat similar to other surveys and research results of public opinion in Spain and other European countries, goes to show that citizens might not see leaving European Union as a solution to their existing problems, but that does not mean that they are happy with various policies of the Union.

Party Euroscepticism in Spain

As Zarzalejos (2016) points out the development of new populist movements is linked to an environment of generalized crisis: "a crisis of prosperity, a crisis in the sense of security, a crisis of identity and governance, and a crisis of the European project." (p. 188) In Spain, which was one of the hardest hit countries during the financial crisis, dominant discourse revolved around crisis of prosperity and failure of governance. But in Spain this *rally effect* was highly unlikely to occur as high unemployment and economic recession that affected a very large segment of the middle class had been linked to political and financial corruption rampant in country's political elites backed by European officials. Traditional parties had lost all the credibility and "ability to politically articulate the voices of European societies" (p. 188) which challenger parties were

quick to profit off. This vulnerability of mainstream parties, such as PSOE and PP, combined with simplistic messaging and strategic communication via powerful presence on social media, allowed populist party of "Podemos" (lit. "we can" in Spanish), headed by a former political science lecturer Pablo Iglesias Turrión, to gain 21% of the popular vote in 2015 general elections[1] and to grab 69 out of 350 seats in the parliament, making Podemos third largest party in Spanish legislative body.

Let's take a look at some of the major policies that Podemos has advocated and pursued over the years based on which we can ascertain their level of Euroscepticism.

From the very beginning, Podemos has opposed the "neoliberal decrees" of European Union and has advocated the resurgence of nation-state . Above, it was mentioned how Eurosceptic discourse in Spain has two central cornerstones from which critical or rejectionist policies are derived: it is a lack of democratic legitimacy of Brussels and neoliberal economic model which a country with a long and strong leftist tradition has been subjected to. But perhaps most importantly, the policy that undermines the statement that "Podemos is not an Eurosceptic party" was an action and push for curtailing or repealing Treaty of Lisbon that Podemos has been advocating since its foundation in 2014 and in fact, pushed for it before European parliamentary elections of 2014. They promoted a "mechanism of integration and cooperation specific to the countries of Southern Europe." (Ramos & Cornago, 2016). In simplified terms, this meant "taking back" sovereignty but not in a sense of withdrawal from the Union, but exiting Eurozone and recuperating monetary independence. But there has been an outright ambivalence towards European integration. In that very same electoral programme quoted earlier, Podemos has called for breaking down barriers

between European people and their right to free mobility and cooperation without intelligence gathering and social stigma. At the same time, the party has pushed policies both in Spanish legislative body and European parliament to exit some of the free-trade agreements that, in their mind, decreases Spanish economic competitiveness on a global market. Economic policies have largely been leftist and oriented on progressive taxation and social responsibility of big corporations.

In their 2020 general election manifesto, Podemos' party strategy regarding Brexit is in line with that of mainstream parties, such as PSOE and PP: Brexit is viewed as a challenge rather than a win for any parties involved and is associated with "uncertainty". Special attention, just like with mainstream parties is paid to guaranteeing protection of rights of Spanish men and women who reside in UK.

Some interesting developments take place with another challenger party Vox. Vox was founded by former members of the mainstream PP in 2013 to push a vision more socially conservative and religious, more pro-market party with a tougher stance on European Institutions and policies, especially, Schengen Agreement and Monetary Union and tougher stance on secessionist movements. Despite popular beliefs and media narrative, 2016 and 2020 Vox manifestos remain highly supportive of Spanish and European unity, but extremely critical of EU institutions, reiterating their commitment to suspending Schengen Agreement. While being increasingly called for to take Brexit-like action and advocate for "Spainexit", Vox has made no indication that it is in favor of such movement and their rhetoric has more or less remained the same. Recent developments in Andalusia and calls by Vox regional parliament members for "liberation" of Gibraltar with regards to Brexit deal (Di Santolo, 2021), only point to a more nationalistic stance

and "punitive" measures applied against the "leavers", but this stance has only been voiced in statements made by local representatives and has not been turned into a party position.

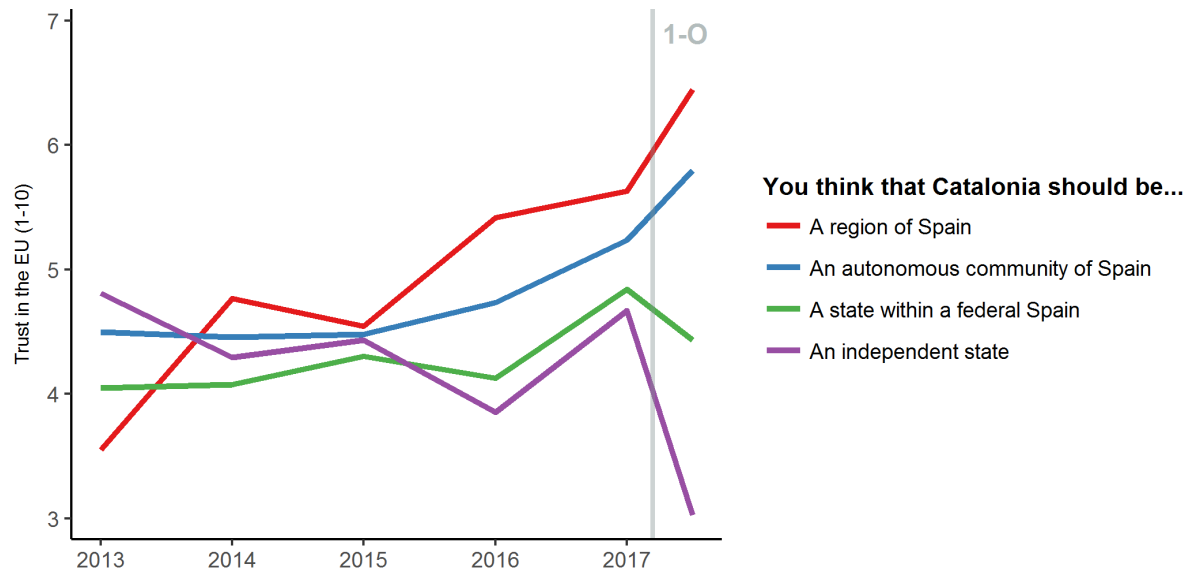*2017 Spanish Constitutional Crisis and EU salience in Catalonia*

One of the problematic issues with involving Spanish constitutional crises in any study, related to EU, is demonstrating that there is enough salience to go about. Spanish Constitutional Crisis is a national crisis, much like Brexit is for Ireland, however, regional implications of Catalan independence referendum or EU's involvement in the Crisis serves as an indicator of policy positions on EU integration of political parties far beyond Spain.

On 1st of October 2017 Catalans held a referendum of independence from Spain which resulted in 89% "Yes" vote, but the referendum being non-binding and in opposition of central government's directives, Spain declared the referendum and its results to be illegal, but it did not stop at that: Spanish government invoked article 155 of the Spanish constitution which meant suspending Catalonia's autonomous status and imposing direct rule (Wagner, et al., 2019). Even though this was not a first referendum on independence in Catalan history, neither a first outright attempt to defy central government's orders, 2017 referendum did still have a major impact on political discourse in Spain and in Europe, as it was followed by massive demonstrations, imprisonment of Catalan's top political officials and an issuance of European arrest warrant for Catalonia's president of the government Carles Puigdemont. The referendum and its results unveiled a broader and larger division that exists at the very core of Spanish "Union". How is this relevant for European project or Euroscepticism studies? Well, there has never been more discussion on EU's involvement in internal, highly politicized and polarized political affairs of its member states, then it was since the Catalonian referendum of 2017.

On the eve of Spanish accession to EU, Catalonian political parties and public was concerned. As mentioned above, Basque and Catalonian nationalist voters were "afraid of the consequences of integration, for culture and identity" (Egea de Haro & Ruiz Jimenez, 2011), meaning that integration into European Union would force a stronger hand from the central government onto Catalonia, population of which felt even more underrepresented back then. To be fair, some of the most popular concerns revolved around economic models of the European Union and how its neoliberal policies were incompatible with the Catalonian understanding of a welfare state, much like in the rest of Spain. But the central question was culture and identity which was threatened by integration through blending into a greater union. Fast forward now thirty years and we get a completely flipped picture: following Spain's aggressive stance on Catalonia's right to self-determination, Catalan public and political parties are calling for EU's intervention and involvement to protect Catalan not-yet-born state and cultural identity. This is certainly puzzling but not shocking. In his earlier study Connoly (2013) found that relationship between European Integration and sub-state nationalism is complex and secessionist movements can often times be contradictory, especially when it comes to EU which often choses to be ambiguous towards the issue. This ambiguity was shut down shortly after the referendum when on 13th of October 2017 at a student conference in Luxembourg Jean-Claude Juncker sent a message to its Spanish and Catalan colleagues claiming EU's involvement "will create a lot more chaos in the EU. We cannot do anything. We cannot get involved in that" (Boffey & Jones, 2017). At that time Juncker had already had another headache at hand in the form of Brexit and Scotland, he certainly did not aim for another territorial integrity crisis in the Union. But EU dimension and membership perspective if Catalonia were to become independent, has always been very strong in secessionist movements' political discourse. In fact 2012 independence referendum question in Catalonia was "Do you want

Catalonia to become a new state within the European Union?". It is no wonder that Juncker's statement followed by similar remarks by top EU officials stirred anger and disappointment in Catalan population which was made even worse when EU made it official that any breakaway regions would have to re-apply for EU membership. All of this confirms what Wagner and others' (2019) found in their research. Pro-Unity supporters of Spanish territorial integrity who desired for EU non-involvement in the crisis were and remained the most loyal to the European Union, while those who supported independent Catalonia and demanded EU to be involved in mediation or hold a pro-Catalan stance, "displayed higher levels of Euroscepticism" (p. 801). EU's siding with the Spanish government was immediately perceived as a detriment to the Catalan cause. But Catalan population, being generally more pro-European than EU average, gives EU the opportunity, willingly or unwillingly, to play the "membership card". Catalans are reluctant, or less likely to vote for secession when EU makes it clear that the new-born country will have to reapply for the membership. This was documented in Muro and Vlaskmap's (2016) survey experiment which found out that "The desire to slow down European integration is absolutely marginal in Catalonia, and political elites have never articulated the need to vote for secession as a means to leave the EU" (p. 1131). However, to complement the earlier mentioned research by Wagner and others (2019), two charts are provided below which represent analysis of survey data coming from the Public Opinion Barometer from the Catalan Opinion Studies Centre (CEO) conduced in 2017 and published by the London School of Economics and Political Science. Catalan citizens were asked to demonstrate their level of trust and feeling of attachment to the EU based on their territorial preferences. These are the findings in graphs:
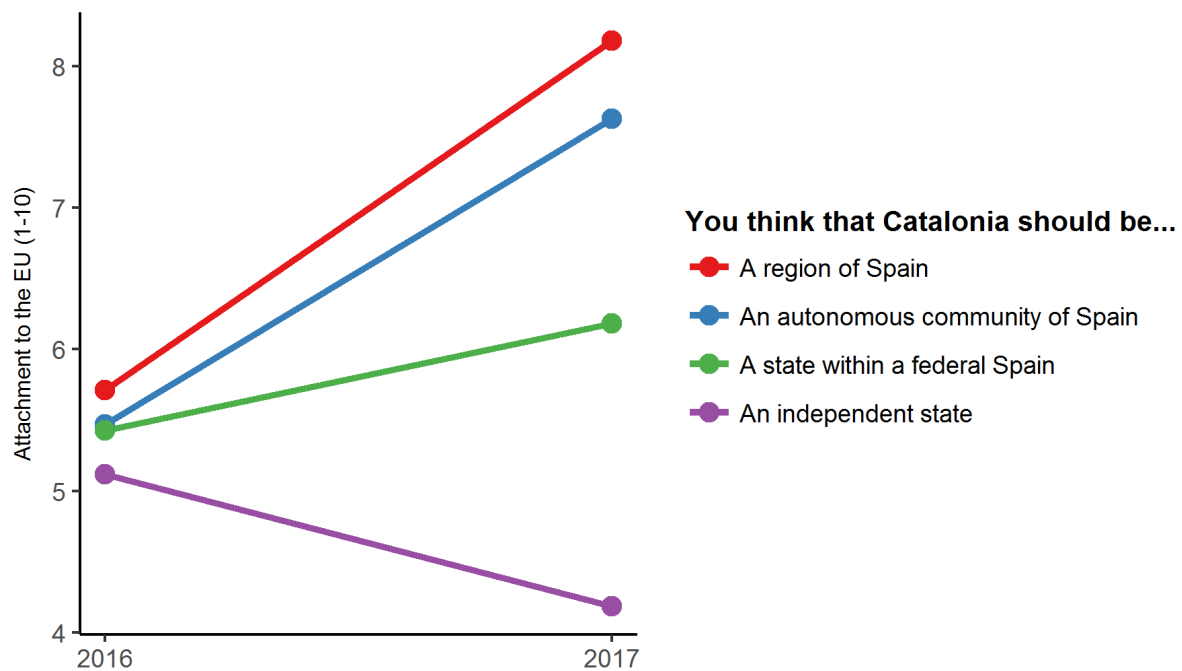
Level of trust in the EU depending on territorial preferences, 2013-2017

You think that Catalonia should be...
- A region of Spain
- An autonomous community of Spain
- A state within a federal Spain
- An independent state

Source: CEO   *Ariane Aumaitre - @ariamsita - Politikon.es*

Feeling of attachment to the EU depending on territorial preferences, 2016-2017

You think that Catalonia should be...
- A region of Spain
- An autonomous community of Spain
- A state within a federal Spain
- An independent state

Source: CEO   *Ariane Aumaitre - @ariamsita - Politikon.es*

Retrieved: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/eurocrisispress/2017/11/17/four-graphs-about-catalonia-and-citizens-attitudes-towards-the-eu/

It is clearly visible that Catalan citizens who think that Catalonia should remain a region of Spain maintain higher levels of trust or attachment to the European Union, especially spiking during and at the time of the independence referendum in 2017, while pro-independence voters are more likely to lose their trust and feeling of attachment to the European project, especially after the referendum. All this goes to show that Euroscepticism in Catalonia is not limited to only economic or ideological dimension, but is highly affected or determined even, by individual preferences regarding Catalonia's independence.

The study of largest political parties in Catalonia confirms findings made by previous research. Specifically, mainstream parties maintain their pro-integrationist views and do not exhibit any resentment or scepticism towards European Union, with the one exception of Junts per Catalunya (reorganization and rebranding of Democratic Convergence of Catalonia and The Catalan European Democratic Party). Even though official party members have been critical of EU's non-involvement in Catalan crisis, qualitative content analysis of 2015, 2017 and 2021 electoral programs demonstrates that party positions on European integration have not changed: they still remain pro-integrationist and pro-EU institutions, but with vocal support for Catalonia's independence.

Limitations

Potential confounding (competing) variables of this research are the "Great Recession" or Financial and Sovereign debt crisis, as well as Migration Crisis which had a major influence on domestic politics both in UK and on EU level (economic crisis, growing unemployment), as well as played a significant role in formation of new Eurosceptic parties that ran their campaigns on economic downturn, increasing migration from the Middle East and North Africa, and poorly

executed bailout programs which further indebted Southern European economies. The European Union turned out to be a perfect "scapegoat" in this process. Some of the changes made by political parties in this research could have been determined by preceding or ongoing crises, combined with the results of Brexit and Catalan referendums.

Recent election results and party positions on European integration could have also been modified by EU's immediate and effective response to coronavirus pandemic and relief funds and mechanisms provided for severely affected countries, such as Spain.

Conclusion

Qualitative content analysis of electoral party programs in Ireland and Spain following Brexit and Spanish Constitutional Crisis have only confirmed the first part of our hypothesis, where it was assumed that mainstream parties would maintain their pro-EU or pro-integrationist views. Contrary to popular beliefs and the expectations in the beginning of the research, Brexit or Spanish Constitutional Crisis have not reinforced Eurosceptic attitudes on party level in neither of the countries: Brexit phenomenon, having already been finalized on paper, could be explained through long and tedious process it was associated with and the resources that it took to finalize the agreement. As of today, neither "success", not "failure" story of Brexit has been confirmed in practice, as lot of developments are still uncertain, especially with regards to Ireland and Spain. Both mainstream and Eurosceptic parties demonstrate a strong commitment to their already existing ideologies and policy positions have not been shaken up or influenced by crises, with a minor exception of Sinn Fein in Ireland and Junts per Catalunya in Spain. In case of the former, Brexit was seen as an opportunity for "Irish reunification", as evidenced earlier by Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018) and used for advancing their own agenda of "unity", as for the latter, the ambivalence of EU's position, or non-involvement in Catalan crisis, rather, calls for careful

observation of pro-integrationist policies, all the while making sure that independence supporters are heard and political goals to achieve it, remain in place. Further research is needed identify the changing patters during upcoming elections or unfolding developments with both Irish reunification or Catalan independence. As for now, "Domino effect" was not observed. Both Spanish and Irish parties rallied behind EU institutions to guarantee the protection of interests of their citizens, while mainstream and challenger parties in Spain rallied behind central government in the face of potential Catalan independence, with an obvious exception of pro-secessionist movements.

Additionally, findings of this research confirm that Eurosceptic parties can and are "entering" the mainstream and ideological convergence, once put in a position of power or entering into alliances and coalitions, is taking place – more to the advantage of mainstream parties which are closer to the equilibrium of party-public discourse and hold moderate, centrist views. Finally, the research also adds credibility to the idea that both Brexit crisis and Spanish constitutional crisis lay grounds for ideological positioning, rather than policy choices. As a result, parties, both mainstream and Eurosceptic are reluctant, or will require a longer time to change their stances on European integration to avoid being deemed inconsistent.

One obvious development that has already taken place is that national parliaments are becoming more and more relevant and active in checking and balancing competences of EU's supranational institutions – and are demanding further involvement of EU in crisis management. This trend is only expected to rise.

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