Vincenzo Emanuele, Nicola Maggini and Bruno Marino

Gaining votes in Europe against Europe?
The electoral performance of anti-EU parties in the 2014 European elections

Abstract

In the wake of the harshest economic crisis since WWII, in several European countries there has been a rise of anti-establishment parties that openly oppose EU austerity policies and EU integration. In this framework of growing political and economic instability, 2014 European elections are a fundamental turning point for these parties, since they want to bring anti-Europe protests within the European Union. How could we define these parties? Which factors can explain their performance in 2014 European elections? Are these factors related to political and institutional contexts or to economic frameworks? In this paper we will answer these questions by using a comparative perspective and a quantitative approach with aggregate data. Specifically, in order to explain the electoral performance of anti-EU parties, we will use macroeconomic indicators and also political and institutional variables, also taking into account previous national elections as a term of comparison.

Keywords: EP elections; Eurosceptic parties; electoral results; party characteristics; political and economic context

After 2014 European elections, many commentators have pointed out that ‘Eurosceptic’ parties have gained many votes and obtained a relevant number of seats within the European Parliament. This paper aims at analyzing the electoral results of Eurosceptic parties and at shedding some light on some hypotheses that could help us understanding these performances. The paper is organized as follows: in the first section we will deal with different definitions of ‘Euroscepticism’, trying to find a suitable definition for our work; in the second section the research hypotheses and data collection will be presented; the third section will host Eurosceptic parties’ electoral results in 2014 European elections and a party-level analysis of these results; in the fourth section we will connect Eurosceptic parties’ results and the economic and political frameworks of the European countries, and we will also present a typology of Eurosceptic parties’ results; the final section will host our conclusions.

1 Euroscepticism: shedding light on a vague concept

In this section we will deal with definitions of ‘Euroscepticism’ in scientific literature and also with some causal explanations that can help us explain the electoral results of Eurosceptic parties.
To begin with, what do we mean when we use the dimension of analysis called ‘Euroscepticism’?

Several scholars have attempted to define it and to categorise parties according to this dimension. Hooghe, Marks and Wilson (2002) point out that there is a clear relationship between politics at national level and parties’ attitudes towards Europe. Specifically, they ‘find that the conventional Left/Right dimension—summarizing contestation about political control of the economy—structures European integration. Political parties located toward the Left extreme and the Right extreme—peripheral parties—are significantly more Euro-skeptical [sic] than parties toward the Center […] The most important finding of [their] research is that the new politics dimension of party competition, ranging from GAL to TAN [Green/Alternative/Libertarian to Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist], powerfully structures variation on issues arising from European integration’ (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002, 985). Euroscepticism is here defined as something related to European integration – which in turn is made by several policy areas, such as fiscal policy, environmental policy and the like (this definition partly resembles the one by Szczerbiak and Taggart which will be later analysed in this section). There are some interesting points to address. First, there is an inverted U-shaped curve that describes parties’ attitudes toward European integration on the Left-Right dimension – that is, extreme Left-wing parties and Right-wing parties are more Eurosceptic than parties tending towards the centre of the political continuum. This could also signal a relationship between Left/Right dimension and Euroscepticism that is weaker than the one devised by Hooghe, Marks and Wilson. In other words, if both extreme wings are more Eurosceptic than centre-leaning parties, are we sure that the Left/Right dimension is a useful tool of analysis? Could it be that something else – not related to the Left-Right dimension – is at work in defining parties’ positions on Europe, given the heterogeneity of Eurosceptic parties – especially in 2014 European elections? Second, even the definition of the Left/Right dimension as almost uniquely related to the political control of economic framework is questionable (see for example different definitions of ‘Left’ and ‘Right’ in Laponce 1975; Gauchet 1994; Bobbio 1996; Lukes 2003). Third, the contribution by Hooghe, Marks and Wilson cannot consider the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis on parties’ ideologies and electoral stances. Fourth, the article does not consider the Central and Eastern European countries that became members of the European Union after 2002. In this sense, another contribution deserves attention.

The article by Kopecky and Mudde (2002) deals (also) with the last issue raised in the previous paragraph. They firstly define Euroscepticism in a peculiar manner; secondly, they analyse parties’ ideas towards Europe in Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. We will focus on the first point. According to the authors, it is useful to ‘draw on David Easton’s seminal distinction between different forms of support for political regimes (Easton, 1965: 124ff.) by distinguishing between ‘diffuse’ and ‘specific’ support for European integration. By diffuse support [they] mean support for the general ideas
of European integration that underlie the EU. By specific support [they] denote support for the general practice of European integration; that is, the EU as it is and as it is developing’ (Kopecky and Mudde 2002, 300). So, the first dimension (being for/against the general concept of European integration) defines the difference between ‘Europhiles’ and ‘Europhobes’, while the second dimension (being for/against the concrete European Union construction) defines the categories ‘EU-optimists’ and ‘EU-pessimists’ (Kopecky and Mudde 2002, 301-302). Therefore, there are four possible combinations of ideal types regarding party positions on Europe and European Union: Euroenthusiast (Europhiles and EU-optimists), Europragmatists (Europhobes and EU-optimists), Eurosceptics (Europhiles and EU-pessimists) and, finally, Eurorejects (Europhobes and EU-pessimists) (Kopecky and Mudde 2002, 302-303). This contribution can be criticised from some viewpoints. For example, even if they are ideal types, some categories of the typology seem to be counterintuitive: how can a party be europragmatist, that is, rejecting the idea of European integration in general but supporting the concrete European integration as it has been developing via the European Union? Kopecky and Mudde (2002, 304) posit that Europragmatist parties ‘do not hold a firm ideological opinion on European integration, and on the basis of pragmatic (often utilitarian) considerations decide to assess the EU positively because they deem it profitable for their own country or constituency’. Therefore, it seems logical to posit that an Europragmatist party, if EU policies continue being positive for its country or constituency, could be tempted, after a certain period of time, to become Euroenthusiast, (supporting both European Union and the idea of European integration), because there could be the idea, within the party, that European integration must be a good idea, if European Union bears so many advantages to the country/constituency. The problem is that Kopecky and Mudde (2002, 319) say that ‘fundamental changes in party positions occur only in the vertical dimension of [their] typology’, therefore avoiding the possibility for a party to become Euroenthusiast if it is Europragmatist, unless a complex ideological change on the side of the party takes place, or a change of the European integration process is brought about (Kopecky and Mudde 2002, 320) – two conditions which seem not to easily conceivable – therefore making this logical shift almost impossible (for a similar critique of the Europragmatist category see Szczerbiak and Taggart 2003, 9).

It seems a different definition of Euroscepticism is needed. We believe Szczerbiak and Taggart’s definitions of ‘Soft Euroscepticism’ and ‘Hard Euroscepticism’ (2003) deserve attention. Soft Euroscepticism is defined as an attitude ‘when there is not a principled objection to the European integration project of transferring powers to a supranational body such as the EU, but there is opposition to the EU’s current or future planned trajectory based on the further extension of competencies that the EU is planning to make’ (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2003, 12), while Hard Euroscepticism ‘might be defined as principled opposition to the project of European integration as
embodied in the EU, in other words, based on the ceding or transfer of powers to supranational institution such as the EU’ (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2003, 12). Moreover, Szczerbiak and Taggart’s contribution is interesting from other viewpoints. For example, they correctly maintain that ‘there is no straightforward linear relationship between general party ideology and party position on Europe […] because parties can interpret their ideologies flexibly and a broad ideological orientation can lead to a range of possible outcomes in terms of party position […] and also because because the EU, and the ‘European project’ more generally, are themselves extremely malleable.’ (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2003, 19). This is a very interesting issue when assessing the fact that Eurosceptic parties come from different areas of the Left/Right continuum and, possibly, are members of different Europarties.

At this point, a question logically arises: what can explain the support for Eurosceptic parties at the electoral level? More generally speaking, what can be taken into account when analysing support for parties in European countries after 2008 crisis? Some interesting hints can be found in a paper by Kriesi and Hernández (2013). The authors connect the economic conditions of a country after 2008 crisis (more correctly, of Western European countries and of Central Eastern European countries) and the results of Prime Ministers’ parties, of governing parties and, to a lesser extent, of opposition parties in national political elections. Firstly, they show that, in order to analyse the economic effects of the crisis on parties’ electoral results, different indicators should be used (GDP growth, change in unemployment rates, IMF interventions, budgetary balance changes, and the like) both because these indicators capture different aspects of the economic situation and because they have different effects in different parts of Europe (Kriesi and Hernández 2013, 14-15; 18-20). Secondly, their analysis shows that Prime Ministers’ parties and governing parties are punished by electors after the 2008 crisis because of dire economic conditions – conversely, new parties generally benefit from crisis’ effects (Kriesi and Hernández 2013, 27 - 28). The increase in votes for ‘new parties’ is not very well developed in Kriesi and Hernández’s work – which is focused on Prime Minister’s and governing parties - and this leaves room for a different analysis like the one we will deliver in this paper.

Another interesting piece of research is the work by Pirro and van Kessel (2013), which shows that populist radical right parties in four European countries (Hungary, Slovakia, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom) have become more and more sceptic towards European Union in the last years, also because of the EU reaction to 2008 crisis, which has strongly influenced the economic measures brought about by national governments. We would start from this qualitative-analysis-related conclusion to point out that there is a relationship between post-2008-economic-crisis situation and the success of extreme and Eurosceptic parties - widening the number of countries to consider and also considering Left-wing parties (which could have had and could have strong reasons to be Eurosceptic,
see considerations by Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002, 969, 973-974; Kopecky and Mudde 2002, 320; White 2013)

The economic situation of a country is not the sole point we would address to explain the success of Eurosceptic parties in 2014 European election. Another interesting issue to address is the influence of national political contexts. It seems there is a relationship between the institutionalisation of a party system and the emergence and success of (partially or totally) new and non-mainstream parties (see for example contributions, which address this issue in several fashions, by Sikk 2005, 2012 and 2013; Tavits 2008). By institutionalisation we mean the ‘process by which the patterns of interaction among political parties become routine, predictable and stable over time’ (Casal Bértora 2014, 17 – emphasis in the original). Since some Eurosceptic parties in 2014 European elections are (totally or partially) new political formations, this is an interesting issue to evaluate. Moreover, other possible explanatory factors must be found within some specific features of a national context, specifically, within ‘incentives created by political institutions such as the electoral system, types of legislature or the spatial distribution of power within the polity’ (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2003: 17). According to Szczerbiak and Taggart (2003, 17), some interesting hints regarding the influence of these factors can be found in Aspinwall (2000), Raunio (2002) and Lees (2002).

There is a final issue to take into consideration, i.e. the fact that we are dealing with European elections, not with elections to select national parliaments and executives. In this sense, a landmark contribution is the work by Reif and Schmitt (1980) on the so-called ‘second-order elections’. The authors posit that European Parliament elections should be considered as ‘second-order elections’, which are different from first-order ones from some viewpoints: for example, since there is ‘less at stake’, a lower turnout, better prospects for new and small parties, an higher percentage of null votes and defeats for governing parties are to be expected; are these features still valid today, more than thirty years after this seminal work has been published? This is something we will consider when analysing the results of 2014 European elections.

2 Research hypotheses and data collection
Following the theoretical arguments presented in the previous section and in light of what has occurred in the 2014 EP elections, we have developed three main hypotheses to be tested through empirical analyses. The first one concerns the relationship between the electoral results of Eurosceptic parties and some party characteristics, the second one connects these results with economic conditions of European countries and the third one deals with the link between political and institutional frameworks of European countries and the results of Eurosceptic parties. Following the argument developed by
Hooghe, Marks and Wilson (2002) who have pointed out that parties located toward the extreme Left and the extreme Right are significantly more Eurosceptic than parties toward the Centre, we hypothesize a non-linear relationship between Euro sceptic parties’ performance in the 2014 EP elections and the ideological dimension based on the Left-Right continuum. In other words, we expect a better electoral performance of Eurosceptic parties both of extreme Left and of extreme Right compared to those leaning towards the Centre. Second, also in light of Hooghe, Marks and Wilson’s arguments (2002), we expect a linear relationship between Eurosceptic parties’ vote shares and post-materialist or GAL-TAN dimension (Green/Alternative/Libertarian – Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist). The emergence of this new dimension of political conflict is related, according to some authors (Kriesi et al. 2006; 2008; 2012), to the transformative power of globalization, which has given rise to a new ‘integration-demarcation’ cleavage. By this we mean that processes of increasing economic, cultural and political competition linked to globalization have created latent structural potentials of globalization ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. The mobilization of the globalization ‘losers’ by new political challengers has not added a new dimension of conflict to the existing national political space but, instead, it transformed the existing dimension of cultural conflict and enhanced its relative saliency compared to the traditional economic dimension. Third, we expect variation in electoral results of Eurosceptic parties based on their previous electoral strength. Indeed, the ‘second order elections’ theory (Reif and Schmitt 1980) posits that in the EP elections the stakes are lower (or are perceived as such) than in the general elections (when the prize is represented by the government of the country). Voters, thus, feel freer in their electoral choices, and punish at the ballot box incumbent parties more easily when they perceive that they are not carrying out policies effective and appropriate to their expectations. According to this perspective, then, the elections for the EP electoral arena are particularly favourable for opposition and small parties while government and big parties are usually disadvantaged on the basis of the theory of electoral cycle (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). Therefore, our expectation is that Eurosceptic parties, being protest opposition parties, may achieve better results in the 2014 EP elections compared to previous national elections. At the same time, we expect that this electoral progress affects in particular small Eurosceptic parties rather than the big ones. In other words, we hypothesize a linear relationship between party size and the Eurosceptic parties’ electoral performance: the smaller the party size, the greater the electoral increase.

Besides party-level variables, we hypothesize that country-level variables may have played an important role in explaining Eurosceptic parties’ electoral results. In particular, our second hypothesis concerns the role played by the economic context. Indeed, after 2008, the financial and sovereign debt crisis has affected Europe, with important, and sometimes dramatic, consequences in economic, social, and political terms. However, the crisis did not have an immediate impact, in terms of economic
policies that would affect the everyday life of ordinary people. As a result, the 2009 EP elections—held almost nine months after the Lehman Brothers default—did not show particularly clear effects of the crisis (De Sio and Legnante 2010). But in subsequent years, the reaction to the crisis has seen the emergence of the European Union, its institutions, and other international institutions as key players in terms of economic policy of the Euro member states. Many states that were most impacted by the sovereign debt crisis had to negotiate bailout deals with the ‘Troika’ committee (European Commission, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund) that strongly limited, if not temporarily cancelled, their economic policy sovereignty. Also, many other Eurozone countries had to take economic measures with a strong impact on the everyday life of ordinary people. It is in this context that, according to many observers, the European Parliament elections of 2014 would become much more relevant than in the past—a first, key test to assess the response of European citizens to the austerity policies decided in Brussels. Several commentators, in the months preceding the elections, suggested that the 2014 elections could seriously challenge the consolidated theoretical framework that identifies EP elections as second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980) compared to the more important national elections. Consequently, there was an expectation of a politicization of the conflict over the importance of Europe in regulating national economies—a politicization that would obviously boost Eurosceptic parties.

In this regard, we hypothesize a territorial differentiated pattern in the electoral performance of Eurosceptic parties. We expect that the success of Eurosceptic parties would have been stronger in two (albeit very different) subgroups of European countries. On the one hand, debtor states that had to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Troika (Greece, Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland) and, on the other hand, the richest creditor countries of the Eurozone (for example Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands) and countries with high economic status outside the Eurozone (UK, Sweden, and Denmark). In the former, austerity policies have created a strong social malaise, preparing fertile terrain for populist and anti-EU parties; in the latter, conversely, a populist and Eurosceptic protest could collect the resentment of citizens ‘forced’ to finance debtor countries, fearing the loss of their prosperity. In a third, intermediate group that includes countries with macroeconomic indicators mostly in line with EU averages, we expect a less strong success of Eurosceptic parties and a general lower salience of European issues. Moreover, to this intermediate group belong also Central and Eastern European countries, which have strongly benefitted from EU structural funds since their entry into the EU, and this latter represents a fundamental engine of economic development. For all the aforementioned reasons, we expect in general a non-linear relationship between the economic context and the electoral performance of Eurosceptic parties.
Finally, our third hypothesis concerns the role played by the political and institutional context. In particular, we expect a greater success of Eurosceptic parties in contexts of higher party system instability. Indeed, as stressed in the first section, some scholars have detected a relationship between the institutionalisation of a party system and the emergence and success of (partially or totally) new and non-mainstream parties (Sikk 2005; 2012 and 2013; Tavits 2008). In this regard, Eurosceptic parties are generally non-mainstream parties that challenge the established actors of the system. In some cases they are genuinely new parties (Sikk 2005), in others they are old parties that have remained for a long time at the fringe of their political system. In both cases, we expect they will benefit from contexts of accelerated party system change and fluid electoral markets. In other words, being generally marginal or extreme actors of the political system, they will have a better chance to perform well where there are significant voting shifts between elections than in contexts of strong electoral allegiance and partisan cues. In a similar way, since Eurosceptic parties are often new challengers in the political landscape, and in many cases also small-sized parties, we expect that they will be advantaged in contexts with minor institutional barriers to the entrance into the electoral arena of new political actors. Furthermore, we have to consider that the EP elections in general are a favourable context for new challengers because instability of the party system and electoral fluidity are higher than in national elections, whereas partisan cues and institutional constraints are more relaxed and turnout is lower, as stated by the second-order-election framework.

The assumptions set above need to be verified through an empirical study. In order to do it, the first step consists of the identification of our research object, namely the Eurosceptic parties. A rigorous and reliable case selection on our dependent variable is fundamental to test the hypotheses and proceed with the empirical analysis.

Notwithstanding the large amount of literature on the process of Europeanization, its consequences on domestic parties and, more specifically, on the emergence of Eurosceptics sentiments and orientations, there is not an up-to-date classification of Eurosceptic parties in Europe based on empirical data. The existing literature has mainly focused on theoretical definitions (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008;2013) or has provided either partial classifications, based on a limited number of countries (Kopecký and Mudde 2002; Külahci et al. 2012; Pirro and Van Kessel 20131) or classifications that are too old to be taken into consideration (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002; De Sio and Legnante 2010). A theoretical definition is an essential starting point to provide a classification. Nonetheless, a concept remains abstract and vague if it is not associated with an empirical reference. At the same time, a classification based on a limited amount of cases or countries does not take into account the whole

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1 Kopecký and Mudde (2002) focus on Eastern European countries, Pirro and Van Kessel (2013) deal with populist radical right parties, while Külahci’s comparative study (2012) takes into account almost exclusively large countries.
The universe of reference (i.e., the 28 member states of the European Union). Furthermore, in times of rapid political and electoral changes, as those experienced during the last years and especially after the most dramatic economic crisis since 1929, the attitudes of voters and parties toward the EU may have undergone significant shifts. For these reasons, studies based on previous elections prove outdated and not able to capture recent changes.

That is why we have chosen to provide a fresh classification of Eurosceptic parties after 2014 EP election. Our starting point has been Szczerbiak and Taggart’s definition of ‘Hard Euroscepticism’ (2003, 6) mentioned in the previous section. We therefore have not considered cases of ‘Soft Euroscepticism’, that is, when a party that generally supports the EU integration is skeptical about the specific trajectory followed by the EU. This general distinction has been integrated by a further consideration: given the increasing importance of the European institutions (EU Commission and EU Central Bank in particular) over the economic and financial policies of the Eurozone countries, parties belonging to countries in the single currency should be treated in a different way from parties coming from countries which are outside the monetary union. As a matter of fact, party systems of the Eurozone tend to be more Europhile than those that are outside (Külahci 2012, 190).

Starting from these two theoretical arguments, we have built a database made up by 308 parties, namely all parties that have contested the 2014 EP elections in the 28 EU-member states and have received at least the 0.5% of the national share. For each party included in the sample we have reported the score obtained on issues related to European integration and – when available – on the attitudes toward the Euro according to four well-known expert survey datasets: Benoit and Laver (2006), Chapel Hill (2010), ParlGov (2012) and EUandI (2014). They all provide party-positions on a set of EU-related variables based on likert scales². Obviously, older dataset has been used only to provide further confirmation of the positions assigned by most recent ones. In cases of conflicting results, we have used other sources, especially party platforms or manifestos and the reports of country experts involved in the CISE comparative study on the 2014 European elections (De Sio, Emanuele and Maggini 2014).

Following the above multiple sources, we have classified each party according to its own attitude toward Europe. As mentioned before, a distinction has been considered between party systems with and without Euro. For parties belonging to the Eurozone, the most important issues used to understand its Europhile/Eurosceptic feelings have been Euro-related questions³, while for parties that do not belong to the Eurozone the most important issues have been those related to the EU

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² Respectively, a 0-20 scale employed by Benoit and Laver (2006), 1-7 by Chapel Hill (2010), 0-10 by ParlGov (2012) and 1-5 by EUandI.

³ For example the party position on the following issue: “The single European currency (Euro) is a bad thing” (EUandI 2014).
integration. The rationale is straightforward: in party system of the Eurozone one of the most salient and divisive issue at stake is actually the possible withdrawal from the single currency, that is considered responsible for the prolonged economic crisis because of the economic and budgetary constraints it entails. On the contrary, outside the Eurozone, it is very likely that a party (even a Europhile one) opposes the single currency. In those contexts, being against the Euro is not enough to qualify a party as a Eurosceptic party. For this reason we have consider primarily the party position on the EU integration and we have selected only those parties that explicitly oppose the EU integration and are in favor of a withdrawal of their own country from the EU.

This classificatory effort has produced a final list of 62 Eurosceptic parties from 23 European countries, reported in Table 1.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Eurosceptic parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Freedom Party (FPÖ); EU-STOP; The Reform Conservatives (REKOS); Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>Flemish Interest (VB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>Attack (PPA); National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL); National Popular Front (ELAM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM); Party of Free Citizens (SSO); Party of Common Sense (ROZUMNI); Workers' Party of Social Justice (DSSS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Danish People's Party (DFP); People's Movement against the EU (FOBE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estonia</td>
<td>Conservative People's Party (EKRE); Estonian Independence Party (EIP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>Finns Party (PS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>National front (FN); Arise the Republic (DLR); Workers' Struggle (LO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Alternative for Germany (AfD); National Democratic Party of Germany (NDP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Golden Down (LS-CA); Communist Party of Greece (KKE); Independent Greeks (AE); Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS); United Popular Front (EPAM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Sinn Féin (SF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Five Star Movement (M5S); Northern League (LN); Brothers of Italy (FdI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>Union of Greens and Farmers (ZSS); Socialist Party of Latvia (LSP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lithuania</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>The Left (DL); Party of Full Democracy (PID); Communist Party of Luxembourg (KPL)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 For example the party position on the following issue: “European integration is a good thing” (EUandI 2014).

5 As mentioned earlier, minor parties that have received less than 0.5% of the national vote share in the 2014 EP elections have been excluded.
Malta
Netherlands
Party for Freedom (PVV); Socialist Party (SP); Reformed Political Party-
Christian Union (SGP-CU); Party for the Animals (PvdD); Article 50
Poland
Congress of the New Right (KNP); United Poland (SP); National Movement (RN)
Portugal
Democratic Unitarian Coalition (CDU); Workers' Communist Party (PCTP/MRPP)
National Renovador Party (P.R.N.)
Romania
Greater Romania Party (PRM)
Slovakia
Slovak National Party (SNS); People's Party - Our Slovakia (L'SNS)
Slovenia
Spain
Sweden
Green Party (MP); Sweden Democrats (SD); Left Party (V);
United Kingdom
United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP); An Independence from Europe (IndEU);
British National Party (BNP); Sinn Féin (SF); Democratic Unionist Party (DUP);
Ulster Unionist Party (UUP); Traditionalist Unionist Voice (TUV)

3 The electoral results of Eurosceptic parties: a patchy framework

The 2014 EP elections have been characterized by a general rise of the Eurosceptic parties presented in
the previous section. Therefore, today this kind of parties holds a more relevant position in the
European party system than in the past. As Figure 1 shows, Eurosceptic parties gained 135 seats out of
751— which correspond to 18% of the total EP seats—increasing their presence in the parliament by
63 seats compared to 2009 elections (when Eurosceptic parties gained 72 seats).

Figure 1 – Eurosceptic parties’ seats in the European Parliament (2009 and 2014 EP elections)

Source: Authors' elaboration on official data.
If we look at the electoral results in terms of percentages of valid votes, the story apparently seems different. Indeed, the mean of the results of all the Eurosceptic parties in the EU is 6.7%, substantively the same than that recorded in the 2009 EP elections (see Table 1). However, looking only at mean values calculated in the total of the EU could be misleading. Hence, we have to take into account that in the 2014 EP elections 62 Eurosceptic parties have obtained 0.5% or more of valid votes, whereas in the 2009 EP elections this number was lower, namely 45 parties. Furthermore, in the European elections of 2014 the number of Eurosceptic parties that got more than 15% of valid votes has doubled with respect to 2009, rising from four to eight. At the same time, sixteen Eurosceptic parties fall in the highest quartile of the percentage distribution of Eurosceptic votes at the 2014 EP elections, whereas in 2009 these parties falling in the highest quartile were eleven. In general, summary statistics reported in Table 1 confirm the electoral rise of Eurosceptic parties previously highlighted by the increase in the number of seats.

Table 1 – Summary statistics for the 2014 and 2009 EP elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean of Eurosceptic votes in the EU</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Eurosceptic parties (N)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N&gt;15% of valid votes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd quartile’s value</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N 3rd quartile</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors' elaboration on official data.

Anyway, this data regarding the overall progress in Eurosceptic parties' electoral results actually may hide highly heterogeneous levels of electoral performances characterizing the different parties we are considering. As further evidence of this fact, Table 2 shows electoral results of Eurosceptic parties both in percentage terms and in seats, also highlighting the differences in votes (in percentage points) compared to previous EP elections. Parties that have gained less than 5% of valid votes are excluded.
Table 2 – Electoral results for the main Eurosceptic parties at the EP elections (vote differences in percentage points between 2009 and 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Party Name</th>
<th>Votes (%)</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>Votes (change from 2009)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>AKEL</td>
<td>Progressive Party of Working People</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>DF</td>
<td>Danish People’s Party</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>+11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>UKIP</td>
<td>United Kingdom Independence Party</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>+10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>FN</td>
<td>National Front</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>+18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>M5S</td>
<td>Five Star Movement</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>FPÖ</td>
<td>Freedom Party</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>+7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>SF</td>
<td>Sinn Féin</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>+8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>MP</td>
<td>Green Party</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>+4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>Jobbik</td>
<td>Movement for a Better Hungary</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>PEV</td>
<td>Democratic Unitarian Coalition</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>+2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>PVV</td>
<td>Party for Freedom</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>-3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>PS</td>
<td>Finns Party</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>KSCM</td>
<td>Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Sweden Democrats</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>SP</td>
<td>Socialist Party</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>LS-CA</td>
<td>Golden Dawn</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>+8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>ZZS</td>
<td>Green and Farmers’ Union</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>FmEU</td>
<td>People’s Movement against the EU</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>KNP</td>
<td>Congress of the New Right</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>AFD</td>
<td>Alternative for Germany</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>new</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>SGP-CU</td>
<td>Reformed Political Party-Christian Union</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Left Party</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>LN</td>
<td>Northern League</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>KKE</td>
<td>Communist Party of Greece</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luxembourg</td>
<td>DL</td>
<td>The Left</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>SSO</td>
<td>Party of Free Citizens</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>+3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: other 36 Eurosceptic parties have got less than 5% of valid votes
Source: Authors’ elaboration on official data.

At present, Eurosceptic parties that have gained 5% or more of valid votes are 26, whereas those that have got less than 5% are 36. As the table shows, the main Eurosceptic parties belong to countries from different parts of the EU and to different party families. The party that has gained more votes in
percentage terms is the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL, i.e. the communist party of Cyprus) with 27%. However, it has lost 7.9 percentage points compared to the 2009 EP elections. Two right-wing and populist parties rank as second, namely the Danish People’s Party (DF) and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), obtaining both 26.6% of valid votes. Furthermore, both parties have become the first party in their countries, with a staggering increase of 11.3 percentage points for the DF compared to 2009 and of 10 points for the UKIP. The National Front (FN) led by Marine Le Pen in France has also achieved an unquestionable success gaining 25% of valid votes and it is now the first party in France, overcoming the Gaullist and the Socialists, with an astonishing increase of 18.6 percentage points in the votes compared to 2009. The fourth party in terms of percentage of votes is the Italian Five Star Movement (M5S) led by Beppe Grillo, which for the first time contested an EP election gaining 21.2% of valid votes. The M5S has lost about three million votes compared to the 2013 general elections, but it still represents, in absolute values and not in percentage terms, the first anti-establishment party in Europe. The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and Sinn Féin (SF) in Ireland performed well too, the former gaining 19.7%, with an increase of 7 percentage points in its consensus compared to previous EP election, and the latter conquering 19.5%, with an increase of 8.3 percentage points compared to 2009. Notice that these two parties are very different from an ideological standpoint. Indeed, the FPÖ is a right-wing, populist, and anti-immigration party, whereas SF is a separatist and left-wing party. Good results have also been obtained by the Green Party (MP) in Sweden (15.4%, an increase of 4.4 points in comparison to 2009), by the neo-fascist Jobbik in Hungary (14.7%, substantively as in 2009) and by the communist Democratic Unitarian Coalition in Portugal (13.7%, an increase of 2.3 points in comparison to 2009).

If we look at the seats in the European Parliament, the parties that have gained more seats (24) are Nigel Farage’s UKIP and Marine Le Pen’s National Front. With seventeen seats in the EP, the second national delegation is Beppe Grillo’s M5S. The Alternative for Germany (AFD) is the third national delegation with seven seats. AFD is a conservative and pro-market party that has run for the first time in the EP elections gaining an appreciable 7% of valid votes. The fourth national delegation is the Italian Northern League, which has gained five seats and a satisfactory 6.2%, even if it has lost 4 percentage points and three seats compared to the 2009 EP elections. Finally, four seats each have been assigned to the DF, FPÖ, MP, the Polish Congress of The New Right (KNP) and the Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV). KNP is a new right-wing party in the Polish political landscape that in its first EP elections has achieved a good result gaining 7.2% of valid votes. The PVV, led by Geert Wilders, is a populist, anti-immigration and right-wing party that has gained 13.3% of valid votes, but it has lost 3.7 percentage points compared to previous EP elections. In a specular way, the populist and right-wing Finns Party is now around 12.9% with one more seat and increases by 3.1 percentage points compared
to previous EP elections. Finally, in comparison with 2009 EP elections, we have to stress the noteworthy increases in percentage points registered by the neo-fascist Golden Dawn in Greece (9.4% of valid votes and an increase by 8.9 points), by the populist right-wing Sweden Democrats (9.7% of valid votes and an increase by 6.4 points), by the agrarian Green and Farmer’s Union in Latvia (8.3% of valid votes and an increase by 4.5 points), and by the libertarian and conservative Party of Free Citizens in the Czech Republic (5.2% of valid votes and an increase by 3.9 points).

Once this variability in terms of electoral results has been detected, we have to look for an explanation, introducing some possible party-level determinants, related to the hypotheses pointed out in section 2. In particular, we expected that Eurosceptic parties will more likely to get votes in two opposite poles of the political space: the far right and the far left. Among the main Eurosceptic parties that obtained good electoral performances in the 2014 EP elections there is a certain degree of heterogeneity from an ideological standpoint. First of all, the populist and Eurosceptic right has registered an electoral progress in these elections (Maggini 2014). Many of these right-wing and Eurosceptic parties belong either to the Europarty Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy (MELD) or to the Europarty The European Alliance for Freedom (EAF). The common features of the parties belonging to the MELD and the EAF are the conservative and xenophobic political orientation, the aversion towards Europe, and the populism (Mudde 2007; Pirro and van Kessel 2013). Often, charismatic politicians, who consider themselves as leaders of a community full of virtues, engage in a populist challenge against an establishment considered as full of vices (Tarchi 2003). More on the far right of the political space there are radical and anti-Semite national parties, such as the Greek Golden Dawn, and the Hungarian Jobbik. Besides this large group of right-wing parties, there is another consistent group of parties of the radical left belonging mainly to The European Left Party (GUE-NGL), such as AKEL, SF, the Portuguese CDU, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSCM) in the Czech Republic, the Socialist Party (SP) in the Netherlands, The Left Party (V) in Sweden, the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), The Left (DL) in Luxembourg. So far, the positions of parties in terms of left and right and the belonging to some specific party family could be explanatory factors of their electoral results.

As far as party characteristics are concerned, the hypothesis pointed out in section 2 assumed a non-linear relationship between the ideological position of a party on the left-right dimension and the Eurosceptics’ success. Indeed, according to Hooghe, Marks and Wilson (2002, 985) ‘political parties located toward the Left extreme and the Right extreme—peripheral parties—are significantly more Euro-skeptical [sic] than parties toward the Center’ Starting from this theoretical argument, already mentioned in the first section, for each party included in our database (i.e. 62 parties) we have first reported the party family they belong to according to the ParlGov dataset (2012). Then, using as
sources the expert survey datasets of Chapel Hill (2010), and ParlGov (2012), we have reported parties’ position on a Left-Right scale from 0 to 10, in which 0 means extreme left and 10 extreme right. As far as party families are concerned, we have calculated the means of the vote shares gained by Eurosceptic parties for each party family. Table 3 shows the results of this analysis, only reporting the means for the party families composed by more than five parties. Before looking at the means, it is interesting to notice the number of parties falling in each party family. Indeed, no Eurosceptic party belong to two traditional and important party families, namely the Christian democracy and the Social democracy. The right-wing family is the largest group with 28 parties, followed by Communist/socialist family (i.e. the radical Left) with 13 parties. The third party family in terms of number of parties (nine) is actually a residual category: indeed, it is composed by single-issue parties or by new parties that do not belong to any traditional political family, as for instance the MS in Italy. Finally, the Conservative party family counts eight parties. As far as means are concerned, the party family of the radical Left and that of the Right show in average the highest vote share (8.2% and 7.3%, respectively), followed by the ‘No family/special issue’ category (5.2%) and finally by the Conservative family (3.4%).

These results confirm that Eurosceptic parties are generally non-mainstream parties that challenge the established actors of the system. In some cases they are genuinely new parties (Sikk 2005), in others they are old parties that have remained for a long time at the fringe of their political system.

At this point it is useful to look at the relationship between the Left-Right dimension and the vote shares of Eurosceptic parties. In Table 3 we have recoded the Left-Right continuum into five categories: Extreme Left, Centre-Left, Centre, Centre-Right and Extreme-Right. As can be noticed, the largest group is the Extreme-Right category that includes 27 Eurosceptic parties, followed by the Extreme-Left category that includes 12 Eurosceptic parties. In the other categories there are just five or fewer than five cases. The mean of Eurosceptic vote shares for radical left parties is practically the same as that of radical right parties (7.8% and 7.5%, respectively). Figure 2 plots the relationship between the vote shares of Eurosceptic parties in 2014 and their position on the Left-Right scale. The hypothesized non-linear relationship between the ideological position of a party on the left-right dimension and the Eurosceptics’ success has been confirmed. Indeed, there is a U-shaped curve that

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6 ParlGov and Chapel Hill expert surveys do not report parties’ position on the Left-Right scale for all the parties of our dataset. Whenever it was possible, we have given a score to these parties looking at their political platforms and at the party family they belong to. Other cases with no left-right positions have been excluded from the analysis. The total number of Eurosceptic parties coded on the Left-Right scale is 49.

7 More precisely, the means of vote shares for ecologist, agrarian and regional party families are not reported because just one party falls in each of these categories.

8 In the Extreme Left category we have collapsed the values ranging from 0 to 1.9, in the Centre-Left the values ranging from 2 to 4.4, in the Centre the values ranging from 4.5 to 5.5, in the Centre-Right the values ranging from 5.6 to 8, in the Extreme Right the values above 8.

9 We have not reported the means of vote shares for Centre-Left, Centre and Centre-Right because they include few cases.
describes Eurosceptic parties’ performances on the Left-Right dimension – that is, Eurosceptic parties of the extreme Left and of the extreme Right are more likely to get votes than Eurosceptic parties tending towards the centre of the political continuum. So far, Eurosceptic parties are not only more likely to locate on the extreme sides of the political space than on the centre as suggested by Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, but they also perform better. Anyway, the non-linear relationship tells us the Left/Right dimension, considered as a continuum, is not a good predictor of Eurosceptic parties’ electoral success. Hooghe, Marks and Wilson posit that the new politics dimension of party competition, ranging from GAL to TAN (Green/Alternative/Libertarian to Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist), powerfully structures variation on issues arising from European integration. This authoritarian vs. libertarian cleavage is assumed to influence the orientation of national parties toward the EU, since the parties on the TAN wing are usually seen as ‘the most clearly-defined group of Eurosceptic parties’ (Bartolini 2012, 158). However, our empirical tests show that there is no linear relationship between the GALTAN dimension\textsuperscript{10} and the electoral performance of Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 EP elections (see Figure 3). Indeed, it is true that there are more Eurosceptic parties on the TAN wing than on the GAL one, but Eurosceptic parties on the GAL side have achieved good results. Conversely, on the TAN wing there are both Eurosceptic parties that performed well and Eurosceptic parties that obtained bad results in electoral terms.

Table 3 – Party characteristics. Descriptive statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Party Family</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communist/Socialist</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-democracy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green/Ecologist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrarian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian-democracy</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right-wing</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No family/special issue</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Left-Right Dimension</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Left</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre-Left</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{10} We have used data from the Chapel Hill expert survey. GALTAN positions have been measured on an 11-point scale that ranges from 0 (libertarian/post-materialist) to 5 (centre) to 10 (traditional/authoritarian). Parties not included in the Chapel Hill expert survey have been excluded from the analysis.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centre-Right</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extreme Right</td>
<td>27 7.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ elaborations on official data and on data taken from ParlGov (2012) and Chapel Hill (2010).

Figure 2 – Relationship between Left-Right dimension and Eurosceptic parties’ vote share at the 2014 EP elections

![Graph showing the relationship between Left-Right dimension and Eurosceptic parties’ vote share.](image)

Source: Authors’ elaborations on official data and on data taken from ParlGov (2012) and Chapel Hill (2010).

Figure 3 – Relationship between GALTAN dimension and Eurosceptic parties’ vote share at the 2014 EP elections

![Graph showing the relationship between GALTAN dimension and Eurosceptic parties’ vote share.](image)

Source: Authors’ elaborations on official data and on data taken from Chapel Hill (2010).
The last party characteristic that we have to take into account is party size. We know that EP elections traditionally represent a favorable context for opposition and protest parties in line with the ‘second order elections’ framework (Reif and Schmitt 1980). According to this theory, at EP elections, stakes are minor (or are perceived as minor) compared to general elections, and the electorate feels less constrained in its electoral choices, with the eventual punishment of traditional parties when they are not supposed to pursue effective policies. Therefore, opposition and small parties usually perform better at EP elections than at general elections, whereas for mainstream and big parties is true the reverse. In the second section we hypothesized that small Eurosceptic parties should improve their vote share with respect to previous national election to a larger extent than big Eurosceptic parties. In order to test the relationship between party size and the electoral performance of Eurosceptic parties, we have proceeded as follows. First, we have classified Eurosceptic parties into three categories: small parties, medium-size parties and big parties\textsuperscript{11}. Secondly, we have calculated for each category the mean of the percentage variations between Eurosceptic parties’ vote shares at the 2014 EP elections and the previous national election\textsuperscript{12}. Table 4 shows that two categories of Eurosceptic parties (i.e. small and medium-size parties) have improved their vote share compared to previous national elections, whereas big parties have decreased their vote share. Therefore, our expectation has been confirmed: small Eurosceptic parties at the 2014 EP elections have performed better than big Eurosceptic parties. The latter have even lost 16.3\% of their electoral consensus at previous national elections. However, there is not a linear relationship between party size and the Eurosceptic parties’ performance. Indeed, the greatest increase has been registered by medium-size parties, not by small parties\textsuperscript{13}. In particular, medium-size Eurosceptic parties have gained 26.9\% of their electoral consensus at previous national elections, whereas the small parties’ gain is 8.6\%.

\textsuperscript{11} As small parties we have considered those which have obtained vote shares at previous national elections between 0.5\% and 5\%, as medium parties those with percentages between 5.01 and 15, as big parties those above 15\%. Small parties are the largest category (i.e. 25 Eurosceptic parties).

\textsuperscript{12} More precisely, the formula is as follows: ((EP party’s vote share-National election party’s vote share)/ National election party’s vote share)*100. We have calculated percentage variations and not differences in percentage points in order to not penalize the electoral improvements (or worsening) of small parties. For instance, increasing by two percentage points actually could not have the same meaning for parties of different size. Let us say moving from 20\% to 22\% is not actually a great increase; conversely, a small party that moves from 2\% to 4\% has doubled its vote share.

\textsuperscript{13} In this regard, electoral thresholds may have played a role in the performance of small parties. The importance of electoral systems as institutional factors influencing parties’ electoral results will be addressed in the next section.
Table 4 – Party size and electoral performances of Eurosceptic parties (2014 EP elections and previous national elections compared)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean var. % EP elections-General elections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>-16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>+26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>+8.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors' elaborations on official data and on data taken from ParlGov (2012).

In conclusion, some of the assumptions pointed out in section 2 have been validated, but our finding are contrasting. As far as party characteristics are concerned, the hypothesis related to the non-linear relationship between the ideological position of a party on the left-right dimension and the Eurosceptic parties’ success has been confirmed. Eurosceptic parties located on the extreme wings of the political space have achieved better results than parties leaning to the centre. In a similar way, Eurosceptic parties outside traditional families or belonging to traditional, but radical political families have got more votes in percentage terms than Eurosceptic parties belonging to mainstream families. However, the non-linear relationship between the ideological dimension and the electoral results of Eurosceptic parties means that the Left-Right continuum is not the best predictor of Eurosceptic electoral results. Furthermore, all the Eurosceptic parties of our dataset are opposition parties at the moment of the 2014 EP elections. Therefore, Eurosceptic parties’ electoral progress pointed out at the beginning of this section is not surprising if we take in mind the theory of the second order elections. Furthermore, this electoral progress has affected small and especially medium-size Eurosceptic parties, but not big Eurosceptic parties. This last point is consistent with such theory, but there is not the hypothesized linear relationship between party size and Eurosceptic parties’ electoral performance. All this to say that party characteristics tell us only a part of the story. In order to reach a more comprehensive explanation of the electoral results of Eurosceptic parties we have to take into account the impact of systemic factors.

4 The national variations of Eurosceptics’ results: the role of economic and political context

The hypotheses pointed out in section 2 aimed at looking for an explanation of the Eurosceptics’ success through the use of party-level and country-level explanatory factors. After having analyzed the
role of party-level variables, this section investigates the impact of systemic factors. First of all, it is useful to take a look to the national variations in the electoral results of Eurosceptic parties, reported in Figure 4.

Figure 4 – Total vote share received by Eurosceptic parties in the 2014 EP elections, by country

As one can easily note from the histogram, the overall mean – obtained by aggregating the results of the Eurosceptic parties in each country – is 14.8%, substantially higher than that recorded in the 2009 EP elections. Hence, the 2014 EP elections have been characterized by a general rise of Eurosceptic parties that today hold most relevant positions in the European party system than in the past. However, this general success conceals a wide cross-country variability. In 5 countries (Croatia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia and Spain), there are no Eurosceptic parties at all, while in other countries (Bulgaria, Slovakia, Estonia, Belgium and Romania) the Eurosceptics play only a minor role in the respective party system.

On the left side of the histogram, we find those countries where the Eurosceptic parties have received a large share of votes. Note that among the countries that fall above the EU mean of 14.8%, only Czech Republic belong to the post-communist bloc. The rest of countries is composed by North-Western European polities (Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Sweden) and Southern European nations (Italy, Cyprus Greece, and Portugal).

Once these variations have been detected, we have to look for an explanation, introducing some possible systemic-level determinants, related to both the macro-economic and the political context.
As far as the macro-economic context is concerned, the hypothesis pointed out in section 2 assumed a non-linear relationship between the economic performance of a country and the Eurosceptics’ success. In particular, we expected a larger success of parties with Eurosceptic views in two opposite group of countries: the richest, creditor countries and the debtor states that had to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Troika, while in an intermediate group of countries with macro-economic indicators mostly in line with EU averages we expected a less strong success of Eurosceptic parties.

In order to assess the macro-economic context of the European countries we have taken into consideration different indicators, such as the GDP per capita, the public debt-to-GDP ratio, the unemployment rate and the variation of these indicators during the years of the economic crisis (2008-2013). Although these statistics concern different aspects of the economic status of a country, they consistently contribute to depict a very clear overall economic situation, which can be synthetically summarized by the chart in Figure 5.

Figure 5 – 2013 GDP per capita and GDP variation since the beginning of the crisis (2008) in the 28 European countries

![Figure 5](image)

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

Figure 5 plots the last available country-level GDP per capita (2013) against the GDP variation between 2013 and the beginning of the crisis (2008). Crossing these two indicators we can remark two crucial pieces of information for the understanding of how the economic context has affected the
electoral support for Eurosceptic parties. The GDP per capita tells us the general economic status of a
country (rich or poor) while the GDP variation clarify the path followed by the country during the
crisis (rising or declining). The chart is divided into four quadrants, according to the mean values of
both indices (respectively 30,736 € and 3.644%), thus creating four possible economic situations. A
substantial group of wealthy countries can be easily noted, headed by Luxembourg that, with a GDP
per capita of 78,670 €, has been left out from the Figure in order to better visualize the other points in
the chart. The group of rich countries has not followed an homogeneous pattern during the crisis:
some countries have continued to grow economically (Germany, Sweden and, to a lesser extent,
Austria), while others have started to decline (as Ireland, that has been forced to ask for the Troika
economic help in 2010). On the left part of the chart we find those countries with a GDP per capita
lower than the European average. Many Eastern European countries are located in the upper-
left quadrant, in the group of ‘rising countries’ who have experienced high rates of economic growth even
in times of crisis (for example, Poland’s GDP per capita has increased by 21.4% since 2008).
Conversely, on the lower-left quadrant there are those countries that have suffered the most from the
economic crisis. Among them we note Greece, Cyprus, Portugal and Spain, which had to sign a
memorandum of understanding with the Troika.

Looking at Figure 5, the assumptions hypothesized in section 2 about the non-linear relation
between the economic context and the electoral performance of Eurosceptic parties seem to find
empirical evidence. As showed in Figure 4, Eurosceptic parties scored their best results in both rich
countries like Sweden, Denmark, the UK and the Netherlands, ‘forced’ to finance debtor states and
thus fearing the loss of their prosperity, and in poor and declining countries like Greece, Cyprus and
Portugal, where austerity policies have created a strong social discontent, preparing fertile terrain for
the rise of a populist protest against the EU. At the same time, the Central and Eastern countries which
have strongly benefited from EU structural funds have increased - with few exceptions\(^{14}\) - their
economic strength during the last years. For these countries, therefore, EU represents a fundamental
engine of economic development and this explains why the ‘rising countries’ located in the upper-left
quadrant show low levels of support for Eurosceptic parties.

However, the economic context does not succeed to explain some other cases, like Spain, which
shows a poor and declining economy, which has been put under the Troika’s control but where no
party has assumed hard Eurosceptic positions. Similarly, the economic context fails to justify why in
Luxembourg and Germany the Eurosceptic parties have not reached a relevant success in spite of their

\(^{14}\) One notable exception is represented by Czech Republic, where the GDP variation between 2008 and 2013 is slightly
lower than the average. Therefore, in the typology of Figure 5, Czech Republic appears as a poor and not rising country.
Not surprisingly, it is the only Central and Eastern European country where Eurosceptic parties totalizes a share of votes
higher than the EU average (18.3%).
economic status (they are the two healthiest countries of the EU) and of their support for the austerity policies.

These contrasting findings suggest that the economic context does not give us a totally clear picture regarding performances of Eurosceptic parties. In order to reach a more comprehensive explanation of the differentiated success of these parties in European countries, we also take into account the political and the institutional context. The structure of the competition (that is, the format and the mechanics of the party system and the features of the electoral market) and also the set of electoral rules in the 28 European countries contribute to shape the political setting, namely the arena where parties decide their electoral strategy and voters decide how (and if) to vote. It is therefore clear that the features of the electoral arena, being close to the act of voting, may significantly affect both the electoral supply (i.e., the decision for an Eurosceptic party to stand for the elections) and the electoral demand (i.e., the decision of voters to support an Eurosceptic party), thus contributing to explain the variable performance of the Eurosceptic parties in the 28 EU countries.

The assumption outlined in section 2 states that the success of Eurosceptic parties is more likely in contexts of higher party system instability. Indeed, Eurosceptic parties are generally non-mainstream parties that challenge the established actors of the system. In some cases they are ‘genuinely new parties’ (Sikk 2005), in others they are old parties that have remained for a long time at the borders of their political system. In both cases we expect Eurosceptic parties would benefit from contexts of accelerated party system change and fluid electoral markets. In other words, being generally marginal or extreme actors of the political system, they will have a better chance to perform well where there are significant voting shifts between elections than in contexts of strong electoral allegiance and partisan cues. Obviously, the political context we are dealing with is not that of national elections but that of the European elections. We know that, despite a strong link between the two certainly exists (political actors and voters are the same in the two contexts) the European elections are second-order elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980) and this results in different behaviors of both parties and voters. Furthermore, despite many observers hypothesized that the 2014 European elections could become the first truly ‘European’ elections, thus showing the features of first-order elections, empirical evidence suggests that the second-order model still held (De Sio, Emanuele and Maggini 2014). Hence, when we refer to concepts like party system instability, electoral fluidity, partisan cues and so on, it should be clear that we refer to the specific context of the European elections, where generally instability and fluidity are higher than in national elections and partisan cues are more relaxed, as stated by the second-order model.

In order to assess the features of the political context in the 28 EU member states, we take into account five different aspects, each measured by a different indicator, whose descriptive statistics are
summarized in Table 5. The first variable concerns the level of electoral participation. The second-order elections theory claims that the level of voter turnout in EP elections will be lower than in general elections as the stake in EP elections is lower (the national government is not at stake). Measuring the turnout change between the national and the European election in each country is a good indicator in order to understand how much EP elections are peculiar with respect to ‘normal’ parliamentary elections of a given country: the higher the turnout difference, the higher the probability that many voters of mainstream parties have abstained given that the national government is not at stake, thus opening a window of opportunity to non-mainstream parties.

Table 5 – Variables of political context. Descriptive statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Std. Dev.</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turnout change</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>-3.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Volatility</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENEP</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polarization</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean district magnitude</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>96.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Authors’ elaboration on official data.

On average, the turnout difference has been of 24.4 points, with a maximum of 46 points in Slovakia and a minimum in Belgium, where the turnout on May 25 has been higher than in the 2010 general election.\(^{15}\)

Another fundamental indicator we use to measure the impact of the political context on the Euroscpetic parties’ performance is the index of Total Volatility (Pedersen 1979; Bartolini and Mair 2000) that is, the net aggregate change between two subsequent elections (in our sample, the 2009 and the 2014 EP elections). The variable range from 0 to 100 where 0 indicates the lack of (aggregate) vote changes, while 100 stands for the opposite situation where any possible change takes place. Being probably the best proxy of party system instability, we assume that a high level of electoral volatility favors the success of non-mainstream parties since it means that traditional loyalties are weaker and voters are more likely to change their established voting choices. As far as volatility levels in the 2014 EP elections are concerned, we note that the mean level of vote change in Europe has been 21.8, well higher than the general level registered in parliamentary elections.\(^{16}\) Furthermore, despite the large difference that usually occurs between Western and Eastern European countries, the latter being characterized by much greater levels of instability in parliamentary elections (Tavits 2005; 2008; 2008; 2009).

\(^{15}\) This is because in Belgium the EP elections has been held the same day of the general elections.

\(^{16}\) Note that Mair (2011) identifies a level of 20 as the reference point beyond which an election can be considered as “highly volatile”.
Mainwaing et al. 2009), data on EP elections shows much more balance\(^{17}\). The most volatile country appears Greece, with the impressive score of 50.4, while the most stable party system with respect to the 2009 EP elections is Finland (9).

The following two variables we take into account are respectively two indicators of the ‘format’ and the ‘mechanics’ of the party system (Sartori 1976).

The format of the party system can be measured through the ENEP\(^{18}\) (Effective Number of Electoral Parties) developed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979). The index counts the parties weighting for their relative electoral strength, so that larger parties counts more than smaller ones. In the theoretical case of a system made up by two parties with 50\% of the vote each, the score of the index is 2. The effective number of parties in the 28 member states at the 2014 EP elections tells us how much each country is politically fragmented. Our expectation, according to Downs’ model (1957), is that as far as the party system gets more fragmented the opportunities for Eurosceptic parties will be higher since the ideological and programmatic distance between parties gets lower and voters will more easily transfer their voting choice from one party to another one. Moreover, in contexts of high party system fragmentation, established parties are generally less strong (each party holds a lesser share of votes) and indeed more easily challengeable by new comers. The mean ENEP in the 2014 EP elections has been 5.9, which means that, on average, the European party systems are rather fragmented in the EP elections, thus confirming the assumptions of the second-order model, according to which small parties in the EP elections perform better than in general elections. Data shows a wide variability in Europe as regards the number of parties, that shifts from the almost Maltese two-party format (2.2) to the highly fragmented case of Belgium (9.9).

As regards the mechanics, we need to measure the polarization of the party system, namely, the degree of ideological distance among parties. Unlike turnout and volatility or ENEP, this is only a relative concept that is not objectively measurable. That is why we need to rest on expert judgments. Therefore, we have decided to compute the index of polarization\(^{19}\) of a party system as the standard deviation of the parties’ left-right position (in a 0-10 scale) in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2010). The underlying assumption is the following: given that Eurosceptic parties are generally extreme parties (both of left and right, as showed in the previous section) a more ideologically polarized party system will be a favorable terrain for their emergence, since voters in those contexts usually tend to support

\(^{17}\) The average level of volatility in post-Communist countries is 24.2, while that of Western countries is 20.

\(^{18}\) ENEP = \(1/\sum p_i^2\) where \(p\) is the party’s national share of votes. As regards the “other parties” category, we have followed the averaging of extremes method advocated by Taagepera (1997).

\(^{19}\) This index of ideological polarization is, in turn, the result of two different indices: one concerns polarization of the party system as regards economic issues (left: more government spending; right: less taxes) and another one dealing with “postmaterialist” issues (Inglehart 1977), that is, democratic freedoms and rights (the so-called GALTAN index, introduced in the previous section).

26
parties located at the edge of the ideological spectrum. The index of polarization has been computed for 25 out of 28 cases and the descriptive statistics are reported in Table 5. Eastern European countries show lower ideological polarization compared to their Western counterparts, with Portugal appearing as the most polarized system (3.25) and Romania as the least one (1.24).

Finally, the last indicator we introduce is related to the electoral system for the EP elections. Even if a decision of the Council (n. 772/2002) approved by the European Parliament in May 2002, has introduced some common principles to harmonize the elections for the EP, previously regulated under the jurisdiction of the member states, the electoral system for the EP elections may vary significantly among the 28 member states as far the electoral threshold, the number of districts and the electoral formula are concerned. Hence, there are extremely proportional systems, like that of Germany, whose 96 representatives are elected in a unique electoral district without any threshold, and very disproportional systems, like that of Poland which combines a low average district magnitude (3.9) and a 5% electoral threshold. In order to assess how disproportional is the electoral system for the EP elections is in each state, we have calculated the mean district magnitude (MDM), that is, the ratio between the number of representatives to be elected in each state and the number of districts in which they have to be elected. Obviously, the higher the MDM, the higher the proportionality of the system (the implicit threshold becomes lower), and vice versa. Given that Euro-sceptic party are often new challengers in the electoral arena and in many cases also small-sized parties, we hypothesize that they will be advantaged from a permissive electoral system. Thus, the more proportional the system, the higher the probability that Eurosceptic parties will decide - believing that they have good chances to win seats - to stand for the election with their own label. At the same time, even voters will more likely support those parties that they consider ‘viable’ and instead will abandon those parties that are generally considered as having little chances to win a seat.

The above-quoted five indicators contribute to shape the ‘political’ setting of each national context where Eurosceptic parties have stood for the election. In order to assess the impact of the political context on the explanation of the Eurosceptic parties’ success and then comparing it to the influence exerted by the economic context, a multivariate regression model (OLS regression) would have probably been the most accurate solution. Yet, the number of observations is too small (N=28, i.e. the

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20 This variable may suggest a problem of endogeneity, given that a system may show a high level of polarization even because extreme left or right-wing Eurosceptic parties are part of it. But the index is calculated from data of 2010, where most of the actual Eurosceptic parties did not exist, thus the problem of endogeneity is a bit reduced.
21 Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta are not included in the Chapel Hill Expert Survey database (2010).
22 The EU has established that the members of the EP have to be elected with a system of proportional representation, using either the party list vote or the single transferable vote system.
23 For more insights on the electoral systems for the EP elections, see Emanuele (2014, 37-42).
24 These effects, both from parties' and voters' sides, are the so-called “psychological effects” of the electoral systems. See Duverger (1951) and Cox (1997) on this point.
number of EU countries) to perform a reliable statistical analysis. However, we can achieve interesting results even through the building of a four-fold typology of economic and political context and through the comparison of the mean national share of votes received by the Eurosceptic parties in each of the four possible situations.

The first step is to combine these five indicators into a synthetic, composite and standardized index of political context. The new index is the mean of the previous indices expressed in standardized form (in other words, its observations are the mean of the Z scores of the previous five indices). Even if the five ‘political’ indicators are very different and cover different aspect of the political system, what is important here is only the way they affect the performance of Eurosceptic parties. The hypothesis is that the higher the turnout decrease between national and EP elections, the higher the level of volatility, party-system fragmentation and polarization, and the higher the mean district magnitude, the better the result of Eurosceptic parties in a given country. Therefore, countries that fall above the median value will be considered as having a ‘favorable’ political context, while countries falling under the median as having a non-favorable context. Thus, a high level of the index in a given country means a high probability of success for Eurosceptic parties in that country, and vice versa.

The second step consists of devising the same procedure for the economic context, combining together the GDP per capita in 2013, the GDP variation during the years of the crisis (2008-2013) and a dummy for having/not having signed a memorandum of understanding with the Troika. As seen before, the hypothesized relation between the economic context and Eurosceptic parties’ performance is not linear. Thus, we will consider as ‘favorable’ economic context both the top and the bottom quartile of the distribution of the index (i.e., both those countries with the strongest and the weakest economic status), while the two middle quartiles are considered as ‘non-favorable’ contexts.

The last step is the intersection of the two thus-created indices and the building of a four-fold typology, presented in Figure 6. Through the comparison of the mean national share of votes received by the Eurosceptic parties in each of the four situations, we note that the combined influence of the two contexts succeed to explain the success or failure of the Eurosceptic parties in most of the countries. Where both the economic situation and the political setting produce positive incentives to the success of Eurosceptic parties, the mean national share of these latter is an impressive 22.6%. On the contrary, where both contexts seem to produce constraints for an Eurosceptic party’s good performance, the mean national share of votes for these parties is only 6.9%.

25 Following previous empirical research (Taagepera and Shugart 1989; Lago 2011; Simon 2013) we expect a non-linear behavior of the variable, since “the impact of any marginal seat in the proportionality of the electoral system will tend to be lower than the previous one” (Simon 2013, 42). Given this underlining assumption, we have transformed the variable into its natural logarithm.
In the first subset of cases (upper-right quadrant) we find 9 countries, among which there are the four member states with the highest results of Eurosceptic parties (Denmark, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Sweden) and other three cases above the mean (Austria, Greece and Portugal). However, even Germany and Spain fall into this quadrant, with the former showing a weak 8%, despite the exponential increase of the Eurosceptics’ result with respect to 2009 (0.3%) and the latter showing no Euro-sceptic party at all. These nine countries share similar features of the political context: a large turnout decrease between national and EP elections, high level of electoral volatility, party system fragmentation and polarization and a permissive electoral system. At the same time, from the economic point of view, some of these countries show a high economic status (Austria, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK) and some others are some of the poorest countries that have suffered the most from the crisis (Greece, Portugal and Spain).

The opposite subset of countries showing negative incentives for the rise of Eurosceptic parties (lower-left quadrant) does not include any member state with an average vote share of Eurosceptics above the mean value. Only Hungary and, to a lesser extent, Finland and Poland, show a quite significant result.
In the other two quadrants the structural incentives are not consistent: in the upper-left quadrant the economic context is favorable but the political one is non-favorable, while in the lower-right quadrant the situation is completely reversed. Among the countries located in the upper-left quadrant, only in two out of 6 countries (Cyprus and, to a lesser extent, Ireland) the Eurosceptic parties have played an important role. Conversely, in the lower-right quadrant, three out of five countries (Italy, France and Czech Republic) - which displayed an intermediate economic status but a particularly unstable political context – show Eurosceptics’ results well above the average.

It is interesting to note that the mean share of Eurosceptic parties when only the political context is favorable is considerably higher than in the opposite situation of favorable economic context (16.9% against 11.9%). This evidence seems to suggest that the political context drives the Eurosceptics’ electoral performance more than the economic context and this sounds perfectly reasonable given that the political variables employed to build the political index are by far closer to the act of voting than the economic indicators.

5 Discussion and conclusions

In this work we have dealt with Eurosceptic parties’ results in 2014 European elections. We have firstly analyzed the concept of ‘Euroscepticism’, deciding to deal with a specific definition of this concept. Secondly, we have analyzed the results of Eurosceptic parties, showing that they have obtained noticeable results in the last European elections. Thirdly, we have combined these results with party-level frameworks, national economic situations and national political contexts. As far as party characteristics are concerned, we have discovered that Eurosceptic parties located on the extreme wings of the political space have achieved better results than parties leaning to the centre. Furthermore, the electoral progress has affected small and especially medium-size Eurosceptic parties, but not big Eurosceptic parties. As far as systemic-level determinants are concerned, we have discovered that combining the economic and the political contexts in a four-fold typology substantially helps us explaining the results of Eurosceptic parties in 2014 EP elections. Specifically, Eurosceptic parties competing for votes in a certain economic and political context—that is, in either rich and ‘creditor’ countries or in poor countries, possibly affected by superimposed economic policies and also in countries with high turnout decrease compared to previous national elections, with high levels of party-system fragmentation and polarization, with high levels of electoral volatility and with a high mean district magnitude—obtained relevant electoral results. Moreover, we have discovered that for Eurosceptic parties’ fortunes having had a favorable political context seems to be more important than having had a favorable economic context.
This is just a starting point for further empirical analyses. To begin with, certain relevance could be given to the role of political entrepreneurship—that is, the decision by some political actors to politicize and to make salient the issue of Euroscepticism—in order to understand Euro-sceptic parties’ results in unfavorable contexts. As shown by some authors (see discussion in De Sio, Emanuele and Maggini 2014, 322-325), this could be an interesting point to address in future works, and could help us shed further light on the rise of Eurosceptic parties after 2014 EP elections.

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