

“Explaining Eurosceptic voting in a Europhile country: a test of four models on the 2014 elections in Belgium”

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Introduction

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections saw an unprecedented surge of support for Eurosceptic parties. Despite the alarmist messages in the media, we cannot speak of an Eurosceptic storm or earthquake as turnout remained low and the results of anti-EU parties varied from country to country (e.g. Barbieri 2015; Brack and Startin 2015; Mudde 2014). Yet, for the first time since its first direct election in 1979, the EP includes today one third of dissenting voices. In the context of ongoing economic crisis and of declining trust in representative institutions (Armingeon and Guthman 2013), European voters seemed to have sent a message to mainstream political parties and the political establishment by supporting radical, populist and Eurosceptic parties.

However, was the vote on radical parties really about Europe? Does it tie to other sentiments articulated in current Eurosceptic parties’ discourse, or to the broader political consequences of globalization, such as a nationalist concerns? Or were voters using these second-order elections to cast a more general protest vote? A number of alternative explanations may question how ‘Eurosceptic’ the public foundations of this Eurosceptic surge in the 2014 elections really are.

Since the end of the so-called ‘permissive consensus’, there has been a lot of research on citizens’ attitudes towards European integration, and the extent to which it affects their voting behaviour. Several explanations have been put forward in the literature to account for the support for Eurosceptic political parties. Strikingly, most of these studies have focused on explanations other than attitudes towards Europe. Some studies stress utilitarian explanations, suggesting that citizens’ support would depend upon the economic context, the national economic performance and the personal or collective benefits from EU membership (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Serrichio et al. 2013). Another strand of

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research highlights the role of identity factors in explaining the choice for a radical party. Eurosceptic parties articulate a threat to national identity and community that some citizens may experience as a consequence of open borders and free movement promoted by EU integration. Eurosceptic parties mobilize anti-immigrant sentiments and tap into feelings of cultural insecurity to oppose the EU (Carey 2002; Hooghe, Huo and Marks 2007; Bruter 2005; McLaren 2002). A third perspective suggests that, rather than a vote against Europe, the Eurosceptic vote is a protest vote against the national institutions and the way democracy works at the domestic level (Anderson 1998; De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005; Franklin, Marsh and McLaren 1994). On the contrary, the EU-issue voting perspective argues that EP elections have increasingly become about Europe and that citizens' stances on EU issues play a major part in their vote choices (De Vries et al. 2011; Hobolt et al. 2009; Hobolt 2015).

Building on these studies, the aim of this chapter is to investigate how 'Eurosceptic' the vote for radical, Eurosceptic parties actually is. We concentrate on the Belgian 2014 EP election. Belgium is an exceptional, but very interesting case. As pro-European sentiment is still assumed to be widespread among both parties and electorate, 'Eurosceptic voting' seems out of question. Nevertheless, we demonstrate that Europe has come to matter even in Belgium.

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section briefly surveys the state of the art, describing the four main approaches to the study of Eurosceptic parties' electoral success. Then, sections 2 and 3 explain the data and methodology used in the paper. The fourth section presents the analysis. The fifth section summarizes our model while we discuss the implications in the concluding part.

1. State of the art

Mass-level Euroscepticism has attracted considerable attention from scholars, especially since the rise of Eurosceptic parties at the start of the 1990s. In electoral studies, we may distinguish four models explaining why voters would opt for a Eurosceptic party.

A first approach is derived from utilitarian theory. On the level of the individual voter, some scholars consider that one's attitudes towards the EU are the results of a cost-

benefits analysis or egocentric utilitarianism (McLarren 2007; cf. Serricchio et al. 2013). More particularly, studies have shown that European integration tends to create a new dividing line between losers and winners in the integration process (Hix 1999; Kriesi et al. 2008). In their words, there is “a new centre-periphery conflict between groups whose interests are threatened by economic and political integration and those whose interests are promoted by integration” (Hix 2005:151). The economic position of an individual, their education level and occupation will, according to this thesis, affect whether he is a winner or loser from the process of integration (Gabel 1998). According to this thesis, citizens with less economic, cultural and social capital (the less educated, unskilled and low income voters) have fewer opportunities to take advantage of a free market and the opening up of national borders. They are more likely to see European integration as a threat to their jobs and social rights and are therefore less likely to support the EU (Abts et al. 2009; Gabel 1998; Hix 2005; Loveless and Rohrschneider 2011).

In the case of Belgium, we therefore test the following hypothesis: the losers from European integration (low income, less educated and/or unskilled workers) are more likely to vote for a radical and Eurosceptic party (*hypothesis 1*).

A second approach states that support for Eurosceptic parties can be interpreted as a protest vote against domestic institutions and governments. Research has shown that trust in national institutions and the evaluation of the performance of one’s national government play a key role in understanding support for the EU (Franklin, Marsh and McLaren 1994; McLaren 2002; De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005). There is a mechanism of proxy at play: as people don’t know much about the EU, they evaluate it through their opinions and knowledge of their national institutions. As Serricchio and his colleagues (2013) put it, “national institutions provide citizens with a cognitive shortcut towards trust in EU institutions” (see also Loveless and Rohrschneider 2011). In the Belgian context we expect voters dissatisfied with their national government and more generally dissatisfied with democracy will turn away from mainstream political parties and turn to radical and Eurosceptic parties (*hypothesis 2*).

The third approach stresses the political aspects of the integration process and highlights identity as a factor explaining voters’ support for Eurosceptic parties (Bruter 2005; Carey 2002; Lubbers and Scheepers 2007; Lubbers and Jaspers 2010; McLaren

2002). The deepening of European integration, especially after Maastricht and the constitutionalization process, as well as the widening of the EU, have triggered fears among citizens of loss of their national identity and anxieties related to immigration. Radical parties, especially on the right, tap into these feelings of insecurity and anxieties to defend national sovereignty and reject European integration (De Vries and Edwards 2009; Hooghe and Marks 2005; Lubbers et al. 2002). Radical right support is indeed often related to attitudes towards immigration and a feeling of ethnic threat (Werts et al. 2012; Kerhberg 2015; Kessler and Freeman 2005). Gomez-Reino and Llamazarez (2013) demonstrated for instance that Vlaams Belang voters were mainly motivated by that party's negative stance towards immigration. Similarly, Werts and his colleagues (2012) showed that political distrust and ethnic threat were the strongest determinants explaining radical right-wing voting. So we will determine if Belgian voters with negative attitudes towards European citizenship and immigration are more likely to support a Eurosceptic and radical party (*hypothesis 3*).

By contrast, the last approach of 'EU-issue voting' argues that van der Eijk and Franklin's (2004) 'sleeping giant' has awoken, and that Europe now plays a more central role during EP elections (De Vries 2007, Hobolt et al. 2009; Hobolt 2015; Tillman 2004). A number of studies have shown that parties with explicit positions on European integration perform better in EP elections (Hix & Marsh 2007; De Vries 2010). EU-issue voting is also shown to depend largely on the degree to which the EU issue is salient to political parties, the level of extremism in terms of EU positioning, as well as opposition status of the Eurosceptic parties (De Vries 2008, 19). Also, more intense, EU-centred campaigns increase the extent in which voters consider Europe in their choice (Hobolt and Wittrock 2011, Hobolt 2005; Garry 2005). As Treib (2014) explains, the 'Eurosceptic vote cannot be dismissed as a mere protest vote against unpopular governments'. Support for radical and Eurosceptic parties reflects the dissatisfaction and distrust of voters towards the EU and its policies (McLarren 2007; Hobolt 2015). In other words, rather than by the secondary explanations given above, the Eurosceptic vote can best be explained by Euroscepticism (*hypothesis 4*).

One may counter-argue that studies of EU-issue voting are somewhat 'biased' by self-selection. As EP elections are characterized by low turnout and low salience, showing up

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in EP elections is an expression of knowledge of and interest in Europe, and is therefore probably inherently linked to EU-issue voting. The Belgian case, however, presents an exceptionally representative and unbiased electorate due to compulsory voting and coinciding local, federal and EP elections.

2. Euroscepticism in Belgium and the 2014 elections

The Belgian 2014 EP election was, for multiple reasons, unlike any other. First, it is a traditionally Europhile country. In 2014, 69% consider EU membership as a good thing (compared to 51% in the EU-28) and 56% trust the EU institutions (43% for the EU-28) in the post-election Eurobarometer survey.¹ Among all but the very extreme left- and right protest parties, there is broad pro-European consensus and barely any competition on the issue of European integration. Several factors may be claimed to contribute to this context of low politicization of Europe.

Firstly, the European project is historically and geographically tied to Belgium. As a small, internally divided country in the European heartland, it has always been dependent on cooperation with its neighbours on economic, cultural and security matters. Belgium's institutional complexity and fragility may be another cause of its dependence on a European legislative framework.

Also, as one of the 'old', complying and less powerful Member States, Belgium has appeared as an ideal supplier for high-profile EU-officials, amongst which were included the first president of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy, and the leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) group, Guy Verhofstadt, who was one of the Spitzenkandidaten in the newly introduced procedure for the election of the EU Commission's President.

Flemish separatism appears to be a third factor preventing the birth and success of Eurosceptic parties. Especially in Flanders, the 'usual suspects' to politicize discontent with Europe, i.e., conservative, right-wing parties, have been pre-occupied with translating the democratic dissatisfaction, anti-elitist and utilitarian discourse that we typically find with Eurosceptic parties towards the federal level. In addition, as they propose the

¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/20150201PVL00053/Post-election-survey-2014>

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shrinking or even the eventual disappearance of the Belgian state, these parties need Europe, or at least the idea of a ‘Europe of the regions’, to present a stable future alternative for an independent Flanders.

The ambiguous relationship between regionalism and Euroscepticism in Belgium is especially clear for the liberal-conservative Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie (N-VA), which has increased its vote share in the federal election from 3.1 to 20.3 in the past decade. In its search for alliances at the European level, it first sat within the Christian-Democrat European People’s Party (EPP) from 2004 to 2009 before joining the regionalist European Free Alliance (EFA) in 2009. After the 2014 election, it negotiated with the liberal ALDE group, but clearly struggled with the expressively Eurofederalist profile of that group’s Belgian party leader, Guy Verhofstadt. Eventually, it joined the much more Euro-critical European Conservative and Reformist group (ECR), which hosts Eurosceptics such as the Danish People’s Party. The N-VA’s electorate, moreover, appears much more Eurosceptic than the party’s position suggests (Deschouwer & Hoon, 2015). With scapegoat Belgium on hand, Europe appears redundant for those parties that wish to challenge the status quo. Altogether, the much heard rhetoric of ‘foreign’ enforcement of rules and policies from far-away Brussels seems redundant and hence absent in Belgium.

The parties that do express strong Eurosceptic dissent are found at the very radical ends of the left/right spectrum, and are hardly viable contenders for political office. In Soerensen’s categorization (chapter x, this volume), the definition of hard Euroscepticism is restricted to parties that oppose the very principle or idea of intergovernmental cooperation in itself. However fierce their discourse, the parties at study do not oppose an intergovernmentalist European project as such, but the specific shape it currently takes in the EU. Despite the radical expression of their disagreement, they are therefore soft Eurosceptics.

At the extreme right, the Parti Populaire (PP) and Vlaams Belang (VB) both have a strongly extreme-right, xenophobe and populist profile with a politically incorrect connotation. In 2004, VB (then named ‘Vlaams Blok’) was convicted for discriminatory provocation by the Belgian Court of Appeal, after which the party adopted its current name to avoid being excluded from elections. Another indication of the extremity of its position

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in the party system is the ‘cordon sanitaire’, in which all other Flemish parties express their refusal to cooperate with VB. In other words, the only Eurosceptic offer the Belgian Eurosceptic voter faces are radical, not so evident and unviable, protest parties.

At the extreme-left end, Parti du Travail de Belgique (PTB-Go) and Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA+), fiercely reject the current shape and content of European integration from a socialist perspective, opposing the EU’s capitalist and market-oriented policies.

Lastly, the last two EP elections have coincided with elections to other, presumably more ‘first order’ offices. With the 2009 EP election, Belgians also elected representatives for their regional parliaments. In 2014, the EP election coincided with elections both at the regional and federal levels. Contesting for voter’s attention on salient socio-economic and institutional issues at the domestic level, Europe has clearly not been politicians’ or media’s priority in the months preceding these elections (Kelbel, Van Ingelgom & Verhaegen, 2014).

Table 1 shows the election outcomes for the 2009 and 2014 EP elections, as well as for the regional and federal elections that took place on the same day.

Table 1 : Election outcomes for the EP elections of 2009 and 2014

2009	Reg (FL)	Reg (WAL)	EP 2014	Reg (FL)	Reg (WAL)	Fed	EP
CD&V	22.9		14,4	N-VA	31.9	20.3	16,8
Open-VLD	15.0		12,8	Open-VLD	14.2	9.8	12,8
PS		32.8	10,9	PS		30.9	10,7
VB	15.3		9,9	MR		26.7	9,9
MR		23.4	9,7	CD&V	20.5	11.6	12,6
Ecolo		18.5	8,6	Spa	14.0	8.8	8,3
Spa	15.3		8,2	Groen	8.7	5.3	6,7
N-VA	13.1		6,1	VB	5.9	3.7	4,3
CdH		16.1	5	Ecolo		8.6	3,3
Groen	7.6		4,9	CdH		15.2	4,1
LD	7.6		4,5	PVDA/PTB-Go	2.5	5.8	3,5
CSP			0,2	PP		4.9	2,2
FN		2.9	1,3	FDf		2.5	1,2
PVDA+	1.0						
PTB+		1.2					

Sources: parlgov.com, verkiezingen2009.belgium.be and verkiezingen2014.belgium.be

We test the four hypotheses in separate binary logistic regression models, which predict the odds that a voter opts for one of the four radical Eurosceptic parties in the EP election, as well as at the regional and federal levels. We start from a very basic, ‘default’ explanation, which is that being radical on the left/right scale leads to a radical vote, and subsequently add the variables for each of the proposed hypotheses to this model. Finally, we develop a summary model containing all explanatory variables.

3. Data & Operationalization

We make use of the 2014 PartiRep Voter Survey dataset, which contains detailed individual-level information on respondents’ attitudes and voting behaviour in the three elections. The survey was conducted in two waves with a random sample of the populations of Flanders and Wallonia. The first wave with face-to-face interviews was fielded from March 20 to May 17 and resulted in 1008 interviews in Wallonia and 1000 in Flanders. After the election date of May 25th, a second wave of telephone interviews was conducted with the same respondents. Three booklets were sent to each individual, in which the lists for which they could vote in their constituency were reproduced. Respondents were asked to fill these in immediately after they had cast their vote. This use of a mock ballot ensures correct registration of the different votes at the different levels. The second wave resulted in 826 Flemish and 702 Walloon interviews.

The *dependent* variable in all three models is a dummy in which the vote for one of the four radical, Eurosceptic parties: the radical right Vlaams-Belang & Parti Populaire and the radical left PvdA + & PTBGo is coded as 1, and a vote for any of the other parties is 0. In the highly depoliticized context of Belgium, these four parties can be considered the only serious ‘contesters’ of European integration. For the extreme right Vlaams Belang, Europe is not the ‘core issue’ as it often is for Eurosceptic parties. However, it devoted some attention during the campaign to rejecting European solidarity with the indebted Member States after the euro crisis: it proposed abandoning all post-Maastricht agreements and introducing a ‘Neuro’-currency including only the Northern Member States (VB, 2014).

The contestation bold, yet soft (see *supra*) of both left and right Eurosceptic parties in Belgium is strongly linked to their radical ideologies, both of which ideologies, collide with the current shape of the European project. By consequence, their Eurosceptic discourse is focused on specific policy fields, yet expressed in very strong and radical rhetoric. For VB and PP, the EU unrightfully forces Belgians to support the budgetary shortages of other Member States, which allows for undesired labour migration and the arrival of economic refugees because of the Schengen Treaty. For both parties, this anti-immigrant rhetoric is mostly oriented towards immigrants from outside the EU. Especially the VB strongly contests the influences of Islamic culture. PTB-Go and PvdA+, on the other hand, strongly blame the EU for the lack of solidarity with the people of the Southern Member States, who are the victims of a strict, inhuman and undemocratic EU-austerity programme.

These radical parties are the only alternatives for voters who wish to express their scepticism through the vote, regardless of their, possibly much more moderate, left/right orientations (Deschouwer & Hoon, 2015). As parties' Euroscepticism springs from very different ideological backgrounds, it seems likely that voters' motivations are different too, and that the inclusion of both left and right Eurosceptics in one dependent variable obscures any support there might be for either one of the hypotheses. Therefore, we constructed separate dummy variables for left (PvdA+ and PTB-Go) and right Eurosceptic votes (VB and PP), and repeat the analyses with these dependent variables².

The *independent* variables in the models are standard control variables (i.e. *age and gender*), combined with the best predictor for radical voting: being radical on the left/right scale. To measure this extremity, we rescale respondents' self-placement on a 10-point left/right scale, referring to the ideological centre (5) as 0.³

The first model tests hypothesis 1 that the losers from European integration (those with low income, less educated and/or unskilled workers) are more likely to vote for a radical and Eurosceptic party. We investigate whether *income, education and occupational*

² These separate analyses showed no relevant differences with the analysis presented in 3.

³ As their response to the question: 'In politics, we often speak of the 'left' and the 'right'. Could you position yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning 'left', 5 'at the centre', and 10 'right'? We recode 10 and 0 to 5, 9 and 1 to 4, 8 and 2 to 3, 3 and 7 to 2, 4 and 6 to 1 and 5, 'in the centre', to 0.

status are related to radical voting. The annex provide frequency tables for the education and occupation categorical variables.

In model 2 (protest voting), we instead employ four measures for general attitudes towards political institutions and democracy. The Parti-Rep survey includes a range of questions measuring trust in various political institutions. We constructed a summated scale from five items measuring trust in national political institutions.⁴ In order to measure satisfaction with democracy, we use the question: ‘In general, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the functioning of democracy in Belgium?’. Thirdly, we include a direct measure for satisfaction with Belgian policy as response to the question: ‘To what extent are you satisfied with the policy of the Belgian government?’.

The third model tests the ‘identity hypothesis’. It includes European citizenship and attitudes towards immigration. Both measures are again summated scales, for which the separate items and Cronbach’s alpha are reported in the annex.

In the fourth and last model, we look at the EU-issue voting approach and include different attitudes directly linked to the EU. Firstly, satisfaction with European policy derives from respondents’ reply to the question: ‘on a 10-point scale, how satisfied are you with the policy of the European Union?’. We could consider this the best measure available for ‘soft Euroscepticism’. Second, we include self-placement on the pro-/anti-European integration scale, measured by the response to “Some people believe European integration should be advanced, others think it has already gone too far. Where do you position yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 meaning that integration has already gone too far, and 10 meaning that integration should be advanced”. This could be seen as a measure of hard Euroscepticism. The third variable tapping into euro-specific motivations is trust in the European Union, measured by means of respondents score on the following scale: ‘On a scale from 0-10, to what extent do you trust the European Union?’. We see trust not as a direct indicator of scepticism, but as a proxy that is rather related to the extent of confidence people feel about the daily functioning of EU institutions (see the introduction to this volume).

⁴ The five items included are trust in political parties, the regional (Flemish/Walloon) government, the federal government, the federal parliament and politicians. Cronbachs alpha = .922.

4. Analysis

0. Default model

The base-line model only takes into account *gender*, *age* and *extreme positions on the left/right scale*, which we consider the ‘default’ explanation for the radical vote. This model quickly shows that, however convenient, being radical on the left/right dimension does not suffice as an explanation for a vote for one of the radical parties. Although the variable is significant, the b coefficient (1.040) is only modest.

1. Utilitarian explanation

Utilitarian motivations are investigated in model 1. The coefficients do not reveal any support for the hypothesis that Eurosceptic voting is linked to social class or occupational status as measures of winning/losing from the integration process. The only significant variable in this model is *left/right extremeness*, with a moderate effect comparable to that in the default model (1.111). For the first two models, we may add that there is barely any difference with the results for the same analyses with regional vote and federal vote as dependent variables (reported in the Annex).

2. Protest voting explanation

The second model looks into the proposition that the Eurosceptic vote would not be so much about Europe, but reflects dissatisfaction or distrust with politics in general, an overall feeling of discontent with the political system, the government and disappointment in democracy may lead voters to radical, protest parties.

To investigate this proposition, we add trust in national political institutions and satisfaction with Belgian policy as well as satisfaction with the functioning of democracy to the default model. In the EP election, the coefficients for the first two variables support the hypothesis. Voters who have less trust in national political institutions, and who are

less satisfied with Belgian policy, are somewhat more likely to vote for one of the radical parties. The extent to which this model as a whole fits the data, is reflected in Nagelkerke's R^2 measure for goodness of fit of 0,09, which suggests that some 9% of the variance in radical voting behaviour can be explained by this model (table 2).

In the regional and federal elections, for which we report the same model in the Annex, we find an even less convincing pattern for this hypothesis: *satisfaction with Belgian policy* significantly predicts the odds of voting for a radical party, whereas *trust in national political institutions* does not. Nagelkerke R^2 is lower for both elections: 0,07 for the federal and 0,08 for the regional election (see annex). To a moderate extent, Eurosceptic parties have profited from protest voting. Despite somewhat stronger coefficients in table 1, however, it would be wrong to endorse the proposition that the EP election is used to express dissatisfaction about national political institutions.

3. Identity explanation

We also expected that voting for a radical, Eurosceptic party might have to do with voters' desire to protect the cultural boundaries of their nation-state. When we evaluate the coefficients for European citizenship and attitudes towards immigration in model 3 (table 2), we see that, at least in the regional and European elections, negative attitudes towards immigration may have played a role in voting for the Eurosceptic parties. The contribution of European citizenship to Eurosceptic voting is significant and, entirely against our expectations, positive. This clearly demonstrates how the identity-dimension of Euroscepticism is very differently reflected in Belgium compared to other cases. The cultural threat felt by those who vote for one of the Eurosceptic parties is very much related to immigration from outside the EU. A threat to Belgian identity posed by European immigrants may be ruled out by the fact that Eurosceptic Belgian voters themselves positively identify as 'Europeans'. It is perfectly possible that cultural pride of a Western, European project goes hand in hand with strong scepticism towards and critique of current EU policies. Like the protest voting model, this model is quite successful in predicting the radical vote in the European (Nagelkerke $R^2 = .10$) as compared to the federal and regional elections (as reported in the Annex, Nagelkerke $R^2 = .07$ and $.08$).

4. EU-issue voting explanation

Departing from the idea that it is indeed Euroscepticism that brought Belgian voters to the radical parties in this election, the last model introduces three very Eurospecific variables: *satisfaction with European policy*, *positions on the pro-/anti-EU integration scale* and *trust in the European Union*.⁵ In all three elections, *satisfaction with European policy*, or soft Euroscepticism, appears as a very good predictor for the radical vote: those who are less satisfied with European policy, are a lot more likely to vote for one of the radical parties (for this variable, the p-value surpasses the .001 confidence level and the b coefficients are -3.350 in the EP election, -2.377 in the federal and -2.531 in the regional election, see Annex). Positions on the pro-/anti-EU integration scale (hard Euroscepticism), as well as trust in the European Union, do not seem relevant here. For each election, *satisfaction with European policy* is the strongest contributor to the Eurosceptic vote, which underpins the EU-issue Voting proposition. The electorates' critique of European policy is very much in line with the 'soft', policy-specific Eurosceptic discourse of the parties that construct the dependent variable. There appears to be no such link for hard Euroscepticism, nor for identity scepticism.

It is also worth mentioning that we find the best goodness of fit statistic with this fourth model in the EP election: a Nagelkerke R^2 of 0.11 makes it the strongest model constructed so far (table 2).

⁵ As mentioned, *European citizenship*, included in model 3, may also be considered to fit this explanation.

Table 2 : Binary logistic regression for Euroseptic vote in the EP election

Binary logistic regression					
Dep = Euroseptic vote in the EP election					
	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Gender	.059(.198)	.166(.244)	.013(.206)	.104(.203)	-.112(.211)
Age	-.620(.388)	-1.046(.662)	-.451(.413)	-.937(.408)	-1.049(.432)
Left/right extremeness	1.040(.319)***	1.111(.336)***	.790(.330)**	1.069(.322)***	.683(.329)*
Education (ref = "none")					
Primary Education		1.068(.932)			
High school, incomplete		1.453(.952)			
Technical high school, incomplete		.761(1.007)			
Vocational high school, incomplete		1.527(.957)			
Completed high school		.816(.953)			
Completed technical high school		-.040(.979)			
Completed vocational high school		.975(.958)			
Higher education (college)		.719(.947)			
University degree		.403(.993)			
Income		-.321(.505)			
Occupation (ref = inactive)					
Self-employed/business owner		-.836(.772)			
Employee (in the public (civil servant) or private sector)		-.138(.509)			
Laborer		.204(.515)			
(Early) retired		-.371(.556)			
Unemployed		.115(.581)			
Student		-1.089(.780)			
Home maker		.179(.622)			
Trust in national political institutions			-1.612(.700)**		
satisfaction with Belgian policy			-1.605(.638)**		
satisfaction with democracy			1.370(.655)**		
Positive attitudes towards immigration				-1.612(.521)**	
European citizenship				2.415(.574)***	
satisfaction with European policy					3.350(.697)***
European integration (0 = against, 1 = in favour)					-.604(.398)
Trust in the European Union					-.473(.591)
Nagelkerke R2	0.021	0.087	0.088	.095	.112

5. Summary model and discussion

A separate evaluation of each model does not suffice to conclude that the Euro-specific explanation is the strongest one. Comparing the statistical strength of each model taken alone, we indeed find strong support for the EU-issue voting hypothesis. However, goodness of fit remains low for each one of the models. Also, alternative hypotheses were not completely rejected, and it is only logical that none of the explanations excludes the other. In order to evaluate how the explanations relate to each other, we now set up a final model (Table 3), which includes all independent variables expected to lead to a Eurosceptic vote.

As was to be expected, the overall explanatory power of these models is at every level larger than for the separate models. However, we notice that this difference is especially visible in the EP election (Nagelkerke $R^2=0.19$), which re-iterates the observation that this election was about Europe. In this summary model, the explanation that Eurosceptic voting is an expression of general dissatisfaction with politics is rejected. As noted by Abts and his colleagues (2009) as well as Treib (2014), support for Eurosceptic parties cannot be dismissed as a protest vote against national governments and policies. It reflects a specific discontent with EU policies. Also, the variables that delivered some support for the cultural explanation lose significance. Especially in the European election, satisfaction with European policy is the strongest predictor for the Eurosceptic vote. Compared to *left/right extremeness*, *satisfaction with European policy* shows itself to be a much more important factor leading voters to the four radical Belgian parties.

We now clearly see that Belgian voters have expressed their dissatisfaction with EU policies and their hostility towards issues related to EU citizenship. These results support the 'EU-issue voting' proposition (De Vries 2007, Hobolt 2015). In addition, the intense, but soft (i.e., policy-specific) Euroscepticism of the four radical Belgian parties is adequately reflected in its electorates. Not principled objection to the idea of European integration, nor the threat to European identity could pose to Belgian identity, but dissatisfaction with European policy is the best predictor for a radical vote.

Table 3 : summary model: binary logistic regression for casting a Eurosceptic vote in the regional, federal and European elections

Binary logistic regression for casting a Eurosceptic vote	Regional	Federal	European Parliament
Left/right extremeness	1.019(.377)**	1.195(.366)***	.887(.362)**
Trust in national political institutions	-.873(1.039)	.849(1.010)	.143(.973)
Satisfaction with democracy	1.114(.779)	-.203(.771)	.589(.722)
Satisfaction with Belgian policy	-.701(.795)	-2.01(.776)	-1.279(.758)
European citizenship	1.400(.786)	1.258(.757)	1.075(.743)
Positive attitudes towards immigration	-1.026(.652)	-.488(.627)	-1.196(.623)
	-		
Satisfaction with European policy	2,273(.848)**	-1.576(.814)*	-3.037(.810)***
European integration (0 is against, 1 is in favour)	.984(.470)**	.333(.468)	.124(.454)
Trust in the European Union	.737(.871)	-589(.829)	.248(.809)
Nagelkerke R2	.186	.155	.194

Controlled for: Gender (cat), Age, Education (cat), Income and Occupation (cat)

6. Conclusion

European integration has entered a new and more difficult phase of its existence. Against the back-drop of the economic crisis, Euroscepticism has become increasingly mainstreamed across Europe as a whole, becoming more salient, less contested and more legitimate (Brack and Startin 2015). As evidenced in the 2014 EP elections, public opinion has become more hostile towards the EU and radical, populist and Eurosceptic parties have become more successful.

The aim of this chapter was to understand if the electoral results of these parties reflected the voters' hostility towards Europe or whether other factors played a role. To do so, we concentrated on Belgium, a country where, as a consequence of the low politization of Europe, as well as compulsory voting and coincidence with regional and federal elections, one may expect issue voting to be least present. However, we find that those who voted for a radical and Eurosceptic party did so because of their attitudes towards Europe. In response to the question asked in the introduction of this volume: no, this EP election

was no longer ‘second order’ in the sense that, at least for the Eurosceptic voters, it was about Europe.

On the methodological level, this chapter demonstrates how *identity-Euroscepticism* is clearly different from *hard* and *soft* Euroscepticism and not necessarily linked to the vote in the same way. In Belgium, we clearly see that, as Soerensen rightfully points out in chapter x, the distinction between hard and soft Euroscepticism is not a matter of the intensity or boldness with which Eurosceptic discourse is expressed, but of the target of the critique: either the principle of European integration, or the current shape of European policy in specific policy fields. Belgian Eurosceptic parties exemplify very intense, but soft Euroscepticism. This position is strikingly well reflected in its electorates’ motivations.

On a positive note, we may conclude that even in a deeply depoliticized country, the second order perspective on EP elections no longer seems to explain everything. Europe has come to matter at the ballot box and EP-voting is more than just an outlet of domestic dissent. At the same time, it is questionable whether EU-issue voting in EP elections is a meaningful and effective political act, as the competence to further develop or reduce the scope of integration essentially lies with national parliaments and governments. The “vote against Europe”, in that sense, is not a constructive demand for representation at the European level and misses its political aim. Finally, the depoliticization of European issues in Belgium leaves voters ‘unserved’ by mainstream political parties (Deschouwer & Hoon, 2015). As we showed, it leads voters who are not so much radical as they are Eurosceptic to vote for radical and populist parties. As a consequence, it is not clear whether the link between Euroscepticism and the success of radical, protest parties is merely a result of the *offer*, as only marginalized parties channel doubts about European integration, or whether Eurosceptic voters’ opinions are in line with the intense, radical discourse of these parties.

More broadly speaking, the lack of a constructive, critical debate about what it exactly is that voters dislike about Europe may be due to the type of parties competing upon the issue, and the very basic pro-/anti- critique as formulated by them. Because of the lack of open and critical reflection on EU integration by mainstream parties, we now end up with a large group of radical, disparaging, sometimes even anti-democratic parties in the European parliament. The academic tendency to interpret votes for Eurosceptic parties

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as disguised expressions of other political sentiments may have contributed to that too, as it has moved us further away from understanding the content of anti-European attitudes. This study, as well as the other chapters in this volume, demonstrate that this perspective is no longer viable, at least in a study of Eurosceptic voting, and by advancing our understanding of the shape and content of anti-European sentiment, makes room for a more constructive debate about democracy in the EU.

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Annex

Logistic regression

Dep = Eurosceptic vote in the regional election

	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Gender	.042(.205)	-.092(.236)	-.019(.214)	.063(.210)	-.104(.210)
Age	-.656(.403)	-.850(.694)	-.487(.428)	-.960(.423)*	-.948(.423)
Left/right extremeness	.994(.330)**	1.181(.353)***	.725(.341)*	.982(.333)**	.716(.333)
Education (ref = "none")					
Primary Education		.308(.975)			
High school, incomplete		1.200(.975)			
Technical high school, incomplete		1.190(.991)			
Vocational high school, incomplete		1.428(.969)			
Completed high school		.805(.965)			
Completed technical high school		.170(.977)			
Completed vocational high school		1.308(.956)			
Higher education (college)		.609(.961)			
University degree		-.168(1.049)			
Income		-.314(.528)			
Occupation (ref = inactive)					
Self-employed/business owner		.573(.814)			
Employee (in the public (civil servant) or private sector)		.701(.673)			
Laborer		1.345(.673)*			
(Early) retired		.349(.719)			
Unemployed		.748(.760)			
Student		-.887(1.068)			
Home maker		.506(.813)			
Trust in national political institutions			-1.610(.729)*		
satisfaction with Belgian policy			-.889(.665)		
satisfaction with democracy			1.768(.679)**		
Positive attitudes towards immigration				-1.418(.538)**	
European citizenship				2.241(.593)***	
satisfaction with European policy					2.531(.538)
European integration (0 = against, 1 = in favour)					.116(.538)
Trust in the European Union					-.651(.538)
Nagelkerke R2	.019	.100	.075	.079	.068

Table A1. Binary logistic regression for casting a Eurosceptic vote in the regional election

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Logistic regression					
Dep = Eurosceptic vote in the federal election					
	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Gender	-.095(.201)	-.980(.682)	.163(.208)	-.089(.204)	-.221(.211)
Age	-.991(.397)**	.227(.760)	-.826(.416)*	-1.222(.414)**	1.339(.434)*
Left/right extremeness	1.209(.321)***	1.414(.344)***	.994(.332)**	1.203(.324)***	.948(.329)**
Education (ref = "none")					
Primary Education		.211(.540)			
High school, incomplete		.711(.552)			
Technical high school, incomplete		.702(.581)			
Vocational high school, incomplete		.709(.572)			
Completed high school		.317(.501)			
Completed technical high school		-.243(.534)			
Completed vocational high school		.816(.498)			
Higher education (college)		.552(.436)			
Income		-.2.63(.436)			
Occupation (ref = inactive)					
Self-employed/business owner		-.046(.792)			
Employee (in the public (civil servant) or private sector)		.307(.603)			
Laborer		.889(.610)			
(Early) retired		.091(.654)			
Unemployed		.985(.662)			
Student		-.359(.834)			
Home maker		.420(.734)			
Trust in national political institutions			-.933(.720)		
satisfaction with Belgian policy			-1.913(.646)**		
satisfaction with democracy			.537(.676)		
Positive attitudes towards immigration				-.691(.517)	
European citizenship				2.293(.584)***	
satisfaction with European policy					-2.377(.682)*
European integration (0 = against, 1 = in favour)					-.332(.399)
Trust in the European Union					-.539(.595)
Nagelkerke R2	.032	.088	.070	0.074	0.081

Table A2. Binary logistic regression for casting a Eurosceptic vote in the regional election

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	982	48.6
	Female	1037	51.4
Total		2019	100

Tabel A3. Frequency table: gender

		Frequency	Percent
Occupation	Self-employed/business owner	139	6.9
	Employee (in the public (civil servant) or private sector)	614	30.4
	Laborer	276	13.7
	(Early) retired	492	24.4
	Unemployed	127	6.3
	Student	167	8.2
	Home maker	104	5.2
	Other, inactive	97	4.8
	Total	2019	100

Tabel A4. Frequency table: occupational status

		Frequency	Percent
Education	None	44	2.2
	Primary education	317	15.7
	Technical high school, incomplete	102	5.0
	Vocational high school, incomplete	111	5.5
	Completed high school	290	14.4
	Completed technical high school	281	13.9
	Completed vocational high school	170	8.4
	Higher education	369	18.3
	University degree	199	9.8
	Total	2019	100

Table A5. Frequency table: education

Sum scale European citizenship		.
Items (4)	Indicate to what extent these statements about the EU correspond with your opinion. I see myself as a citizen of the EU I am proud to live in Europe I feel part of the EU I am proud that Belgium is a member of the EU	
Cronbach's alpha		.879
Sum scale Positive attitudes towards immigration		
Items (4)	Would you say it is generally bad or good for Belgium's economy that people from other countries come to live here? Would you say that Belgium's cultural life is generally undermined or enriched because of people coming to live here from other countries? Is Belgium made a worse or a better place to live in because of other people coming to live here from other countries? Would you say that immigrant people have come to take advantage of our wealth or rather that they contribute to our country's wealth?	
Cronbach's alpha		.871
Sum scale Trust in national political institutions		
Items (5)	To what extent do you trust the political parties? To what extent do you trust the Flemish/Walloon government? To what extent do you trust the federal government? To what extent do you trust the federal parliament? To what extent do you trust politicians?	
Cronbach's alpha		.922
<i>Tabel A5. Cronbach's alpha for sum scales: European citizenship, positive attitudes towards immigration and trust in national political institutions</i>		