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Transnational Perspectives and Euroscepticism: A Strategical Rhetoric of Blame

An Honors Thesis Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in The Department of Political Science and International Studies

By

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Under the mentorship of Dr. Jamie Scalera

ABSTRACT

The increasing success of Eurosceptic parties in national and European elections is undeniable. In the last twenty years, the European Union (EU) has faced economic, social, and political crises without much time in between. As a result, we are now the witnesses to an institutional crisis rendered even more real by the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU in January 2020. In this paper, I analyze the changes in rhetorical strategies employed by Eurosceptic parties to gather stronger electoral support. Many scholars have now agreed that Euroscepticism and the parties representing it have become mainstream and accepted by the general public (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2018). The journey to that acceptance, however, is less clear. While most agree that the crises that shook the EU have served as catalysts of success for Eurosceptic parties, the strategies employed to gather and use that momentum is less evident. Based on the cleavage theory and its subsequent adaptations, I argue that the distinction between domestic and transnational perspectives of issues can be used to understand shifts in party rhetoric and changes in their electoral scores. I use electoral data, scores from the Party Manifesto Project (Volkens et al., 2020), and original manifesto analyses to better comprehend the rhetoric of blame and its impact on party success. My findings suggest that the blame of transnational rather than domestic institutions for EU-wide issues is a strategy that allows Eurosceptic parties to strengthen their core and expand their electoral gain.

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Introduction

“The European Union will be the first death from Coronavirus,” Marine Le Pen, leader of the French Eurosceptic party Rassemblement National (National Rally – RN), predicted in March 2020 (France 24, 2020). She continued on, explained that the Union had “demonstrated its complete inability to bring any reaction, solidarity, or help [to its member states]” (France 24, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic comes as yet another crisis shaking the stability of the European Union (EU) in recent years. In fact, there is no doubt that Euroscepticism is on the rise. In 2016, the United Kingdom (UK) shook the rest of Europe by voting in favour of a withdrawal from the EU, making it the first time the EU lost a member state rather than gained one. After a very complicated and extended period of negotiation, this is finally done: the UK has officially withdrawn from the EU on January 31, 2020.

This, however, does not put an end to the need to study and comprehend the phenomenon developing before our eyes. Opposition to the EU and its values has become a mainstream and acceptable movement, after being designated as somewhat of an extreme opinion for several years. Increasingly, politicians blame the EU for problems that would have previously been considered domestic issues. Issues like the 2008 economic crisis and the 2015 refugee crisis have been framed as being worsened by the EU’s lack of response. At the same time, some politicians see themselves as possible reformers, or even saviours, of the Union and seek to rethink its role and powers. Understanding the sources behind that growth in dissatisfaction with the EU becomes crucial as we start to see the true consequences of the ideal of Euroscepticism. If there is a very ample amount of resources explaining, classifying, and conceptualizing...
Euroscepticism, the question still stands: how can we explain the recent increase in electoral support for Eurosceptic parties?

I argue that the answer can be found in a shift in rhetoric, specifically regarding blame. As political parties increasingly regard issues as transnational rather than domestic, they choose to blame the EU for lack of efficient action to solve these problems. I define this new behaviour as “transnational blame,” wherein political parties identify international institutions as responsible for a variety of crises. They may even choose to shift the blame from the domestic government to the EU, sometimes as a way of providing cover for that government.

Understanding this shift in rhetoric – and its larger consequences – is of drastic importance both from a policy and a theory perspective. First, it would be impossible to deny that the EU is in a crisis caused in part by Euroscepticism, and certainly made worse by it. Understanding the evolution of Euroscepticism and the different ways it gathers support becomes increasingly important in terms of policymaking. This transnational blame may hold important implications for the EU (and other international institutions) in the long-term, including regarding their survival and potential changes to their functioning. On the other hand, understanding the impact of transnational perspectives of issues on support toward the EU can serve as an addition to the theories of international institutions and democratization. Moreover, this newly gained approach may contribute to the academic literature and provide a new way of studying issues within international institutions.

Historically, opposition to the EU has become more prevalent since 1979, the date of the first direct elections to the European Parliament (EP). At the time, only a few
countries belonged to the EU – only nine states, against the 27 members. Hard-Euroscepticism – that is, the complete opposition to the EU project in all its shapes – was barely existent, and there was no parliamentary group exhibiting it. We had to wait until 1994 to see the apparition of the Europe of Nations (EN) group. This Eurosceptic parliamentary group went through a multitude of names across the years, including Independence and Democracy (IND/DEM) or Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), for instance. In 1999, this group was joined by the group Union for Europe of the Nations (UEN), and, in 2015, the group Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF). For the 9th Parliament, which was voted into session on the 23rd and 26th of May 2019, the hard-Eurosceptic group took the name Identity and Democracy (ID), under the leadership of French Member of the European Parliament (MEP) and representative of National Rally (RN) Marine Le Pen.

Nonetheless, although these groups are easily identifiable as entities that unite anti-EU parties from across Europe, they are not the only groups that experts have labelled as being Eurosceptic. The much more stable European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) has existed since 1995. It exhibits forms of soft-Euroscepticism – that is, the dissatisfaction with the current EU as it is, and the belief that it should be reformed, one way or another. Similarly, the Europe of Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group, founded in 2009, also express soft-Eurosceptic ideas under an ideal that they name “Euro-realism”. While the former focuses on ways a strong European integration will benefit the social and environmental field, the latter criticizes the overly centralized and ambitious nature of the EU which would like to reform into a “community of nations cooperating in areas where they have some common interests”
(European Conservatives and Reformists Group, 2018). The difference in beliefs of what the EU should be is crucial and permits a better understanding of Euroscepticism as a spectrum. Moreover, it also opens up a discussion regarding the way these parties perceive issues, as either transnational or domestic and how they advocate for the best ways to respond to them.

This paper considers various crises facing the EU and explores this newfound perception of these issues as being of transnational nature and caused (or worsened) by a transnational institution. I chose to discuss the recent crises that shook the EU in the 21st century: the Eurozone economic crisis, the migration crisis, the institutional Brexit crisis. I argue against the belief that “European politics is domestic politics by other means” and, instead, suggest that there is such a thing as European politics, based on the concept of a transnational understanding of issues.

**Literature Review**

As stated earlier, the study of Euroscepticism has followed its official appearance in 1979 and has gained in richness and variety of content ever since. Several authors are very prominent in the field, and their writing has allowed the scholarship to gain a deeper understanding of the concept and evolution of Euroscepticism across the years. To better explore the large body of literature that constitutes the scholarship around Euroscepticism, I chose to divide it into two categories: the study of the ideology itself and that of its support. My research will also rest on the cleavage theory: its origin and subsequent adaptations are also described here.
Euroscepticism: the study of the ideology

Within the study of Euroscepticism as an ideology, authors have chosen to adopt various methodologies and focuses. As such, the literature offers both research papers that study the content of party programs vis-à-vis the European project, as well as papers that chose to analyse the behaviour of parties as expressed through the actions of individual deputies and entire parties within and outside of the EP.

Paul Taggart (1998) started the discussion of the ideology by defining Euroscepticism as “the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (p. 366). His research also questioned the nature of Eurosceptic parties and led to the implementation of a typology based on a survey of West European parties. Taggart (1998)’s findings consist in a typology divided into four categories: (1) single issue parties which only exist to express Eurosceptic sentiments, (2) protest-based parties which are in opposition to the mainstream political system and establishments, (3) established parties which are governing parties, and (4) factions, which is the phenomenon of a party being divided from the inside based on disagreement on European integration (pp. 368-369). This typology has since then been modified by multiple authors or served as a starting point for the study of more specific elements of Euroscepticism.

Nathalie Brack (2013), for instance, engaged in research aiming to understand the strategies of Eurosceptic MEPs. She responded to Taggart’s typology by offering a different version of it, which she constructed through a study of a sample of party programs. In Brack’s (2013) typology, Euroscepticism is divided into three categories:
(1) hard Euroscepticism, which fully opposes the European project, (2) intergovernmentalism, which would rather see the EU as a forum for discussion rather than as a political actor, and (3) utilitarianism, which suggests that the EU should only intervene in situations where international cooperation is needed or beneficial without overtaking domestic governments’ responsibilities (pp. 90-91).

While Taggart (1998) and other authors who followed his ideas focused on the content of the rhetoric of Eurosceptic parties, other authors have chosen to focus on the parties’ behaviour both outside and within the EP. After offering a different party program content-based typology of Euroscepticism, Brack (2013) wanted to understand the varying behaviours of Eurosceptic MPs. As such, she has also observed actions of elected Eurosceptic MEPs as well as conducted interviews with some of them, classifying their behaviour into three different categories: (1) the Absentee, who does not take part in the EP sessions or the EU, and only has significant involvement on the domestic field, (2) the Public Orator, who uses their position as an MEP to criticize the institutions through speeches and plenary sessions, and (3) the Pragmatist who seeks compromise with other MEPs with the intend of changing the system from within (Brack, 2013, pp. 92, 97-101).

Brack (2013)’s behavioural classification is completed by that of Benedetto (2008), who focuses on entire parties and seeks to understand the lack of tangible results of Eurosceptic parties’ activities within the EP through a study of Eurosceptic MEPs. His findings led him to argue that the parties’ failure to bring any significant changes to the EU or even stimulate a significant debate is due to: (1) their size as minority groups, (2) the heterogeneity of their beliefs which prevent inter-group consensus, (3) the existing alliance of mainstream pro-EU group against Euroscepticism, and (4) their belonging to a
peripheral group rather than a mainstream group (Benedetto, 2008, p. 131). His analysis thus focuses on institutional and structural forces determining the presumable weak results of Eurosceptical parties’ activities.

Though authors have contributed additional information to the concept of Euroscepticism, there has been a relative consensus on its nature. As such, I use the definition by Taggart (1998) and adapted by subsequent scholars: “the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (p. 366).

**Euroscepticism: the study of its cause and success**

Following a similar desire to understand the behaviours of Eurosceptic parties, authors have sought to understand the reasoning behind their positioning within the EP. For instance, Marks, Wilson, and Ray (2002) questioned the ways party positioned themselves on new issues and studied a sample of parties represented within the European Parliament to explore their behaviour. Their research findings stated that the three factors impacting the European integration position were: (1) the party family, with the liberal and Christian democrats as least Eurosceptic and the extremes (both left and right) as most Eurosceptic, (2) the attempt of the party to attract their median support, which they judged as a rational strategy, and (3) the location of a party on the left/right dimension, as they found that peripheral parties very commonly choose more extreme ideologies to distinguish themselves (Marks et al., 2002, pp. 591-592).

Nonetheless, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018) found that the peripheral argument does not seem to hold nowadays. Their research sought to link recent crises to the growth
of Euroscepticism through the study of expert surveys from a variety of EU states. Among other findings which will be discussed below, Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018) observed that Eurosceptic beliefs have become somewhat of a mainstream idea, which should be considered a measure of success for the parties (p. 1203).

Moreover, in their research on the Eurozone crisis and the migration crisis’s impact on divides in Europe, Hooghe and Marks (2017) proposed an extensive study of the literature and leaned on Chapel Hill Expert Surveys and the TAN (tradition/authority/national) vs. GAL (green/alternative/libertarian) divide to conclude that the left-right cleavage may not fully explain the diversity of opinions regarding European integration (p. 23). In fact, they argued that other factors, such as geographic areas or position as the age of the party may also affect opinions of EU integration (pp. 22, 26). Hooghe and Marks (2017)’s research is discussed in further details later in this literature review.

This finding echoes the research of Hix (1999) and Van der Eijk and Franklin (2007) who both found the EU dimension to be unrelated to the left-right dimension. Hix (1999) has studied the policy positions of several party families in the EU to understand the evolution and changes in European integration through a new theoretical framework of the European political space. This framework includes two main dimensions: (1) integration-independence, and (2) left-right - based on two “value dimensions” (Hix, 1999, p. 73). After developing the theoretical framework, the author tested it on a sample of mainstream party leaders and found the political market in EU politics to be somewhat fragmented. Moreover, though there is a considerable left-right dimension in the EU (which tends to align with domestic positions), Hix (1999) found this left-right dimension
to be less related to the integration-independence than to a mainstream-extreme dimension, as mainstream and major parties tend to shift toward a pro-integration position (p. 87).

Similarly, Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) have questioned whether discontentment with the EU could represent an opportunity for national politicians to grow their platform, and what the likelihood of this occurring was. Their theory centres around the metaphor of a “sleeping giant,” which could be awakened by political entrepreneurs using the latent public opinion scepticism and the existing divisions between voters. Their use of a ten-point scale survey on individuals’ opinions of European unification led the authors to discover, among other findings, that attitudes towards the EU were largely independent of the left-right dimension (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2007, pp. 39-41). In other words, while political parties were likely to ignore the EU issue and attach it to a left-right dimension, the voters’ behaviour on EU integration was not actually expressed by the party position (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2007, pp. 33, 48).

Though these different papers show a lack of correlation between EU integration and the left-right dimension, the literature has not fully concluded on this matter. For instance, Marks and Steenbergen (2002) studied the evolution of political contestation in the EU, asking whether the debate about European integration could be reduced to a small number of dimensions and to what extent this debate might be related to traditional cleavages (pp. 879-880). The authors answered these questions by discussing four existing models of dimensions of contestation: International Relations Model; Hix Model; Regulation Model; Hooghe-Marks Model (Marks and Steenbergen, 2002, p. 885).
They found a certain correlation between the EU dimension and that of the left-right, showing that the Left-Right dimension tends to underlie opinions on European integration, most likely because new integration issues are simply assimilated into existing cleavages such as the Left-Right dimension (Marks and Steenbergen, 2002, p. 889).

Furthermore, multiple authors have sought to distance themselves from the ideologies themselves and instead focus on the outside elements that influence the growth of Euroscepticism. In their aforementioned study, “Putting Brexit into perspective: the effect of the Eurozone and migration crises and Brexit on Euroscepticism in European states,” Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018) explain that party-based Euroscepticism can be caused by multiple elements, including economic, social, and political factors, namely as responses to an economic crisis, anti-immigration sentiments, concerns about democracy and sovereignty, and nationally specific concerns (pp. 1204-1205). Their analysis focuses specifically on the 2008 economic crisis, the 2010 Eurozone crisis, the 2015 refugee crisis, and the consequences of the Brexit vote of 2016, but can easily be extended to other crises.

The study itself proposes to analyse the framing of “Europe” in different cases, showing that the EU might be described with the following factors: immigration, economy, values, democracy, environmental policies, militarism, neoliberalism, sovereignty, bureaucracy, democratic deficit, moral/cultural values, national issues, women’s issues, and asylum (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2018, pp. 1199-1202). They showed that, though each crisis has had a clearly different impact (e.g. the Eurozone crisis impacted mostly countries affected by bailout policies; the migration crisis
impacted post-communist states of central Europe; and Brexit has contributed to the legitimisation of the Eurosceptic narrative), the EU’s handling of the crisis as well as the rhetoric surrounding the events has had a tendency to increase feelings of Euroscepticism (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2018, p. 1207).

Other authors chose to follow a similar research question and sought to understand how crises can explain the rise of Euroscepticism. In their research on the growth of far-right parties in Europe, Polyakova and Shekhovtsov (2016) used two case studies (Greater Romania Party in Romania and Jobbik in Hungary) to suggest that far-right parties are especially concerned by the aforementioned crises. They described the fear of “Islamisation” of Europe, the 2008 economic crisis, the refugee crisis, and the terrorist attacks of 2015 as catalysts of the parties’ success, emphasizing the growing threat to the stability of the EU.

In fact, this group of issues is seen as a “triple crisis” (economic, social, and political) by Heisbourg (2015), who studied the political impact of the Syrian refugee crisis with the use of qualitative data describing the evolution of the asylum crisis (p. 9). The paper narrated the crisis, pointing out the conclusions which might be taken and the lessons that could be learnt, including the fact that the migration crisis simply served to worsen existing tensions and issues such as economic difficulties, German hegemony, and division between Member States (Heisbourg, 2015, pp. 10-12). Though the argument of the paper is essentially normative rather than quantitative, Heisbourg’s conceptualization of the “triple crisis” creates an understanding of the growing prominence of Euroscepticism in all aspects of society.
Many authors also chose to focus on a specific country-case to explore this triple crisis in depth. Krzyżanowski (2017), for instance, chose to focus on a case study of Poland to show the evolution of the Polish political discourse. He justified this choice of case-study by pointing out the uniqueness of the country in that immigration has been absent from the Polish mainstream discourse for years (Krzyżanowski, 2017, p. 5). Through a study of political speeches and Tweets from the party Law and Justice (PiS), Krzyżanowski (2017) found that anti-immigration issues are linked with larger patterns of anti-internationalism and Euroscepticism, often popularized by the mediatization of politics, an observation that can easily be expanded to other countries (pp. 10, 17).

In turn, in their research questioning the impact of the refugee crisis on Euroscepticism, Benedikter and Karolewski (2017) leaned on recent interactions between Italy and other EU member states. Their findings led them to argue that Italy was left alone to deal with the refugee crisis, rather than receiving substantial support from the EU. As such, this caused Italians to develop strong resentment and anti-EU feelings. Again, this seems to be the premise of extended research developing the way states have grown to expect a transnational response to issues they now see as transnational.

Nonetheless, there is little literature on this subject. Recently, in an effort to understand new divides in Europe, Hooghe and Marks (2017) adapted the original cleavage theory (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967) to conceptualize a transnational cleavage within parties. The cleavage separates parties encouraging the EU’s integration efforts from those supporting national sovereignty above all else. Hooghe and Marks (2017)’s approach could help understand Euroscepticism (and conversely, Euro-enthusiasm) from
a transnational perspective. Their paper is discussed in detail in the “Cleavage Theory” section of the literature review.

Harteveld et al. (2017) also demonstrated that European citizens can (and do) make the difference between various political institutions and tend to blame the institution responsible for a particular issue. The research focused on the refugee crisis’ impact on attitude toward the EU through a content analysis of the media and individual survey data. Among other findings, the authors found that the salience of the refugee crisis in the media was positively correlated with increased concerns about EU policies; in other words, if a crisis is more mediatized, it will cause higher levels of Euroscepticism (Harteveld et al., 2017, pp. 169-170). As stated earlier, the data also showed that, though the asylum crisis has increased Euroscepticism in every country overall, the level of mistrust of national political elites was less homogenous and depended on national circumstances, which shows that EU citizens are conscious of and understand different levels of governments (Harteveld et al., 2017, p. 172). Though the authors focused on the refugee crisis, it seems reasonable to infer that their findings can apply to a larger set of issues.

Based on these findings, it seems natural to wonder whether an increased understanding of issues as being transnational would cause an increase in Euroscepticism.

Cleavage theory

In order to develop my research, I chose to analyse Eurosceptic movements through an adaptation of the cleavage theory. Developed in the 1960s by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), from a study of election data and survey of parties, the theory proposes
that all European parties position themselves on one side or another of four cleavages defined by the authors. These cleavages are centre v. periphery (which gave birth to regionalist parties), state v. church (which divided secular parties from those aligned with a specific religion), owner v. worker (which represents the left wing/right wing separation), and land v. industry (which led to the appearance of agrarian parties).

Later, following historical development, some authors create other cleavages to further understand political parties’ behaviours and ideals. Focusing on the process of globalization, Kriesi et al. (2006) described the appearances of new cleavages in Western Europe (p. 921). They suggest fusing Lipset and Rokkan’s (1967) cleavages into two dimensions: a cultural (religion) dimension and a socio-economic (class) dimension (Kriesi et al., 2006, p. 923). Through the study of new party families, the authors argue in favour of a two-dimensional nature of cleavages and warn that new challenges, such as those of integration, may create or deepen new cleavages (Kriesi et al., 2006, pp. 925, 949, 951).

Moreover, authors such as Kitschelt (2004) propose that parties may only be successful based on the combination of position on two or more dimensions of cleavage (p. 17-19). Such findings are based on research questioning the changes in party systems in recent democracies and supported by surveys of parties in democracies of the Global North and individual survey data.

More recently, as stated earlier, Hooghe and Marks (2017) have chosen to explore the European crises through Lipset and Rokkan’s (1967) cleavage theory, conceptualizing a transnational cleavage and analysing the crises from that specific lens. Hooghe and Marks (2017)’s paper entitled “Cleavage Theory Meets Europe’s Crisis:
Lipset, Rokkan, and the Transnational Cleavage” forms the basis of my theoretical framework. Hooghe and Marks (2017) assess the newly formed transnational cleavage as a response to reforms leading to increased globalization. In particular, they affirm that the Eurocrisis and the migration crisis were critical instances for the emergence of the cleavage (Hooghe and Marks, 2017, pp. 4, 13-14). A survey of experts in the field leads the authors to understand that the cleavage is mobilized by new parties and non-mainstream parties, especially from the radical right, since it is very rare for established mainstream parties to be able to change their positioning at the level of conflict dimension (Hooghe and Marks, 2017, pp. 16-17). Thus, the new cleavage is embodied by new political parties who tend to be actors in the creation of social divisions rather than subjects to existing divisions (Hooghe and Marks, 2017, p. 7). As an addition, recent surveys showed a sharp decline in support for moderate parties, which confirms the author’s hypothesis that new, non-mainstream parties are becoming increasingly important (Hooghe and Marks, 2017, p. 22).

To finish, Hooghe and Marks (2017) describe the most active pole of the transnational cleavage as connecting various positions, including defence of national and western values, defence of national sovereignty, opposition to immigration, and trade scepticism (p. 11). Still, this does not put only radical right parties on the one extreme of the transnational cleavage (Hooghe and Marks, 2017, p. 24). Indeed, using the TAN vs. GAL cultural dimension model, the authors assess that the transnational cleavage is represented on both poles of the dimension but that separate regions of Europe have called to different political groups to express this new divide. Notably, while Western Europe has used the GAL vs. TAN dimension as an extension of the economic left vs.
right cleavage, Eastern European countries have called to the TAN pole to express their disagreement with transnational changes, and Southern European countries showed support for the GAL pole for a similar purpose (Hooghe and Marks, 2017, pp. 24-26). Hooghe and Marks’s theoretical framework will serve to create and refine the theory used in this paper.

Summary

The body of literature on Euroscepticism has shown us that Eurosceptic parties are growing in scope and importance within European institutions. Authors have highlighted social, economic, and political crises as potential causes of the recent growth. In turn, Euroscepticism has been painted as both cause and consequence of a new divide in society, between those who support globalization and those who would prefer putting national interests first. Hooghe and Marks (2017)’s transnational cleavage is one way of illustrating this cleavage. Still, though we know this new cleavage through its theoretical uses and characteristics, we can still question how the cleavage is expressed and how it presents itself in party rhetoric. Furthermore, with the aim of better understanding Eurosceptic growth, I propose to analyse how the transnational cleavage impacts party success.

Theory

The knowledge constituted from the rich body of literature about Euroscepticism paints the picture of a growing movement caused by a multitude of crises within the European Union. While this indicates that recent crises – economic, social, political, and
institutional – have had a role in causing the growth of Eurosceptic parties, the need for a systematic review of this causation is still present. This research seeks to respond to the following question: how can we explain the recent increase in electoral support for Eurosceptic parties? Based on the cleavage theory conceptualized by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and subsequently adapted by other scholars, as well as on the findings of Hooghe and Marks (2017), I suggest that a transnational understanding of issues is followed by an increase in Euroscepticism. In particular, I propose that a shift in blame within parties’ rhetoric (in favour of blaming transnational rather than domestic institutions) will be followed by higher success for these parties.

My theory is based on the understanding that increased transnational blame (x) causes an increased support for Euroscepticism (y). Taking into account that transnational issues are becoming more and more salient in the domestic level, these issues become increasingly present in party’s rhetoric and in voter’s minds. As per Hooghe and Marks (2017), the world sees a growing push against globalization and international institutions with the understanding that it is more prudent to prioritize the well-being of nation-states rather than the expansion of international alliances. As such, voters might be more convinced by Eurosceptic ideas and rhetoric, which suggest that the EU might be hurting the nations’ best interests. Instead of blaming the domestic government for a failure to address issues of importance to voters, it becomes increasingly easy for Eurosceptic parties to turn the blame for crises onto the EU.

The rationale behind this is the fact that the EU has put into place multiple institutions that transform domestic issues into transnational ones. For instance, and in the case of immigration, institutions such as the Schengen Area, the Common European
Asylum System (CEAS), and the Dublin Convention contribute to making immigration and asylum issues into transnational matters. Similarly, financial instability can be analysed from a European perspective, especially given the numerous commercial and financial agreements within the EU (including that of the Eurozone) as well as institutions like the European Central Bank (ECB). The Schengen Area and the European External Action Service (EEAS) make foreign security and the response to terrorist threat a European-wide responsibility. The list can go on.

My theory proposes that, as Eurosceptic parties turn to blaming the European Union for a variety of crises, their electorate becomes more intrigued – and even convinced – by their message, which allows the parties to grow in influence and importance.

The first concept upon which my theory rests is that of transnational blame as interpreted from Hooghe and Marks (2017)’s conceptualization of the transnational cleavage which “has at its core a cultural conflict putting libertarian, universalistic values against the defence of nationalism and particularism” (p. 22). Per their research, “the most active pole of [the transnational] cleavage connects national and western values, defence of national sovereignty, opposition to immigration and trade scepticism” (Hooghe and Marks, 2017, p. 11). I conceptualize transnational blame as another expression of Hooghe and Marks (2017)’s transnational cleavage in which parties choose to see crises as being inherently transnational. Transnational blame thus consists in framing issues as being caused or worsened by international institutions or the international system. It functions as a rhetorical strategy entailing a shift from domestic
blame (of national government, opposition party, structural issues, etc.) to transnational blame and aiming to increase popular discontentment with international structures.

The second concept (y), that of Eurosceptic party success rests on the definition of Euroscepticism, as coined by Taggart (1998) and adapted by subsequent scholars: “the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration” (p. 366). Further discussion of the concept of Euroscepticism was addressed in the literature review of this paper. The growth of Euroscepticism – and thus, the success of Eurosceptic parties – is studied in several research articles aforementioned including Brack (2013) and Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018). The latter one raises the observation that “Euroscepticism has shown that it has the capacity to enter the political mainstream and to become a position adopted by parties of government” (Taggart and Szczerbiak, 2018, p. 1203). I choose to look at the electoral success of Eurosceptic parties as a sign of political success for Eurosceptic ideas.

To explain the causal relationship between transnational blame (x) and growth in support for Euroscepticism (y), I rely on studies of the impact of political rhetoric on voters’ behaviour. Though a majority of the body of literature focuses on political campaigns in the United States, I chose to assume that the psychological effect of these campaigns is similar in European politics and that “campaigns fundamentally shape voters’ decisions” (Druckman, 2004, p. 577). As such, my research is based on the assumption that political rhetoric has the capacity of persuasion, that is: “the extent to which political messages are able to alter citizens’ attitudes, and thereby shape their behavior” (Motta and Fowler, 2016, p. 3). I also chose to acknowledge rhetoric as playing
a major role regarding the intensity of a crisis. Though crises might be felt differently in various countries, if a party rhetoric presents the crisis as being of high intensity, the electorate will respond to it based on the rhetoric, regardless of its objective intensity (Harteveld et al., 2018, p. 172).

From these assumptions, I construct my causal mechanism as follow: as Eurosceptic parties change their rhetoric and turn to a blame of transnational institutions in their official communication, voters become more persuaded to support a Eurosceptic platform in elections.

Table 1 below showcases the different possible results of a domestic blame or a transnational blame. My theory proposes that transnational blame causes an increase in Eurosceptic party success. Nonetheless, Table 1 proposes explanations for all possibilities and offers explanations if my hypothesis were to be nullified by the data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transnational blame (x)</th>
<th>Eurosceptic Party Success (y)</th>
<th>LOW PARTY SUCCESS</th>
<th>HIGH PARTY SUCCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO TO LOW BLAME ON TRANSDNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS</td>
<td>A potential blame on domestic government is upsetting to nationalist voters</td>
<td>This expresses a low level of trust for the national government. The Eurosceptic party is a way for voters to protest against their national government</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH BLAME ON TRANSDNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS</td>
<td>Voters might be attached to the EU institutions and believe that crises can be resolved through further expansion</td>
<td><em>This is my hypothesis: transnational blame helps Eurosceptic parties grow their support base</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 - Causal relationship between transnational blame and party success

In particular, the table does pose the problem of transnational blame leading to lower Eurosceptic party success. I explain this potential electoral result as being a call for further expansion of the EU. An insufficient response to a crisis might be pointed by
some policymakers as an argument in favour of a more federal EU. For this reason, I’d like to bring an extra nuance into my research by regarding soft Eurosceptics as two factions rather than one united ideology. I propose to understand soft Eurosceptics as either: (1) pro-European federalists who want the EU to be more powerful, in order to efficiently respond to crises, or (2) inter-governmentalists who wish for the EU to be a forum of discussions rather than a deciding political actor. For the purpose of this research, I loosely base this cleavage on the divide we see between the EP’s ECR and GUE-NGL. Nonetheless, research would benefit from an empirical demonstration of this nuance within soft-Euroscepticism, which could constitute a later project. For the purpose of my research, I address both hard Eurosceptic and inter-governmentalist Eurosceptic parties as my units of interest.

In summary, following Hooghe and Marks (2017)’s observation of a growing transnational cleavage in the EU, I hypothesize that parties may choose to blame the EU for taking away their country’s sovereignty or for failing to respond to the crises adequately, instead of blaming their domestic government. I trust that this increased tendency to blame the EU might be observable on official party rhetoric, such as party manifestos, with growing anti-EU rhetoric focused on regarding the EU as responsible for crises like the 2008 economic crisis or the 2015 refugee crisis. Based on Taggart and Szczerbiak (2018)’s findings that Euroscepticism is becoming mainstream and more appealing to voters, I further hypothesize that the parties’ strategy to put the blame on the EU rather than on their national government might show results in the form of electoral gains in the EP elections.
**H1:** If parties increase their level of transnational blame in their official rhetoric, they will receive a greater amount of electoral support in EP elections.

**Research Design**

Following this hypothesis, I have chosen to represent my independent variable, the level of transnational blame (x), through a study of party manifestos. The population for that variable is the entirety of party rhetoric, but for this research, I relied on a sample of party manifestos selected based on researcher’s skills and data availability. For my dependent variable, electoral support (y), I have chosen to look at a sample of election results among the population of all EP elections since 1979. In particular, I am collecting data on the following EP elections: 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019. For the study of my hypothesis, my unit of analysis is political parties. I measure their amount of transnational blame through their manifestos (x) and see its impact on their electoral gains in EP elections (y) through a quantitative analysis.

Since my independent variable is measured through the study of manifestos, I need to pick specific parties to serve as my sample. Due to data availability and skills of researcher, I selected political parties from the following countries: France, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, and Poland. Based on data previously gathered by various researchers (including Pahre et al., 2014) as well as the PopuList (Rooduijn, 2019), I created a list of Eurosceptic parties from these five countries. Through that list, I was able to select the manifestos which I wish to study based on data availability from the Manifesto Data Project (Volkens et al., 2020). I also only selected parties that have...
existed and participated in at least two EP elections between 2004 and 2019, as to be able to complete a full analysis of these parties, including with the change in rhetoric from one election to the other. This eliminated any political party that has only participated in one EP election before being disbanded. Based on those criteria, I have selected the following sample of Eurosceptic parties:

- United Kingdom: Brexit Party (Brexit); Conservative Party (Con); Democratic Unionist Party (DUP); Sinn Fein (SF); UK Independence Party (UKIP)
- Republic of Ireland: People Before Profit Alliance (PBPA); Sinn Fein (SF)
- France: French Communist Party (PCF); La France Insoumise (FI); Left Front (FdG); National Front/Rally (FN/RN)
- Spain: Galician Nationalist Block (BNG); Podemos (Podemos); United Left (IU); Voice (Vox - V)
- Poland: Law and Justice (PiS); League of Polish Families (LPR); Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (SRP)

For the statistical analysis, I considered the following parties as the same unit: UKIP and Brexit, and FdG and FI. In the case of UKIP and Brexit, I considered that the departure of several UKIP MEPs to join the Brexit Party, as well as the fact that the Brexit Party was formed by Nigel Farage – UKIP’s “greatest electoral asset” – hint as a continuation of UKIP’s legacy in the Brexit party (Walker 2019; Osborne 2019). Similarly, for FdG and FI, I understood the presence of MEP Jean-Luc Mélenchon on all ballots (2009 and 2014 for FdG, 2019 for FI) as a similar continuation of ideas under a different party name (Castaño Tierno 2018; Laïreche 2016).
On the other hand, I have chosen to study the party’s success in EP elections in 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019 for two reasons. First, Hooghe and Marks (2017) discuss the emergence of transnational cleavage and base their observation upon recent years. As such, it would be counter-intuitive to try to identify the cleavage in a time where it might not have existed yet. Similarly, my research aims to understand the current and continuous growth of Euroscepticism, which requires a study of contemporary parties. Secondly, studying the aforementioned elections years allow me to account for the recent crises shaking the EU. In particular, I acknowledge each year as follow:

- 2004: baseline
- 2009: response to the Eurozone economic crisis
- 2014: response to the growing refugee crisis
- 2019: response to the political and institutional crisis caused by Brexit

I expect to see a change in rhetoric preceding these elections with an increased amount of the manifestos devoted to discussing these crisis – and their causes. Based on my hypothesis, I also anticipate a potential change in electoral results following these changes in rhetoric.

As stated, my independent variable is the change in transnational blame as measured by party manifesto content. In order to find quantifiable data, I relied on the Manifesto Data Project (Volkens et al., 2020) which provides a systematic study of manifestos under the form of quantitative data. I used the following indicators such: Internationalism Positive and Negative ([107], [109]), and European Union Positive and Negative ([108], [110]).
Electoral results stand as my dependent variable \((y)\), which I expect to change based on the level of transnational blame \((x)\). I collected the electoral scores of my sample of parties directly from the reports of the European Parliament. Though the EP tends to emphasize the number and percentage of seats allocated to each party, I collected the data specifically on the percentage of national votes in support of a given party to account for vote share rather than seat allocation. As stated, I reported on these electoral scores for my party sample and for the four elections I have chosen: 2004, 2009, 2014, 2019.

Based on that data collection process, I obtained for each year and each party two numbers: (1) one measuring the level of transnational blame and (2) one representing its electoral success. I ran statistical analyses of the data to identify potential correlation and its strength. I searched for correlation both between \(x\) and \(y\) values and between their difference. The existence of a correlation would allow me to reject \(H_0\) and potentially confirm \(H_1\).

Following the confirmation of \(H_1\), I worked on finding a model representing the relationship between \((x)\) and \((y)\). In other words, I ran further analyses to represent, quantitatively, the way transnational blame influences electoral success. In particular, I worked on a model quantifying the variation in transnational blame in a given manifesto \(x\) (corresponding to an electoral result \(y\)) and the blame in the previous manifesto \(x_{-1}\) (corresponding to the previous election results \(y_{-1}\)) and its relationship to the variation between \(y\) and \(y_{-1}\). A potential way of representing the relationship could be as follow:

\[
y = a \cdot y_{-1} + b \cdot x + c \cdot (x - x_{-1})
\]

(with \(a\), \(b\), and \(c\) being coefficients to be determined by statistical calculations)
The model above represents the electoral results of a Eurosceptic party for a given election based on knowledge of previous electoral results and level of transnational blame shown by that party.

Upon completion of the statistical analysis, I complemented this quantitative study by adding my own observation of manifestos, especially when it comes to the distinction in the tendency to blame domestic or international institutions, which is unfortunately not an indicator used by the Manifesto Project Database. To that end, I performed an original study of sampled manifestoes and research certain keywords (or their translations when it is relevant) including but not limited to: “European Union” “Europe” “European” “Euro” “Eurozone” “Schengen” “Commission” “Maastricht” “Lisbon” “European bureaucracy” “Brussels” “Elite” “Merkel” “Sovereignty” “Democratic Deficit.” I have selected these keywords to permit an easy identification of any reference to the EU, whether neutral or negative (in the case of “Brussels,” which tends to have a negative connotation, for instance). This analysis allowed me to identify patterns in transnational blame rhetoric, as well as permit me to study more complex elements such as the shift from an economic-focused blame to a more social one between 2009 and 2014. Similarly, this qualitative analysis also showcased the strength of transnational blame and the level to which it is implied or directly stated by various parties.

Analysis

The analysis of data collected from the Manifesto Data Project (Volkens et al., 2020) allowed me to highlight some interesting relationships between variables. In particular, I
chose to substitute the transnational blame scores for indicators 109 and 110, defined by the Manifesto Data Project as follow:

- **109 Internationalism Negative**: “Negative references to international co-operation. Favourable mentions of national independence and sovereignty with regard to the manifesto country’s foreign policy, isolation and/or unilateralism as opposed to internationalism.” (Volkens et al., 2020)

- **110 European Community/Union Negative**: “Negative references to the European Community/Union. May include: opposition to specific European policies which are preferred by European authorities; opposition to the net-contribution of the manifesto country to the EU budget.” (Volkens et al., 2020)

I decided to perform my quantitative analysis with these two indicators due to their close relation to a potential “transnational blame” indicator, which unfortunately does not exist in the Manifesto Data Project. Nonetheless, I found that “negative references to international co-operation” and “opposition to specific European policies” are very likely to happen in the presence of blame targeted at international institutions.

Indicators 109 and 110 are referred to as S109 (score 109) and S110 (score 110) in the statistical analysis. I also included derived variables including D109 (difference 109) and D110 (difference 110) which stand for the numerical difference between the score for a given manifesto and the previous one. Similarly, the independent variables EP, DEP, EP-1 and DEP-1 all stand for some variation of the party’s electoral results in the European Parliament. EP stands for the electoral score received on a given election, DEP for the difference between the score for a given election and the previous one, EP-1 for the score of the previous election, and DEP-1 for the difference between the score for
the previous election and the one even before that. Based on these different figures, and though I have collected data for 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2019, I constructed my table and analysis by showcasing the election results for 2014 and 2019 to allow for the calculation of DEP and DEP-1 which would not be available for 2004 and 2009.

An important issue that arose during the data collection and analysis was that of data availability. Unfortunately, the Manifesto Data Project does not study all manifestos but only those of parties with some electoral importance domestically; in other words, they only touch on successful political parties, which reduced the amount of usable data. In order to have a significant data analysis, I have chosen to calculate the scores for 2014 and 2019 together. Though this removes the existing control variable based on election particularities (as a particular result may be due to an event occurring prior to a given election), this made the statistical analysis possible. During my study of the data, I have also noticed that S109 and S110 were quite often given a null score of 0.00 (50% of available scores are 0.00 for both S109 and S110). The validity of these null scores could potentially indicate the need for further study of the manifestos, especially for parties that are well known for their negative rhetoric toward international co-operation or the EU. 

*Figure 1* compares S110 to electoral results (for all four elections). The high number of dots situated exactly on the y-axis illustrate the issue with these null scores.
I chose to pursue two analyses: one with inexistent data replaced by the median of all available scores (S109 and S110) and the second one with only the available scores.

The ensuing statistical analysis presented two low to moderate correlations between dependent and independent variables. In particular, Figure 2 showcases the level of correlation calculated between the chosen variables. I was specifically interested by the correlation of 0.3 between EP and S109 as well as the correlation of 0.42 between EP and S110. This indicates that there may be some link between negative references to international co-operation (or the EU) and electoral results for a given party. It is also important to note that S109 and S110 are somewhat correlated (0.37), which is not too much of a surprise given that they score quite similar phenomena. In other words, a negative view of international co-operation may be paired with a negative view of European integration. Similarly, positive references to national sovereignty might be present in both Internationalism Negative and European Union Negative.
Further statistical analysis and calculation of p-values revealed some more information about the data, as shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4. In particular, though the confidence interval for Pearson’s correlation between EP and S109 included 0 (and thus did not permit for \( H_0 \) to be rejected), a calculation of Kendall’s correlation resulted in a tau superior to 0.3 and a low p-value (0.04). This could indicate that EP and S109 vary in the same direction, which might confirm my hypothesis that, as transnational blame increases, so do party electoral scores.

Figure 5 showcases the potential correlation between S109 and EP. It is notable, as stated before, that the values are quite scattered and cannot confirm a strong correlation between the two variables.
In the case of S110, however, I was able to confirm a correlation through calculations shown in Figure 6. Indeed, a calculation of Pearson’s correlation indicated with a 95 percent confidence interval that the true correlation is 0.41*. It confirmed that it is not equal to 0 and is positive interval: 0.017 and 0.703. As such, I can affirm with a 95 percent confidence that there is a correlation between negative references to the EU and electoral scores at the European Parliament. Since S110 is a stand-in scoring system for transnational (in particular EU) blame, the existence of the correlation between S110 and EP might be reflected in the study of my original data. In other words, the correlation between S110 and EP could indicate that my hypothesis that levels of transnational blame impact electoral results can likely be confirmed.
Figure 7 showcases the correlation between S110 and EP. One notable outlier (16.47; 26.77) represents the score and electoral results for UKIP in 2014. This could cast some doubt upon the reliability of this datum, as all other S110 figures are scored between 0.00 and 6.00. Nonetheless, even with the exclusion of this datum, I can still confirm with a 95 percent confidence that there is some correlation between S110 and EP.

Figure 4 Graph of the correlation between EP and S110

After confirming the existence of a correlation between S110 and EP (hinting at a correlation between transnational blame and electoral results), I attempted to calculate a model aiming to predict electoral results based on known manifesto scores. As stated earlier, I worked on two models: one with imputed data (replacing all non-available data with the median of available data) and one with only the available data.
A first regression analysis of the data (with imputed data where it was non-available) showed the calculation results in Table 2. The resulting model proposed to calculate EP based on EP-1, S109, and D110. The very low (i.e. smaller than 0.001) p-value of F-statistic indicated that H₀ may be rejected and that the addition of the variables contributed to improve the fit of the model significantly. Thus, the model is as follow:

\[
EP[n]=0.43+0.84\times EP[n-1]+5.39\times S_{109}+1.7\times D_{110}
\]

It indicates that a party’s electoral result for a given election is dependent upon previous electoral result and tends to increase with S109 and D110. In other words, the higher the score for negative references to international cooperation are, the higher the party results will be. Similarly, as negative references to the EU increase (compared with the previous manifesto), so will the electoral score the party obtains.

The second regression analysis (with only available data) showed the calculation results presented in Table 3. The resulting model is quite interesting for my analysis. Indeed, like for the previous one, it suggests calculating the results of a given election based on EP-1, S109, S110, and D110. Again, the very low p-value of F-statistic allowed me to reject H₀ and confirm that the model is significantly improved by the overall addition of variables. The model is as follow:

\[
EP[n]=4.2+0.76\times EP[n-1]+15.63\times S_{109}-2.28\times S_{110}+2.8\times D_{110}
\]

An important point to note is the high coefficient linked to S109 (equal to 15.63). This serves to indicate that the level to which a party negatively refers to international cooperation (or positive reference to sovereignty and isolationism) is highly relevant in the calculation of the party’s electoral score. In other words, the more a party advocates
for more isolationism and criticizes international co-operation (and the more they increase their rhetoric anti-EU), the higher the score they will receive in elections.

Another interesting part of this model is the negative coefficient associated to S110, which seems to indicate that, the more a party refers to the EU in a negative light, the lower the score they will receive. However, since I have found a correlation between S110 and EP, I can safely argue that this is not the case. Instead, I interpret this negative coefficient in light of the existing correlation between S109 and S110 (0.37). This gives insight in the global contextual behavior of the model and shows that S109 and S110 reinforce or compensate for one another. In other words, there might be an existing limit on the level of Internationalism/EU negative references and, as one of the indicators reaches that limit, the other must compensate by decreasing. This could be illustrated by the understanding that if a party makes a very high amount of negative references to international co-operation in general, it might not need a similarly high number of negative references to the EU to properly communicate a message against international co-operation.

This statistical data provides me with the ability to reject H₀ and, instead, confirm that transnational blame does have an impact on party success. In other words, this analysis highlights and confirms the new pattern of blame that I have identified and described thorough this paper. Parties are increasingly making use of this new rhetorical strategy and painting international organizations – and in particular the European Union – in a negative light. In return, it seems that this strategy pays off, as these negative references are correlated with higher electoral success. To the extent that this pattern persists, I expect Eurosceptic parties to continue receiving an increasingly higher vote
share. Understanding this pattern becomes crucial in the study of the growth of Euroscepticism. Similarly, those findings can also prove useful from a policy perspective. The success of parties that constantly condemn the failures of international organizations may actually highlight the need for communication to be changed on the side of these organizations as well. Clear communication of the European Union’s successful endeavors might prove an efficient answer to the growing pattern of transnational blame.

Illustration

After demonstrating the relevance of transnational blame in the rhetoric of a political party, it is interesting to see how it takes shape and the language it adopts. Here, I showcase the use of this rhetoric of blame in the case of the Rassemblement National (formerly Front National), a French far-right party that has built its platform on anti-immigration and anti-EU ideas. I sampled four manifestos: that of 2002, 2007, 2012, and 2017 (all French presidential election years) to collect examples of transnational blame being used.

The 2002 Front National manifesto acts as an excellent baseline for my analysis. Though it is very heated in its criticism of the EU, it mostly reflects on the European integration project rather than on specific actions by the EU. It clearly fixes its positioning on the transnational cleavage described by Hooghe and Marks (2017) by emphasizing the importance of national sovereignty and its disagreement with any form of international organizations. At the same time, though, I found a lack of specific blame, replaced rather by a fundamental disagreement with the identity of the EU.

“L'Europe de Bruxelles est une prison pour ses peuples. - Brussels’ Europe is a prison for its people.” (Front National and Le Pen, 2002)
“La Nation est, pour tous les Français, le cadre naturel de leurs libertés et de leur souveraineté. Toutes les atteintes portées à ces dernières seront remises en cause : Convention de Schengen, traités de Maastricht et d’Amsterdam, ‘Nouvel Ordre Mondial’. Si elle n’obtient pas la protection de ses intérêts, la France sortira de cette Europe-là. – The nation is, for all French people, the natural setting of their freedom and sovereignty. All violations upon the latter will be challenged: Schengen convention, the treaties of Maastricht and Amsterdam, the ‘New Global Order.’ If it doesn’t obtain the protection of its interests, France will leave this Europe.” (Front National and Le Pen, 2002)

A specific case of blame denounced by Jean-Marie Le Pen’s 2002 Manifesto is that of the lack of action by European scientific institutions in dealing with the mad cow disease (BSE) in due-time and endangering the populations by failure to take action.

“D’autres organismes et comités ‘scientifiques’ fonctionnent au niveau européen: ce n’est qu’en 1996 que la commission européenne a commencé à se pencher sur l’interdiction d’exportation du boeuf britannique alors que le problème était connu depuis 1986. – Other ‘scientific’ organisms and committees function at the European level: only in 1996 did the European Commission start to consider the interdiction to export British beef, even though the problem was known since 1986.” (Front National and Le Pen, 2002)

Similarly, though the Front National warns that the EU will endanger French interests, there is no real blame besides the BSE as mentioned above. All attacks are predictions based on fears that the EU might protect its own interests rather than France’s and, as such, cause issues. Nonetheless, concrete examples are rare.

The 2007 manifesto is similar in its relative absence of specific attacks and blame against the EU, primarily since a vast majority of the manifesto focuses on propositions for the presidential program rather than a more detailed description of the party’s view. Nonetheless, I still noted a blame on the EU with regards to its agricultural politics which, the FN says, endangered French farmers by forcing them onto a dishonest and competitive global market.
“Depuis plus de 20 ans, les pouvoirs ont décidé de mener, via notamment Bruxelles, des politiques de baisses massives des protections douanières du territoire français et européen. C’est un choix politique qui a été fait et que les paysans ne discutent pas. Mais ce choix a entraîné pour eux une concurrence déloyale. En effet, pendant que le monde agricole français et européen est soumis aux coûts de la protection environnementale, du bien-être normal des animaux, des salaires européens et de la protection sociale européenne, les produits arrivant du Pacifique sud ou du Brésil, eux, n’ont pas ces coûts. – For twenty years, the power have decided to lead, notably from Brussels, politics of reduction of custom protections on the French and European territory. This is a political choice, against which farmers do not argue. Still, this choice has led to unfair competition for them. Indeed, while the French and European agricultural world is subject to the cost of environmental protection, well-being of animals, European salaries, European social protection…, the products coming from the South of the Pacific or Brazil are not subject to those costs.” (Front National and Le Pen, 2007)

This criticism is also followed by that of the European politics of immigration.

This is, however, not a surprise given that the FN has historically built its platform around the opposition to any form of immigration, especially from developing countries.

Moreover, though it does blame the EU for a lenient attitude vis-à-vis undocumented immigration, the manifesto also points to the domestic government for a very similar behavior.

“The European Commission refuses to lock Europe in fixed borders. Against the massive arrival of illegal immigrants on the European
territory, the European Commission decided to create, on October 3rd 2005, FRONTEX, a European agency that manages the external borders of the EU. This is a costly and derisory gadget. All of the European immigratory directives (from 2003 and 2004) contribute to a same goal: facilitate immigration toward the common territory through an accelerated harmonization of immigration and asylum politics. Since the treaty of Amsterdam in 1999, illegal immigration, irregular stays, and repatriation of illegal immigrants are all within EU competency. Only legal immigration is still (and for how long?) relevant to domestic competency.” (Front National and Le Pen, 2007)

“Bruxelles n’est pas seule responsable. La France s’inscrit dans la même logique d’ouverture des frontières, de suppression des monopoles d’État et des services publics, de concurrence effrénée, d’élargissement de l’Europe, de démantèlement de notre souveraineté. – Brussels is not the only culprit. France subscribes to the same logic of opening borders, suppressing state monopolies, encouraging unrestrained competition, expanding Europe, and dismantling our sovereignty.” (Front National and Le Pen, 2007)

In 2012, Marine Le Pen, Jean-Marie Le Pen’s daughter, takes on the leadership of the FN. In the 2012 manifesto, her language is much more aggressive than her father’s, and the blame on the EU is much clearer, even from the first few pages, where she denounces the single currency policy’s failures. She accuses the EU of being responsible for the economic crisis and for weakening France’s economy.

“Depuis 10 ans, l’euro, monnaie unique, n’a tenu aucune de ses promesses. Son bilan est sans appel : explosion des prix, chômage, délocalisations, dette. […] La France s’est déjà endettée de 60 milliards d’euros pour renflouer la Grèce, l’Irlande et le Portugal. […] Rester dans l’euro, c’est se condamner à mourir à petit feu. - For ten years, the single currency Euro, has held none of its promises. Its assessment is irrevocable: rise of the prices, unemployment, outsourcing, debt. […] France has already taken on a debt of 60 billion Euros to assist Greece, Ireland, and Portugal. To continue using the Euro is to condemn oneself to a slow death.” (Front National and Le Pen, 2012)

Other arguments in the 2012 manifestos focus on European policies with regards to agriculture, hunting, and fishing. The too-strict policies, the manifesto states, endanger French people. Similarly, they criticize the “dogma of free and
real competition” within the public sector and especially public service. Finally, the “dogmatic European construction” is seen as “a complete failure”

To finish, the most recent manifesto, from 2017, is not outdone. Though it is much shorter, its blame of issues on the EU are very clear. Along with discussing the problem of immigration and that of the Common Agricultural Policy, the manifesto also denounces a mismanagement of finances by the EU, wherein France has found itself dependent upon the European Central Bank.

“Remettre de l’ordre dans nos finances publiques par la fin des mauvaises dépenses publiques (notamment celles liées à l’immigration et à l’Union européenne) […]. Sortir de la dépendance aux marchés financiers en autorisant à nouveau le financement direct du Trésor par la Banque de France. – We must rearrange our public finances and end bad public spending (especially those linked to immigration and the European Union […]. We must escape the dependency upon financial markets by allowing the direct financing of the Treasury by the Banque de France.” (Front National and Le Pen, 2017)

Another interesting point in the manifesto is that of symbols, wherein Marine Le Pen insists that we must showcase the French flag in all public buildings and “remove the European flag” (Front National and Le Pen, 2017). This is a clear sign of the party’s clear opposition to all forms of the European project as it stands.

All in all, those manifestos show the evolution in the way Europe was perceived in the past two decades: from an original mistrust of the project and a suspicion that it might lead to unintended consequences, the language and the rhetoric have evolved to instead blame the European Union for problems that would have been a responsibility of the state a few years before. Blame is very present in the most recent political communications, and manifestos are but one example of the way this is expressed.
Speeches and television interviews often offer an even stronger depiction of this rhetoric of transnational blame.

**Conclusion**

Thorough this thesis, I have worked to find and propose an explanation for the recent increase in electoral support for Eurosceptic parties, specifically looking at their gain in the European Parliament. I have developed an argument based on the cleavage theory, suggesting that a transnational understanding and description of issues may be followed by an increase in Euroscepticism, especially if it is accompanied by a blame turned toward the European Union rather than domestic institutions. Thorough a statistical analysis that used indicators from the Manifesto Data Project to quantify transnational blame \( (x) \), as well as the party vote shares for the last four European Parliament elections to signify party success \( (y) \), I have discovered the presence of a significant correlation between the two variables. In other words, I was able to prove that the presence of transnational blame within a party’s rhetoric does impact the party’s electoral success. Those findings can highlight the reasoning behind the changes in the rhetoric of Eurosceptic parties and may have strong implications for European Union politics.

The mistrust toward international organizations is, of course, nothing new. Euroscepticism has been present and growing for years and so have other movements opposing the expansion of international organizations. Nonetheless, the shift in the rhetoric of blame that I described in this paper is more recent and its consequences might be drastic, both from a policy and a theory perspective. The external crises that the EU
has faced have contributed in worsening the internal crisis that scholars have been continuously studying and that saw its first major consequence with the final withdrawal of the United Kingdom in January 2020. Understanding how political parties make use of these external crises to expand their support base becomes crucial to devising policies to respond to the larger institutional crisis. As mentioned earlier, the European Union might need to focus on methods to better communicate its successes as to mitigate the effects of transnational blame and, instead, highlight the benefits of belonging to the Union.

On a more academic and theoretical basis, I was able to propose an explanation for the continued growth of Euroscepticism, which scholars have known questioned for years. Though rhetoric does not, obviously, tell the full story and does not fully account for the success of Eurosceptic parties, it is important to acknowledge its crucial role in helping the parties expand their support base in EU countries. Moreover, the phenomenon of transnational blame that I identified and studied is not one that stops at borders and there is much to be said about how it might impact other regions of the world.

Further research could focus on this pattern on a greater scale or in a different area, which could contribute to confirming this research’s findings and conclusions, as well as inform both the academic and the policymaking community on the future of international organizations. Moreover, this thesis and its findings rely essentially on indirect data, as the independent variable – transnational blame – is evaluated through indicators from the Manifesto Data Project (Volkens et al. 2020). As discussed in the analysis section of my thesis, this reliance on outside data caused certain limitations, including in making the sample a bit small due to the absence of certain scores. Future scholars could work on improving and re-testing the findings of this thesis through
original data collection. In particular, it could be worthwhile to rely on a linguistic analysis software to research keywords linked to the European Union and identify the level of blame in given sentences. Through the results of the linguistic analysis, scholars could obtain scores measuring the amount of transnational blame for a given party on a given year and substitute these scores for the ones from the Manifesto Data Project. This original data collection would allow for a more precise estimation of the level of transnational blame and would potentially permit a further statistical analysis of the correlation between transnational blame and party electoral success.

Future scholars could also add onto this research through original interviews, either with party leaders or with their public relation advisors as to enquire about the specific use of the rhetoric of blame and the evolution of their communication strategy. This could be an excellent way to gain not only an understanding of the effect of that rhetoric but also an insight into its construction. All in all, party rhetoric is a rich topic and, as Euroscepticism continues to evolve, the prospects for research are numerous.
Reference List


Appendix

Pearson's product-moment correlation

data: TAB2$S109 and TAB2$EP
\( t = 1.4781, \ df = 22, \ p\text{-value} = 0.1536 \)
alternative hypothesis: true correlation is not equal to 0
95 percent confidence interval:
-0.1170204  0.6278380
sample estimates:
cor
0.3005647

Figure 5 Pearson's product-moment correlation calculation for S109 and EP

Kendall's rank correlation \( \tau \)

data: TAB2$S109 and TAB2$EP
\( z = 2.0226, \ p\text{-value} = 0.04311 \)
alternative hypothesis: true \( \tau \) is not equal to 0
sample estimates:
tau
0.3162551

Figure 6 Kendall's rank correlation calculation for S109 and EP

Pearson’s product-moment correlation

data: TAB2$S110 and TAB2$EP
\( t = 2.1578, \ df = 22, \ p\text{-value} = 0.04213 \)
alternative hypothesis: true correlation is not equal to 0
95 percent confidence interval:
0.01748894  0.70283905
sample estimates:
cor
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Figure 7 Pearson’s product-moment correlation calculation for S110 and EP
Table 2. Manifesto indicators and EP election results (imputed data)

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Table 3. Manifesto indicators and EP election results (existing data only)

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Table 4. Manifesto indicators and party results
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