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## UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL CONTESTATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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**F**or the past 50 years, the European Union (EU) and its predecessors (the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community) have helped shape the politics of constituent countries. In the era following the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, the EU has been transformed into a multilevel polity in which European issues have become important not just for the governments of EU member states but also for citizens, political parties, and political groups within those states. How, if at all, has this affected political contestation in and about the EU? This is the question that this special issue addresses.

The question of contestation of the EU has two related components. First, how do domestic political actors conceive the basic alternatives for European integration? Can the debate about European integration, despite its complexity, be reduced to a relatively small number of dimensions? Does contestation over European integration resolve itself into a single underlying dimension, or does it involve two or more separate dimensions? Second, how is contestation over European integration related, if at all, to the issues that have

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characterized political life in Western Europe during the past century or more?

The articles in this special issue engage these two components of contestation. To facilitate an understanding of the context of this project, we begin by reviewing past research on these topics. We then discuss the contribution of this special issue and preview some of the key conclusions of the articles in this issue.

### DIMENSIONS OF CONTESTATION

The literature on dimensions of contestation goes back at least to Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) pioneering work on cleavage structures. Lipset and Rokkan argue that political cleavages arose in response to major junctures in European political development that generated basic ideological conflicts. In their view, dimensions of contestation that arose from the class cleavage, the religious cleavage, and the center-periphery cleavage are enduring because they are rooted in social structure and political organization. From their standpoint in the mid-1960s, Lipset and Rokkan believed that the resulting pattern of cleavages was frozen into place.

Few scholars still argue that these cleavages are permanent (see Dalton, Flanagan, & Beck, 1984; Franklin, 1992; Hix & Lord, 1997; Karvonen & Kuhnle, 2001). However, their ideological residue is still visible in the politics of the EU member states. The ideological continuum from Left to Right is a central organizing dimension in Western Europe (Barnes & Kaase, 1979; Hix, 1999a; Hix & Lord, 1997; MacDonald, Lijthaug, & Rabinowitz, 1991; Van der Eijk & Niemoller, 1983). There is some debate about whether this continuum can be divided into an economic dimension and a liberal-authoritarian dimension (Kitschelt, 1994) or into a new politics versus old politics dimension (Franklin, 1992). But no one doubts the critical importance of the categories Left and Right in Europe.

To what extent is contestation over European integration related to the cleavages that structure domestic conflict in Western Europe and, in particular, to the ubiquitous Left/Right dimension?

Interest in this question has intensified as the boundary between European and national politics has weakened during the past decade. Although Ernst Haas paid close attention to the domestic sources of opposition and support for European integration in his classic study, *The Uniting of Europe*, written in 1958, most scholars continued to view European integration as the result of foreign policies conducted by government elites acting on a "permissive consensus" (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970). European integration was seen to

have little connection with the ideological moorings of domestic politics. European integration was thought to take place among, but not within, countries.

This view has become untenable during the past decade as the EU has become a more openly contested arena for political parties, interest groups, and social movements (Hooghe & Marks, 1999; Imig & Tarrow, 2001; Marks, Hooghe, & Blank, 1996). After the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, international relations scholars responded by adapting models of pressure politics to provide a domestic dimension to national decision making. Given their emphasis on trade negotiation, these scholars generally assume that domestic contestation is driven by sectoral economic interest. Andrew Moravcsik (1998) argues at length that government policy on European integration essentially amounts to the efforts of producer groups—employers in export- and import-competing sectors—to achieve advantageous trade policies.

The alternative approach, one adopted by comparativists, is to explore European integration as an extension of domestic politics. Instead of inquiring whether European integration is the outcome of geopolitics or domestic politics—the question that has long motivated the neorealist/liberal intergovernmentalist debate—these scholars take domestic politics as their point of departure and inquire into how domestic politics influences, and is influenced by, European integration. While economic models of preference formation appear promising for explaining trade policy, comparativists are sensitive to the way in which ideology frames preferences and wish to broaden the study of European integration to public opinion, social movements, and party politics.

The latter project, which is the one that motivates this special issue, begins with two conspicuous advantages. It can build on deep and wide bodies of theory, such as the social cleavage theory that we discuss below. And just as important, it can exploit diverse sources of systematic comparative data—including public opinion surveys, Lexis-Nexis compendia of newspaper reports, political party manifesto data, and expert data on political parties—each of which will feature in the following articles.

The application of comparative politics models to European integration in recent years has heightened interest in whether and how existing patterns of domestic contestation structure orientations on European integration. An important building block is Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) argument that political actors have an incentive to interpret new issues in light of existing cleavages such as the Left/Right ideological dimension. Why would that be so? First, one can invoke the concept of path dependence to argue that it is extremely costly for political parties to abandon existing cleavage structures

(see Marks & Wilson, 2000; Scott, 2001). Parties attract ideologically motivated activists, they build strong institutional ties to particular constituencies, and they develop reputations for particular programs and policies. One can also make the case for assimilation from a rational choice perspective. Whereas stable political equilibria exist in a political space that is dominated by a single dimension (due to the median voter theorem), stable equilibria in multidimensional political spaces are much more difficult to arrive at (see, e.g., Hinich & Munger, 1997). The problem is already quite complex in a two-dimensional space, but it becomes intractable in spaces of higher dimensionality. Thus, introducing new dimensions of conflict is costly to those benefiting from the status quo because it will entail instability. Finally, one can invoke cognitive political psychology to make the argument. The more complex the political space, the more difficult it becomes for actors to operate in this space due to cognitive limitations. Moreover, information processing theory suggests that decision makers interpret new information in light of what they already know, suggesting a tendency to accommodate new issues to old cleavages (see Steenbergen & Lodge, 1998).

Although few comparativists would take issue with the maxim that ideology constrains how individuals and organizations interpret new issues, the tightness of fit is debated. There are four logical possibilities in relating a European integration dimension to the Left/Right dimension:<sup>1</sup>

- Contestation takes place on a single anti-integration versus pro-integration dimension. The Left-Right continuum is irrelevant for understanding contestation.
- The dimensions are unrelated (i.e., they are orthogonal to each other).
- The dimensions are fused in a single dimension.
- The dimensions are related to each other in two-dimensional space, but they are not fused (i.e., the dimensions are oblique).

Each of these possibilities is represented in the literature on the subject, as we spell out below. The international relations model represents the first possibility, the Hix-Lord model (Hix, 1999a, 1999b; Hix & Lord, 1997) represents the second possibility, the Tsebelis-Garret model (Tsebelis & Garrett, 2000) represents the third possibility, and the Hooghe-Marks model (Hooghe & Marks, 1999, 2001) represents the fourth model.

1. The following discussion, including Figure 1, draws heavily on an earlier version of Gabel and Hix (2002 [this issue]), which was presented in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, in April/May 2000.

### THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS MODEL

International relations approaches imply that European integration is independent of the Left/Right dimension of domestic contestation. What is more, these approaches suggest that contestation concerning European integration is divorced from the ideological underpinnings of domestic politics. These assumptions are shared by realism, intergovernmentalism, and neofunctionalism.

Realist scholars hypothesize that national leaders take positions on this dimension in response to geopolitical pressures (Hoffmann, 1966). Pursuit of the national interest, rather than domestic ideological differences, determines whether national leaders support or oppose further European integration.

Liberal intergovernmentalists argue that economic pressures bearing on national producer groups are primary. Exporters favor deeper economic integration; import-competing producer groups are opposed (Moravcsik, 1998). The link between economic integration and supranational decision making is functional. Governments will create supranational institutions to the extent that they cannot use national institutions to solve the credible commitment problem of international contracting. Liberal intergovernmentalists maintain, against realists, that domestic conflict is important in explaining why some governments support and others oppose integration. But that conflict is about the gains and losses from trade and is independent of the Left/Right dimension that structures much domestic contestation.<sup>2</sup>

Neofunctionalists emphasize that functional pressures for political integration are mediated by cross-national coalitions and supranational entrepreneurs. The integration process—which may lead national elites to redefine policy problems and even their identities—is independent of the conventional Left/Right dimension of domestic political contestation. Support of and opposition to further integration arises as elite actors—bureaucrats and politicians—assess costs and benefits in a dynamic context of problem solving, spillover, and learning (Haas, 1958).

The international relations model that we draw from these literatures conceives of contestation across the range of EU issues along a single dimension summarizing support or opposition for European integration. Conflict on this dimension involves diverse sets of actors—national governments for realists, governments and producer groups for intergovernmentalists, and bureaucrats and politicians for neofunctionalists. However, in each case, contestation is

2. Hence, Andrew Moravcsik (1998) deals in detail with how national governments respond to producer group interests but does not discuss party politics or party competition as sources of government policy.

independent of the Left/Right concerns that frame domestic politics. Hence, in Figure 1A, we represent the international relations model as an autonomous dimension ranging from *more integration* to *less integration*.

#### THE HIX-LORD MODEL: TWO ORTHOGONAL DIMENSIONS

Simon Hix and Chris Lord have argued that contemporary EU politics is increasingly two dimensional (Hix, 1999a, 1999b; Hix & Lord, 1997). A Left/Right dimension, summarizing diverse economic and sociopolitical issues in the domestic arena, remains orthogonal to a national sovereignty dimension ranging from *independence* to *integration* (see Figure 1B).

The orthogonality of these dimensions reflects contrasting pressures. Major political parties have a big stake in the existing Left/Right pattern of contestation, and they seek to extend it to new issues that arise on the political agenda. When challenging parties and groups raise new issues, the major parties respond by trying to force them to compete as well on the Left/Right dimension.

But national sovereignty issues are difficult to assimilate into the Left/Right dimension. Hix and Lord (1997) argue that the major parties are divided about national sovereignty. They therefore prefer to compete on the Left/Right dimension while bottling up competition on issues of European integration.

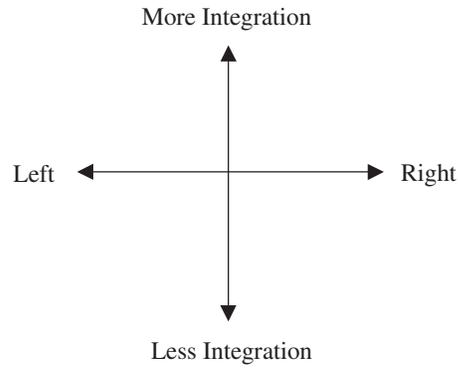
Traditional parties distinguish . . . [among] themselves in the domestic arena over the role of state authority in the making of social and economic policies, and not on the question of the institutional design of the emerging supranational political system in Europe. (Hix & Lord, 1997, p. 26)

They do this by taking a generally prointegration stance, leaving opposition to minor parties at the ideological extremes.

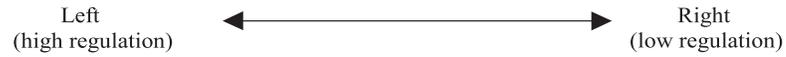
According to Simon Hix (1999b), the independence/integration and Left/Right dimensions cannot be collapsed into a new single dimension because they mobilize crosscutting political coalitions. The Left/Right dimension involves the allocation of resources and values between functional groups, whereas the national sovereignty dimension involves the allocation of resources and values between territorial groups. The upshot of this is that social classes and political parties are internally divided over European integration. Correspondingly, the four possible dichotomous alternatives—Left/more integration, Left/less integration, Right/more integration, and Right/less integration—are all feasible policy positions and are likely to be pursued



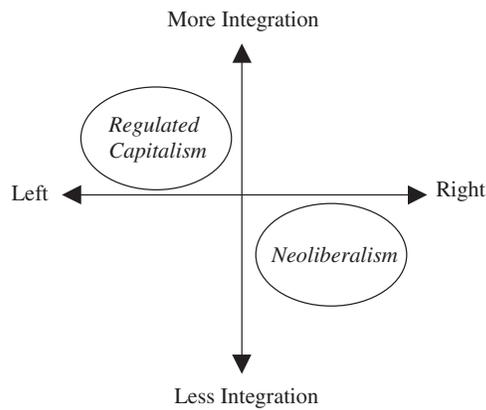
**1A. International Relations Model**



**1B. Hix Model: Two Orthogonal Dimensions**



**1C. Regulation Model**



**1D. Hooghe-Marks Model**

*Figure 1.* Four models of the shape of European Union politics.

by different forces. Hence, these two dimensions coexist orthogonally in EU political space in the same way that functional and territorial cleavages persist in other territorially divided polities (such as Belgium, Switzerland, Canada, and the United States).

#### THE REGULATION MODEL

George Tsebelis and Geoffrey Garrett (2000) have speculated that European integration might be subsumed into the Left/Right dimension. In this scenario, EU politics is fused to domestic competition between the Left, which pushes for common economic regulation across Europe, and the Right, which favors less EU regulation. Both the international relations model and the regulation model conceive of a single dimension of contestation for European issues, but they take sharply opposing positions on how this dimension relates to the Left/Right dimension in domestic politics. Whereas the international relations model implies that European integration is autonomous from the conflicts that have historically structured domestic contestation, the regulation scenario hypothesizes that European conflicts are expressions of such conflicts.

The widely recognized primacy of national politics in EU elections establishes the plausibility of the regulation model. European elections are "second order" elections in which political parties and voters are chiefly motivated by national issues (Van Der Eijk & Franklin, 1996; Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Moreover,

European elections usually occur between national elections, when the popularity of the party/coalition in government is typically relatively low. Consequently, the opposition at the national level may gain in EP [European Parliament] elections in the same way as the president's party loses seats in mid-term elections in the USA. (Tsebelis & Garrett, 2000, p. 31)

National political parties dominate voting in the European Parliament, and their performance in national elections shapes the composition of national governments, which send delegates to the Council of Ministers. Consequently, legislative actors in the Parliament and national representatives in the council may be constrained by the same Left/Right dimension that structures national politics in EU member states. Kreppel and Tsebelis (1999) find evidence that traditional Left/Right divisions characterize many issues that are debated in the European Parliament and EU political process, while Garrett (1992) has argued that bargaining over institutional reform in the Single European Act was shaped by national preferences concerning the

extent of intervention in the European economy. In both cases, one may argue that political parties in the European Parliament and in national governments will support only reforms that shift the status quo closer to their ideal position along the Left/Right dimension.

Whereas the international relations model conceives European integration as a single dimension that is entirely independent of the Left/Right dimension, the regulation model hypothesizes a single dimension that is subsumed into the Left/Right dimension. This is represented in Figure 1C.

#### **THE HOOGHE-MARKS MODEL: REGULATED CAPITALISM VERSUS NEOLIBERALISM**

Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (1999, 2001) identify a Left/Right dimension ranging from *social democracy* to *market liberalism* and a European integration dimension ranging from *nationalism* to *supranationalism*. In their view, these dimensions are neither fused together nor orthogonal to each other. Rather, Hooghe and Marks claim that certain aspects of European integration are likely to be absorbed into the Left/Right dimension. To the extent that this is the case, pro-EU and anti-EU and Left and Right become indistinguishable. However, not all aspects of integration are easily incorporated into the Left-Right dimension, and to the extent that they cannot be, a distinct prointegration/anti-integration dimension emerges.

Hooghe and Marks (1999) hypothesize that the Center-Left is likely to become more pro-European as the debate about European integration focuses on market regulation rather than market making. The Center-Left, including particularly social democrats, supports regulated capitalism, a project to build environmental, social, infrastructural, and redistributive policy at the European level.<sup>3</sup> As regulatory issues are taken up at the European level, social democrats become more favorably disposed to further integration.

Those on the political Right, in contrast, become more opposed to European integration. They wish to combine European-wide markets with minimal European regulation, and once economic and monetary integration is in place, they become skeptical of the benefits of further European integration.

3. Mark Pollack (2000) emphasizes Prime Minister Tony Blair's "third way" approach as an alternative to Hooghe and Marks's (1999) regulated capitalism. However, Blair's third way and regulated capitalism both reject government ownership, Keynesian demand-side policy, and heavy-handed government regulation in favor of social inclusion, social cohesion, and "market-enhancing or market supporting—rather than market-replacing or even market correcting—policies" (Hooghe & Marks, 1999, p. 87). If there is a difference, it seems to be a fine one.

The neoliberal project rejects supranational authority and strives instead to provoke regulatory competition among national governments within an encompassing market.

Contestation in the EU policy space is therefore structured in two camps. Figure 1D depicts this hypothesis with a line that slopes down from regulated capitalism on Center-Left to neoliberal capitalism on the Right. Thus, Hooghe and Marks (1999) propose a two-dimensional model of the EU political space where the Left/Right dimension and the national sovereignty dimension structure actors' policy positions in the EU political space.

### CONTRIBUTION OF THE ISSUE

The hypotheses that are proposed, then, generate conflicting expectations about the connection between an EU dimension and the Left/Right dimension of domestic political contestation. One reason for this is that discussions about the dimensionality of the political space in the EU do not always focus on the same political actors or even the same level of analysis. Hooghe and Marks (1999, 2001) make a judgment about the EU as a whole, whereas Hix and Lord (1997) focus mainly on political parties and Tsebelis and Garrett (2000) focus on legislators. Because their foci differ, it is difficult to draw broad conclusions about the dimensionality of European politics. What we need are analyses of the dimensionality of the EU political space across a variety of actors so that we can make comparisons and assess whether dimensionality of EU political space is actor specific. The contribution of this special issue is to analyze contestation among such a variety of actors: citizens (Gabel & Anderson, 2002 [this issue]), national political parties (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002 [this issue]), European political parties (Gabel & Hix, 2002 [this issue]), and social movements (Imig, 2002 [this issue]). By drawing comparisons between those actors, we obtain a sense of the nature of contestation in the EU and the variation in contestation.

### PREVIEW OF THE FINDINGS

What do these comparisons across actors show? Despite the wide variety of foci and methods used in the articles in this issue, there is a remarkable congruence in their findings. It appears that contestation takes a similar form for different actors. Let us elaborate on some of the common threads in the articles.

*EU positions are structured.* The articles demonstrate that the EU positions of political actors are structured rather than random. European integration involves many issues, yet despite their diversity, they seem to be interpreted as reasonably coherent packages by national and European political parties, citizens, and social movements. That political parties vary in their orientation to EU issues in a structured way is not surprising. Party positioning is determined by sophisticated actors whose job involves bringing intellectual coherence to the political world. The dynamics of party competition induce political parties to simplify their positions on issues in a way that is accessible to citizens who have little time to spend figuring out party positions.

But we find structure also at the mass level, despite the fact that European integration presents the public with highly complex, often technical, issues. Only a small proportion of European citizens can be classified as “opinion leaders” on EU issues if we use Inglehart’s (1970) cognitive mobilization index, yet ordinary people respond to surveys, such as the Eurobarometer survey, in a structured and intelligible way. The same appears to hold true for social movements, whose actions follow a clear pattern of opposition despite the often chaotic character of protests themselves.

*There is convergence in the structure of EU positions.* A second common finding in the articles in this issue is that the EU positions of different political actors are structured in a similar way. A Left/Right dimension appears to underlie the opinions, stances, and behavior of citizens, social movements, and political parties. The hypothesis that political actors assimilate the new policy issues raised by European integration within their existing schemas—and the Left/Right dimension in particular—is amply confirmed. To do otherwise would be difficult and costly.

This is not to say that all aspects of European integration can be accommodated equally successfully within the Left/Right dimension. A second dimension—a new-politics dimension—emerges as a powerful predictor of party positions on European issues in the Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson (2002) article. However, as of yet, this dimension is correlated very highly with the Left/Right dimension. This lends support to the Hooghe-Marks model (Hooghe & Marks, 1999, 2001) of EU political space, although it also is consistent with a one-dimensional model.

Second, the convergent patterns in the structuring of EU positions suggest that parties, citizens, and social movements act in a common space. This has implications for political representation, as Gabel and Anderson (2002) point

out in their article. A minimum requirement for adequate representation is that political elites and mass publics operate in a common political space. This is a requisite for effective dialogue between elites and masses. If it did not exist, it would be difficult for political elites to formulate policies that could take account of the public's preferences. Here, then, is one source of optimism with respect to representation on the issue of European integration.<sup>4</sup>

*The nature of Left/Right.* The articles in this issue shed some light on the substantive content of the Left/Right dimension. The article by Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson (2002) unpacks Left/Right by distinguishing between an economic Left/Right and a libertarian-authoritarian dimension. They find that the EU positions of national political parties are explained by both dimensions but that the latter dimension is the more powerful. Since the authoritarian pole of this dimension is closely associated with nationalism, this finding suggests that some portion of Euro-skepticism may in fact reflect nationalistic sentiments. To assess the validity of this effect in the general public or for social movements must await further research.<sup>5</sup>

The articles in this issue, then, suggest a remarkable convergence in the structure of EU positions across different actors. Not only is there contestation potential within each category of actors, but the structure of the contestation is similar both in terms of the number of underlying dimensions and in terms of the meaning of those dimensions. This finding is one of the most significant contributions of this issue. It suggests that we can learn much from the responses of particular actors to European integration—as each of the articles does—but that an explicit comparison among actors may contribute even more to our knowledge of contestation.

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4. Of course, the existence of a common political space does not by itself produce representation (see Van Der Eijk & Franklin, 1996).

5. Imig (2002) distinguishes the economic Left/Right dimension from the materialism versus postmaterialism dimension. The latter dimension approaches the libertarian/authoritarian dimension but does not encompass the nationalistic elements that help define the latter.

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