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## Diverging Europe: The Political Consequences of the Crises in a Comparative Perspective

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## 15 Diverging Europe: The Political Consequences of the Crises in a Comparative Perspective

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*Sven Hutter, Argyrios Altiparmakis and Guillem Vidal*

### 15.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we describe the impact of the crises on European party competition in a comparative perspective. That is, we summarise the trends across the three macro-regions used as a structuring framework in this book. While the previous chapters have offered detailed country-based accounts of the unfolding and consequences of the economic and political crises, the present chapter takes a bird's-eye view of the commonalities and dissimilarities in the content and structure of party competition across the regions. Our quantitative study of the big picture (measured with our original media data) is complemented by the concluding chapter, which considers additional features of party systems and takes a more qualitative approach (see Chapter 16). In combination, the two chapters provide answers to our initial research questions of whether and how the multiple crises that Europe faced in the aftermath of the Great Recession influenced political conflict in national party systems.

More specifically, in this chapter we evaluate the ideal-type scenarios developed in Chapter 1 regarding three topics: (a) the issues that become politicised in times of crisis; (b) the potential re-structuration of the political spaces; and (c) the driving forces of change. The introductory chapter highlighted one common effect of the Great Recession all over Europe, i.e. a reinforcement of the second, non-economic, conflict dimension. In times of economic hardship, we should observe not only a simple return of economic struggles but also increasingly politicised conflicts over cultural and more narrowly conceived political issues of democratic renewal and reform. The shape of this second conflict dimension differs across Europe's macro-regions, however. The differences reflect the long-term transformations of the party systems in the regions and the different crisis experiences (see Chapters 1 and 3). The previous chapters have foreshadowed substantial cross-country variation within

each region,<sup>1</sup> but they have also underscored the heuristic value of our cross-regional perspective. Taking this into account, we wish to underline from the start that the following descriptive summaries of our results are designed to forgo some detail with the aim of carving out the systematic variations behind country-specific manifestations.

We proceed in three steps. In Section 15.2, we examine the level of politicisation of the three central issue domains, i.e. economic, political and cultural issues. In Section 15.3, we focus on how the various conflicts structure the regional political spaces. Here, we also introduce a new measure to study the association between economic and non-economic conflicts. In Section 15.4, we move from the party-system level to the party level. Based on the work of Hobolt and de Vries (2015), we produce a measure that indicates which party groups are driving restructuring by adopting a strategy that sets them apart from their competitors regarding both issue emphasis and position-taking.

## **15.2 Beyond the Economy: The Most Politicised Issues in the Great Recession**

Which issue domains were most politicised in the three European macro-regions? Did Europe's multiple crises lead to systematic changes in the topics that became politicised? What kinds of change did they induce? These are the central questions that we seek to answer in this section. As we have done throughout this book, we conceptualise politicisation as salience multiplied by polarisation. By doing this, we treat both components of party competition as equally important and ultimately obtain a measure that indicates the structuring capacity of an issue domain in the political space. If an issue is not both salient and polarised, it can hardly structure the partisan space (for the measures, see Chapter 3).

Based on the results of the country studies, we restrict the empirical analyses to the issue categories that most clearly indicate the various conflict dimensions: economic issues cover welfare, economic liberalism, economic reforms and conflicts over the euro (including bailouts); political issues cover democratic renewal, democratic reform and European integration; and cultural issues (or what we have labelled 'new' cultural issues) cover cultural liberalism, immigration and nationalism. Note that as a result of the findings of the country chapter, we include Ireland in the

<sup>1</sup> Most importantly, not only the extent and type of a crisis (economic and/or political) but also the pre-existing conflict structures, the timing of elections and contingent strategies of political parties play a crucial role in explaining the variation observed (as was highlighted in the heuristic framework developed in Chapter 1. See Figure 1.1 for a summary).

group of southern European countries. We have opted for this solution given the extent of the economic crisis, the absence of a New Right challenger and the emerging divide over austerity in the country (for details, see Chapter 14). We have also cross-checked our results by re-assigning Ireland to the NWE countries. However, this does not affect any of the main regional conclusions.

### *Cross-regional Variation*

To analyse the politicisation measure, we proceed in two steps. First, we present descriptive evidence on the politicisation of the three issue domains by region and period (pre-crisis versus crisis). Afterwards, we present the results of simple OLS regressions with the level of politicisation as our dependent variable.<sup>2</sup> To begin with, Table 15.1 shows the average levels of politicisation in the pre-crisis and crisis periods. The analysis covers fifty-eight election campaigns: twenty-six campaigns in the years from 2001 to 2008 (coded as the ‘pre-crisis period’) and thirty-two in the years from 2009 to 2016 (coded as the ‘crisis period’).

Overall, the average values for the pre-crisis period empirically illustrate our claim in the introductory chapter: both economic and cultural issues were fairly politicised in all three regions in the 2000s, whereas more narrowly defined political issues only structured conflict in SE and CEE. In other words, we observe moderately politicised struggles over economic and cultural issues in NWE in the pre-crisis years, whereas all three issue categories (economic, cultural and political) gave rise to moderately politicised struggles in SE and CEE before the onset of the Great Recession. It is important to note that struggles centring around domestic corruption and bad governance drove these cross-regional differences, while questions related to the deepening and widening of the EU did not structure political conflict in either SE or CEE. Although we observe more politicised struggles over Europe in NWE before the Great Recession, the average values are also fairly low. This finding mirrors previous results on the politicisation of Europe, which also show a decline in the 2000s compared to the 1990s (see Grande and Hutter 2016).

A comparison of the pre-crisis baseline with the ‘crisis elections’ suggests that the substantive focus of political conflict diverged even more across the three European macro-regions after the onset of the Great

<sup>2</sup> Note that we have standardised the politicisation measure across issues, countries and elections because it would otherwise have very small values, and some outliers may have distorted the results (but the overall results and regression analyses are not affected by this decision).

Table 15.1 *Politicisation of issue domains by region before and within the crisis*

Region	Pre-crisis			Within-crisis (post-2008)			$\Delta$ (Within-crisis – Pre-crisis)		
	Economic	Political	Cultural	Economic	Political	Cultural	Economic	Political	Cultural
North-Western Europe	0.18	0.05	0.11	0.34	0.04	0.21	0.16	-0.01	0.10
Southern Europe	0.13	0.19	0.16	0.41	0.24	0.05	0.28	0.05	-0.11
Central-Eastern Europe	0.13	0.15	0.13	0.09	0.20	0.20	-0.04	0.05	0.07
Average	0.14	0.13	0.13	0.28	0.16	0.16	0.14	0.03	0.02

*Note:* We standardised the politicisation measure across issues, countries and elections as it has otherwise very small values and some outliers distort the picture somewhat (but the overall results and regression analysis are not affected by this decision). Ireland is coded as Southern Europe. The table shows regional averages (countries are weighted equally).

Recession. The crisis period saw increasingly politicised conflicts over economic and cultural issues in NWE, over economic and political issues in SE, and over political and cultural issues in CEE (see Table 15.1). To begin with, the pattern for NWE indicates the impact of the economic crisis, as we observe somewhat more contestation related to economic issues. At the same time, an increase in the structuring capacity of cultural issues points to a reinforcement of the long-term trends in this region. The results in Table 15.1, by contrast, indicate the most pronounced ‘crisis effects’ in the south of Europe. Economic issues in SE saw by far the strongest increase in politicisation from the pre-crisis to the crisis period (plus 0.28). This increase is due to combined conflicts over domestic and European austerity (as indicated by the rise of the ‘euro including bail-outs’ category from a non-issue to a highly politicised issue in SE). While not as pronounced, the regional averages also highlight that questions of democratic renewal and reform were increasingly structuring political conflict in SE. The impact of an (accelerating) political crisis can also be observed in the four CEE countries, with increasingly politicised struggles over political issues.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, economic issues became even less politicised while the increase in cultural issues reflects long-term trends in the region.

As stated before, we also ran simple fixed-effect regressions with the level of politicisation per issue category (i.e. economic, political and cultural) in a campaign as our dependent variable. Here, our unit of analysis is the election campaign (fifty-eight cases multiplied by three issue domains, which results in a total of 174 issue/election cases), and the independent variables are the region, the type of issue domain and a dummy variable for the crisis (post-2008). Figure 15.1 shows the predicted probabilities of a three-way interaction between crisis, region and type of issue domain. With this analysis, we can further support the previous findings, although we do not find the expected level of statistical significance for all the cases. According to the results shown in the figure, economic issues became significantly more politicised in the crisis elections in NWE and SE, whereas there were no significant changes in the case of CEE. The magnitude of the effect was significantly larger in SE, where the economic crisis was most felt. Cultural issues lost weight in the

<sup>3</sup> Again, note that the cross-regional variation for political issues is exclusively driven by conflicts over domestic issues, which are almost 10 times more politicised in SE and CEE than in NWE. By contrast, we observe some convergence, although at a low level, regarding the politicisation of Europe. Questions of the further deepening of Europe became slightly less politicised in NWE but more so in the other two regions. Note again that here we exclude questions related to the euro and bailouts, which are covered by the ‘economic issues’ category.

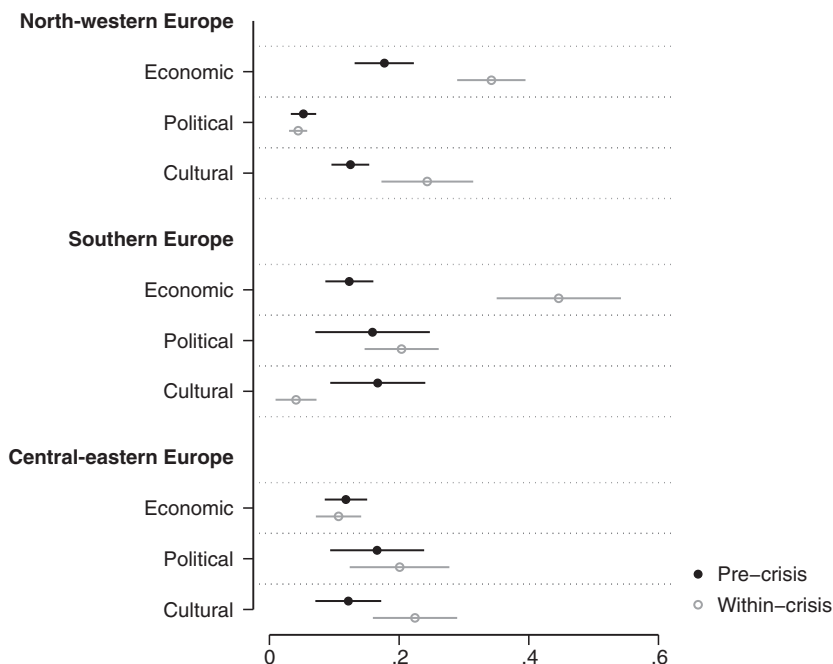


Figure 15.1 Predicted probabilities of the level of politicisation by region, issue domain and period  
 Note: Standard Errors Clustered by Country-election. C.I. levels 84.4 percent (i.e. if C.I. do not overlap it means that there is a significant change at  $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

public debate in SE after the crisis, particularly those concerning cultural liberalism. By contrast, the predicted probabilities suggest increasing struggles over such issues in NWE and CEE (although the results are statistically non-significant, which is a tough threshold given the small number of cases). The same applies to political issues, where we only observe a slight decline in the first crisis elections for NWE. Although the coefficients are as expected (positive) for both SE and CEE, the increase from pre-crisis to within-crisis does not reach statistical significance either.

*Cross-country Variation*

The country chapters and the size of the standard errors in the previous regression analysis indicate that Europe’s crises were differently

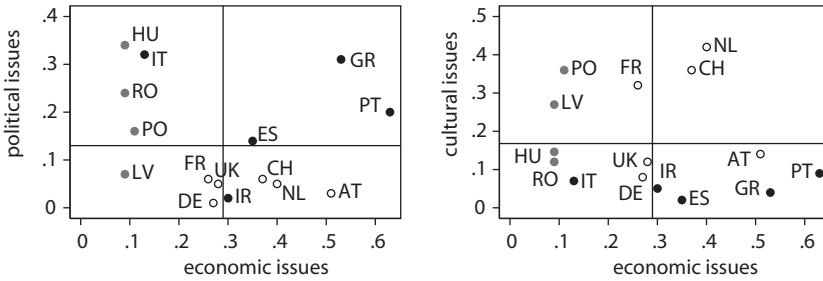


Figure 15.2 The levels of politicisation by issue domain and country in the crisis period

Note: The figure shows the average level of politicisation by issue domain and country in the crisis period (years 2009 to 2016). Countries from north-western Europe are highlighted with hollow circles, countries from southern Europe (incl. Ireland) with black circles and countries from central-eastern Europe with grey circles.

articulated not only across but also within the three macro-regions. To further elaborate on the question of cross-versus within-regional variation, Figure 15.2 shows the politicisation levels in the crisis period for each country separately.

To begin with, the results for all six countries from NWE confirm a subsidiary role of conflicts related to political issues – i.e. to institutional reforms and the fight against corruption – in this part of Europe (see Figure 15.2). Moreover, economic issues were fairly politicised across NWE in the crisis (at least much more than in the four cases from CEE). However, it is in Austria where we observe the most intense struggles over economic issues during the crisis, followed by the Netherlands and Switzerland. As cultural issues were also highly politicised in the Netherlands and Switzerland, the two countries are most characteristic of the overall regional pattern of intense conflicts over both economic and cultural concerns (see the top right-hand graph in Figure 15.2).<sup>4</sup> By contrast, Germany and the UK are placed in the opposite quadrant with below-average politicisation levels for both economic and cultural

<sup>4</sup> In Switzerland, the high value for cultural issues is mainly driven by struggles over immigration, whereas we observe similar politicisation levels for immigration and cultural liberalism in the Netherlands. The relative contributions of the two cultural sub-issues reflect the timing of the elections, because the Swiss campaign in autumn 2015 was the only campaign in the northwest covered by our analysis that took place amidst the first peak of the refugee crisis (for details, see Chapter 12).



issues. Although the longitudinal analysis in Chapter 13 indicated that the two somewhat caught up with the developments in countries where the New Right had already been established long before the crisis, our comparative analysis still indicates clear-cut differences. Finally, France and Austria show yet two more patterns. In Austria, economic issues trumped cultural issues in the crisis, whereas we observe the opposite in France.

All the southern European countries (plus Ireland) show below-average values for the politicisation of cultural issues (again, see Figure 15.2). After the onset of the Great Recession, we no longer observe visible and polarised conflicts over cultural liberalism, while immigration was already almost invisible in the pre-crisis campaigns covered by our data. Based on the combined politicisation measure, Greece, Portugal and Spain fit the general southern European story the best. All three countries saw politicised conflicts over both political and economic issues during the Great Recession.<sup>5</sup> Italy is the ‘odd man out’, as politicisation mainly occurred around political issues in general and the legacy of Berlusconi more specifically. Economic issues figured visibly in the 2013 Italian campaign too, but we only observe limited polarisation (Chapter 6). Finally, based on the aggregate politicisation measures, Ireland does not fit the southern European story well. While the increasing struggles over austerity might indicate some change in the highly unstructured Irish party system (Chapter 14), the cross-national comparison still indicates a low structuring capacity of all three issue domains.

Compared to NWE and SE, the countries from CEE share yet another feature: a low level of politicisation of economic issues. All four countries show values that are less than half the average value of 0.29 (again, see Figure 15.2). This supports our hunch that party competition in the region is mainly focused on non-economic issues. However, the degree to which political and cultural issues were politicised tends to vary cross-nationally. As is indicated in Figure 15.2, Poland is the country where both cultural and political issues led to politicised struggles in the crisis period. By contrast, the crisis elections saw above-average levels of politicisation for either only political (Hungary and Romania) or only cultural (Latvia) issues. The almost exclusive attention to political issues confirms our expectations for Romania (Chapter 10). The values for Hungary and Latvia, by contrast, reflect the fact that our politicisation measures only reach high values when both features – salience and polarisation – were

<sup>5</sup> Our indicator of political issues does not consider regionalism. We refrain from including it as the country chapters have highlighted strong differences in the aggregated issues and emphasised their varying links to what we refer to as a political crisis or a ‘crisis of representation’. However, if we consider them, the values for the Spanish case increase considerably (see Chapter 3).

present. Thus, in Latvia, political issues were almost as salient as cultural ones, but the fight against corruption and the oligarchs only structured the ‘Latvian-speaking’ part of the party system, and the positions taken by the various party groups were often not as clear-cut as expected. It is with regard to nationalism and the status of the country’s Russian-speaking population that the Latvian parties’ positions diverge the most (Chapter 11). This finding contrasts with the situation in Hungary, where political issues were high on the agenda after the 2006 scandal and led to highly polarised struggles too. Interestingly, cultural issues were salient in both the Hungarian ‘crisis campaigns’, but especially in 2014 they were not polarised. As shown in Chapter 8, in the 2014 campaign the Hungarian parties tended to outbid each other in terms of which was truly nationalist.

### **15.3 The Structure of the Political Space in the Great Recession**

Here, we proceed in two steps to assess how the different issues structured the political spaces and whether we observe significant changes in the crisis period. First, we present the results of our weighted multi-dimensional scaling procedure (WMDS) by region and period (pre-crisis and crisis). In a second step, we focus on the alignment of conflicts over economic and non-economic issues in the political spaces of the three regions.

#### *Comparing the Regional Political Spaces before and during the Crisis*

The regional MDS plots synthesise an enormous amount of information and are the most parsimonious representation of party competition in each region we can think of. While the optimal solutions in each case are two-dimensional (as indicated by the corresponding stress values and scree plots), we have added two additional lines to illustrate our interpretation. More specifically, we have rotated the figures in such a way that the horizontal dimension corresponds to the traditional socioeconomic dimension of party competition, ranging from the left (pro-welfare and anti-austerity position) to the right (pro-economic liberalism and austerity position). We have also added a second dimension which usually covers the major non-economic issues. Furthermore, we have indicated major clusters of actors with dashed elliptical figures. The reader should also bear in mind that the MDS method focuses on the main lines of opposition. Secondary issues/actors are less accurately represented and

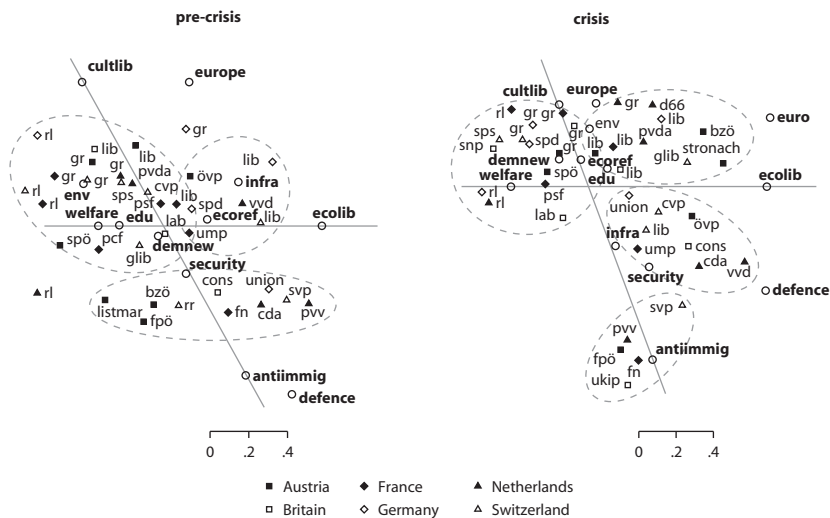


Figure 15.3 The structure of the north-western European political space: pre-crisis and crisis  
 Note: countries are weighted equally.

are often moved to the periphery of the space. Issues that account for less than 2 percent of the observations and parties with fewer than thirty observations have been excluded from the analysis (for details, see Chapter 2).

To begin with, Figure 15.3 shows the integrated political space for NWE. Overall, the graphs confirm the view of a limited impact of the crises, which mainly resulted in a further strengthening of the cultural integration–demarcation dimension. The overall structure regarding issue locations and party clusters did not much change between the pre-crisis and the crisis periods. However, the party configurations became even more distinct. More specifically, in both periods the space is characterised by two dimensions: a horizontal economic dimension and a vertical cultural dimension. The latter opposes cultural liberalism and anti-immigration. European integration – which covers general European issues of deepening and widening – is embedded in this dimension, as its closeness to ‘cultural liberalism’ suggests. In the crisis years, we can also find ‘euro’ – which covers statements regarding the common European currency and bailouts of eurozone member states – in the graph. These issues were not salient enough in the pre-crisis years (below 2 percent); within the crisis,

support for the euro and the bailout conditionality is located on the right-hand side of the economic dimension in NWE.

Within the two-dimensional space, we identify three distinct party clusters in the pre-crisis period. On the upper left-hand side of the graph is the unified left, composed of the mainstream left-wing parties but also of most of the radical left and Green parties. To its right, we find a centrist camp composed of most of the liberal parties and also some Christian Democrats and the French UMP. Finally, the nationalist-conservative camp is composed of the New Right parties and also the British Conservatives and the German and Dutch Christian Democrats. The MDS graph for the crisis period shows an even more unified left camp on one side and a more fragmented political right. The right can now be sub-divided into three distinct clusters. At the bottom, we find a homogenous cluster of all the populist right parties. They are even closer to anti-immigration and are the most opposed to cultural liberalism and Europe, which reflects the New Right's predominant focus on cultural issues, as does its almost equal distance to welfare and economic liberalism. The other two clusters on the right are formed by a more conservative camp (composed of the Christian Democrats, the Dutch and Swiss liberals, and the French UMP) and a more liberal camp (composed of all the other liberal parties and the Austrian BZÖ and Team Stronach). Note that the liberal camp includes the Dutch PvdA, which suggests that the 'third way' social democrats in the Netherlands went unusually far in the direction of economic liberalism and budgetary rigour. However, all in all, the emergence of these four camps underlines the reinforced role of the cultural dimension in structuring party competition in NWE.

Figure 15.4 shows the structure of the political space in SE in the elections in the mid-2000s and after the onset of the Great Recession in 2008. Like the politicisation indicators, the graphs indicate that we witness a period of profound transformation of the party systems in SE. The political space changes regarding both the key structuring issues and the main party clusters. In the pre-crisis period, we find essentially the same two dimensions as in NWE: an economic and a new cultural dimension (here the opposition is between cultural liberalism and pro-defence, because immigration is hardly salient at all). However, in SE the economic and cultural conflicts are closely aligned with each other, which contrasts with the more orthogonal structure in the north-west. Reflecting the bipolar type of competition, we find a left-wing cluster (composed of the moderate and radical left) opposed to the major right-wing parties. The former combines economically left-wing positions with culturally libertarian positions, while the latter support more conservative cultural positions and

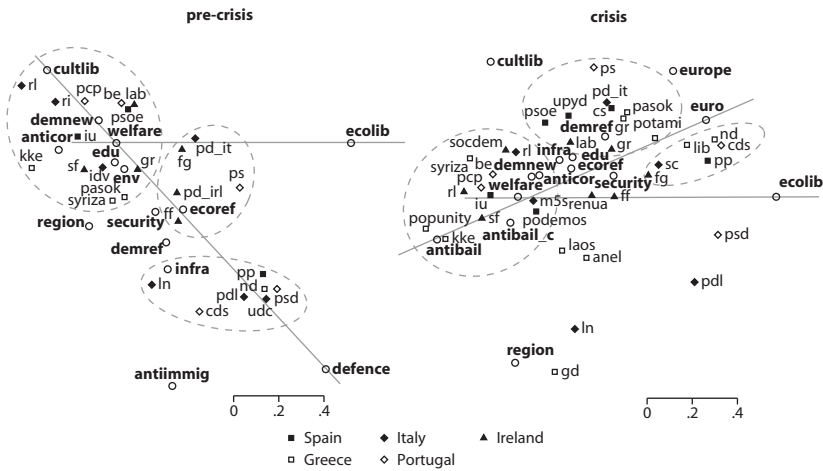


Figure 15.4 The structure of the southern European political space: pre-crisis and crisis  
 Note: countries are weighted equally.

economically more liberal ones. The third cluster is occupied by the Irish right-wing parties, which take centrist positions on most issues, and by the Portuguese Socialists, who were in government in the pre-crisis elections we cover.

The crisis does not change the dimensional character of the joint southern European political space (see Figure 15.4). However, what does change is the orientation of the second dimension and its interpretation. It is no longer a ‘cultural’ dimension but a ‘political/European’ dimension (indicative of the political crisis in the south of Europe). Cultural liberalism is much less important in structuring the space, as is indicated by its very peripheral location, and the issues ‘anti-immigration’ and ‘defence’ are not even represented given their low salience (below 2 percent). By contrast, both the economic (euro) and political (Europe) European issues have become contested topics. As shown in the respective country chapters, this result mirrors above all the Greek configuration (see Chapter 5). Support for both European issues is associated with the centre-right and the centre-left. Moreover, we find an alignment of conflicts over austerity with those over democratic renewal. Importantly, this integration is driven by a radical/New Left cluster at the bottom-left of the graph (amongst others, Syriza, Podemos, and M5S belong to this cluster). This New Left cluster is opposed to a centre-left one (including PASOK, the Italian PD, the Spanish and Portuguese Socialists, and the Irish Labour Party) and

a centre-right one (including the Greek *Nea Dimokratia*, the Irish *Fine Gael*, the Spanish and Portuguese Conservatives, and the Italian *Scelta Civica* founded by Mario Monti).<sup>6</sup> The centre-right is situated closer to economic liberalism and further away from cultural liberalism than the centre-left. Thus, while the crisis saw further splits on the political right in NWE, it was the left that was split in the south. However, note that the four New Right challengers in the graph are also either located close to the left-wing cluster (the two Greek parties *LAOS* and *ANEL*) or somewhat peripherally at the bottom of the graph (the Greek *Golden Dawn* and the Italian *Lega Nord*, which is located there because of its regionalist agenda).

Figure 15.5 presents the results of the MDS procedure for the four CEE countries under scrutiny. The structure of the joint political space comes closer to that observed in NWE than to that in SE. We can identify two somewhat independent dimensions: an economic dimension (indicated by the solid line between welfare and economic liberalism) and a cultural dimension (indicated by the line between cultural liberalism and nationalism). The parties are more divided along the cultural dimension than along the economic dimension. In the pre-crisis elections, the second pole of the cultural dimension was associated with positive mentions of nationalism and opposition to ethnic minorities. This contrasts with the northwest, where this second pole is associated with anti-immigration (given the low salience of immigration, the issue is not represented in the pre-crisis space for CEE). Thus, as expected, a defensive kind of nationalism, which was mobilised without the targets of nationalism in NWE, contributed to the structuring of party competition in CEE. Importantly, the parties in CEE cluster at least as much according to their national origins as according to their affiliation with certain party families. In the pre-crisis period, we observe a nationalist cluster (including the Hungarian *Fidesz*, the Polish *PiS*, *LPR* and *PSL*, and also the Latvian 'For Fatherland and Freedom/*LNNK*' and the Greater Romania Party, *PRM*). However, to the right of the nationalist camp we also observe a miscellaneous cluster which involves the Polish *PO* and *SLD*, the Hungarian *MDF* and almost all the Latvian parties. At the top of the space, we find the two Hungarian left-wing parties (*MSZP* and *SZDSZ*) and all the Romanian parties (apart from *PRM*).

The space for CEE during the crisis period indicates that the cultural dimension became even more important in structuring the political space (reflecting the results for the levels of politicisation). The parties seem ever more differentiated along the divide between cultural liberalism on

<sup>6</sup> Berlusconi's *PDL* and the Portuguese Social Democrats are also located more closely to the centre-right than to the centre-left cluster. However, they are located further away from Europe and the euro than the rest of the centre-right.

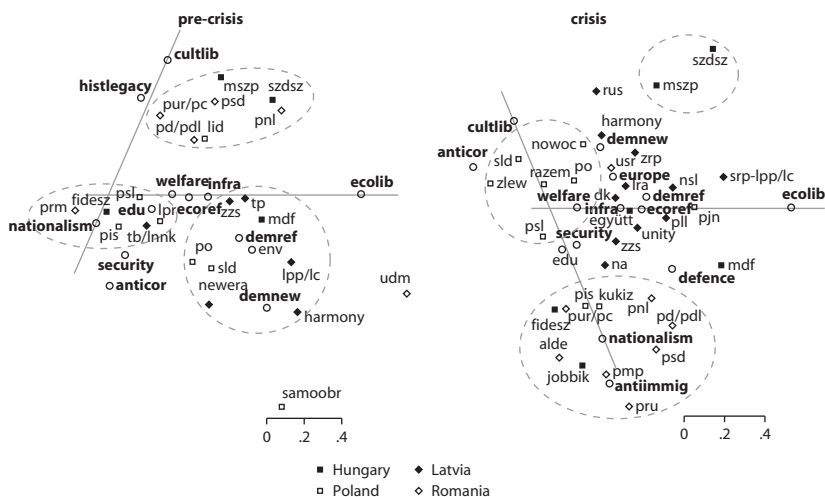


Figure 15.5 The structure of the central-eastern European political space: pre-crisis and crisis  
 Note: countries weighted equally.

the one side and nationalism on the other. Note that anti-immigration and Europe are now also located in the figure, given their increasing salience. Anti-immigration is now associated with nationalism and the conservative right, while Europe is located closer to cultural liberalism (as is democratic renewal). When we look at the location of the different parties in the political space, we see that the differentiation along the cultural dimension is most clear-cut in the cases of Hungary and Poland. The less structured Latvian and Romanian party systems fit less well into the graph and cluster much more in terms of national origins. At the bottom there is the nationalist camp with its most prominent members being Fidesz (now joined by its more radical competitor Jobbik) and PiS (now joined by the New Right challenger Kukiz'15). Moreover, we find almost all the Romanian parties in this cluster except the Save Romania Union (USR), the new anti-corruption challenger, which emerged in 2016. The Polish opposition to the national-conservative cluster is located closer to cultural liberalism and anti-corruption (most importantly, we find PO here and also the left-wing SLD and ZLEW), while the two Hungarian left-wing parties (MSZP and SZDSZ) are located more peripherally at the top of the cultural dimension. Finally, the Latvian parties are located between these clusters and mainly spread along the ethnic-cultural dimension. The main party of the

Russian-speaking minority (Harmony) is located at the top of the space, while the main Latvian-speaking parties (the Nationalist Alliance, NA, and the Union of Greens and Farmers, ZZS) are located close to the nationalist camp. Overall, the two graphs underline the increasing structuring capacity of cultural and political issues in CEE. However, they also show the often campaign-specific shifting alliances around political issues (Romania being the most telling example of these dynamics).

### *Alignments of Economic and Non-economic Conflicts*

In a next step, we present a more formal way of studying the alignment of economic and non-economic conflicts in the political spaces of the three regions. To do this, we focus on the location of the three issues that most clearly represent the critical challenges to the established structure of political conflict in each region: the anti-immigration discourse in NWE, the defensive nationalist discourse in CEE and the democratic renewal discourse in SE. We are interested in whether our MDS procedure shows any alignments of the conflicts over these three issues with the traditional economic left–right dimension. More specifically, we study whether the Great Recession led to a closer integration of the three issues with economically left-wing positions.

For the analysis, we construct a measure of the spatial integration of an issue on the economic left–right dimension. The measure considers the distances in the political spaces between (a) the respective issue category (e.g. anti-immigration) and ‘welfare’ (the supposed left-wing pole of the economic dimension) and (b) the distance between the respective issue and ‘economic liberalism’ (the supposed right-wing pole of the dimension). More specifically, we calculate the ratio between these two distances. That is, we divide the distance to economic liberalism by the distance to welfare. We rely on this relative measure because the distances in an MDS graph can only be interpreted relative to each other. Moreover, we calculate the natural log ( $\ln$ ) of the division. Our indicator then corresponds to the log-odds of these two distances. The log has the advantage that it takes a value of 0 if the particular issue is located at equal distance from both poles. Positive values indicate an alignment with welfare (the economic left) and negative values an alignment with economic liberalism (the economic right). Note that values above 0.7 indicate that the issue is at least twice as close to welfare as it is to economic liberalism, and values below -0.7 indicate the exact opposite. We calculate the measure for the regional MDS graphs shown in the



previous section and for the single election graphs shown in the country chapters.

Table 15.2a shows the results for the location of the ‘anti-immigration’ issue category in the political spaces in NWE. The low values resulting from the regional MDS highlight that conflicts over immigration do not align with conflicts over economic issues. If at all, the small negative value in the pre-crisis period indicates that anti-immigration tended to be located closer to economic liberalism. The values for the individual countries underline this interpretation, as we find some right-wing association of anti-immigration in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany and France in the pre-crisis period. Austria is the only country where we observe a small tendency towards a left-wing association in the pre-crisis period (see also Chapter 12). However, the value of 0.24 still points to an orthogonal structure. Moreover, we find only weak evidence that anti-immigration was more closely integrated with left-wing economic positions in the Great Recession. While we observe some shifts to the left in the Netherlands, France and Germany (as indicated by the positive values for the changes), Austria shows the opposite pattern; Switzerland and the UK show hardly any change at all. Overall, this leads to a situation in which the conflicts over the main new cultural issue are even less aligned with the economic left–right dimension. Switzerland and Austria are the only countries that still show a somewhat closer association of anti-immigration demands with economically right-wing positions (for related trends, see also Afonso and Rennwald forthcoming).

The values for the south of Europe (including Ireland) highlight the close alignment of economic and non-economic conflict in the region (see Table 15.2b). That is, calls for democratic renewal and institutional reforms are mainly associated with left-wing positions. Moreover, it is important to note that such calls were already closely associated with the left-wing pole of the economic dimension before the Great Recession. The values for the pre-crisis period range from 0.84 in Ireland up to 1.75 in Spain. The regional plots in Figure 15.4 indicate minor changes (-0.25), but we observe a pronounced shift to the right in Italy (-1.49), followed by Spain (-0.48) and Greece (-0.38). As the values in Table 15.2b show, the Italian 2013 campaign is the only one where we observe even a slightly negative value of -0.5, indicating that democratic renewal was located somewhat closer to economic liberalism than welfare. As the Italian chapter highlights, this has much to do with the fact that the central conflict revolved around narrowly defined political issues in general and Berlusconi’s legacy more specifically. Moreover, it underlines that the challenger in Italy, Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S), was much less

Table 15.2 *Alignments of economic and non-economic conflicts in the political space (log odds)*

a) The location of 'anti-immigration' in NWE			
	pre-crisis	crisis	change (shift to the left)
Regional MDS (Figure 15.3)	-0.23	-0.08	0.15
Austria	0.24	<b>-0.78</b>	-1.03
UK	-0.06	0.13	0.18
France	<b>-0.73</b>	0.05	0.78
Germany	<b>-0.93</b>	-0.16	0.77
Switzerland	<b>-1.32</b>	<b>-0.95</b>	0.37
Netherlands	<b>-1.37</b>	-0.04	1.33
b) The location of 'democratic renewal' in SE			
	pre-crisis	crisis	change (shift to the left)
Regional MDS (Figure 15.4)	<b>2.34</b>	<b>2.10</b>	-0.24
Spain	<b>1.75</b>	<b>1.27</b>	-0.48
Greece	<b>1.30</b>	<b>0.92</b>	-0.38
Portugal	<b>1.18</b>	<b>1.27</b>	0.10
Italy	<b>0.99</b>	-0.50	-1.49
Ireland	<b>0.84</b>	<b>1.07</b>	0.23
c) The location of 'nationalism' in CEE			
	pre-crisis	crisis	change (shift to the left)
Regional MDS (Figure 15.5)	<b>1.16</b>	<b>0.54</b>	-0.62
Hungary	<b>0.90</b>	<b>1.25</b>	0.35
Latvia	<b>1.00</b>	0.40	-0.60
Poland	<b>1.90</b>	<b>1.10</b>	-0.80
Romania	-	0.40	-

*Note:* The measure of association is 0 if the respective issue is located equally distant from welfare and economic liberalism as the supposed end points of the economic dimension in the political spaces. Positive values indicate left-wing integration (closer to welfare) and negative values right-wing integration (closer to economic liberalism). Values above 0.7 or below -0.7 are highlighted in bold. The table shows the averages values for the elections in the pre-crisis and crisis periods. Due to its low salience (below 2 percent), 'nationalism' was not included in the pre-crisis space of Romania (see Chapter 10).

clearly embedded in the political left than the challengers in the other SE countries (for details, see Chapter 6). Overall, the Greek, Spanish and Portuguese cases still show a quite clear left-wing association with democratic renewal in the crisis. However, the slight

shift to the right in the crisis might well be related to a strengthening of new challengers on the centre-right (most importantly, Ciudadanos in Spain) and the radical right (most importantly, ANEL in Greece). In addition, a more detailed look at single campaigns shows that the left-wing integration is stronger in cases when the mainstream left was in opposition (the most telling examples are Portugal and Spain in 2015).

The results in Table 15.2c show that the defensive nationalism on the rise in CEE was associated with the left-wing pole of the economic dimension during both periods (pre-crisis and crisis). As the regional MDS graphs already indicated, this association of the demarcation pole of the cultural dimension with economically left-wing positions differs from the functional equivalent in NWE – which, as we have just shown, is either not aligned with economic conflicts or is instead associated with economically right-wing positions. However, note that none of the party systems are very polarised on economic questions. The joint regional plot suggests that the integration of ‘nationalism’ with the left became less pronounced during the crisis (-0.62). However, a detailed look at the four countries highlights that changes in Latvia and Poland mainly drive this finding. By contrast, in Hungary nationalism became even slightly more integrated with the left-wing pole of the economic dimension during the crisis. Ultimately, these diverging trends led to there being two groups of countries in the crisis period: (i) Hungary and Poland, where we observe a stronger association of nationalism with the left-wing pole; and (ii) Latvia and Romania,<sup>7</sup> where conflicts over economic issues and nationalism were less aligned with each other.

To sum up, the results show that, first, the main cultural or political challenges in the three regions were to different degrees aligned with economic struggles. In simple terms, we observe the most substantial alignment in the south and the weakest in the north-west, with CEE being somewhat between the two extremes. Second, calls for democratic renewal tended to be associated with the left-wing pole of the economic dimension in SE, as were nationalist claims in CEE. By contrast, anti-immigration statements tended to be more associated with the political right in the NWE pre-crisis period. Third, the trends over time suggest an increasing independence of the different types of conflict in all three regions. Thus, the

<sup>7</sup> In Romania, nationalism was less salient, but it emerged as a more polarising issue in the two ‘crisis’ elections in 2012 and 2016 (see Chapter 10).

Great Recession did not lead to a further alignment of economic and non-economic conflicts.

#### **15.4 Which Parties Are the Driving Forces of Change?**

Zooming in to the party level allows us to explore the characteristics of the agents which brought forward system-level changes in politicisation. This allows us to assess the ideal type scenarios with respect to the agents of change in times of crisis. To reiterate, we expected that there would be a continued increase in the politicisation of cultural issues spearheaded by parties from the New Right in NWE. In SE, we expected that changes in politicisation would be driven by New Left parties, which mostly politicise economic and political issues. In contrast, in CEE we assumed that mainstream parties rather than challengers would be in the vanguard of politicising mostly cultural and political issues.

To empirically describe these patterns, we need to measure who politicises which issue and in what direction. To do this, we follow Hobolt and de Vries (2015) by combining a party's issue emphasis with its issue position. Specifically, for each party in each election, we multiply its salience score by the distance between its position and the mean position of all the parties in the system (the interested reader can find more details of the measurement in Chapter 2). While Hobolt and de Vries use this indicator to measure issue entrepreneurship, we consider it to be a measure of the party's visible attempt to politicise an issue. This is why we call it party-level politicisation. In our view, the measure combines salience and radicalness (the distance of the party's position from the system mean), which correspond to the two components of the politicisation concept that we apply at the system level.

Note, however, that this measure has a direction, as the distance from the mean position of all the parties in the system may be negative or positive. We code the positions in such a way that positive values indicate the most important expected 'challenges' to the status quo. Thus, positive values for economic issues denote a tendency towards state interventionism; for political issues a call for more democracy and transparency; for cultural issues a challenge to libertarian, pro-immigration and anti-nationalism stances; and for European issues a stance of Euroscepticism. The category 'Europe' is shown separately, as constructing an average position on political issues (domestic and European) would distort underlying differences.

For the empirical analysis, we run a series of fixed-effect regressions with party-level politicisation per party group and issue domain as our dependent variable. Our primary independent variables are region, crisis period (as at the systemic level) and party type. More precisely, we categorise the parties in terms of two cross-cutting distinctions: left versus right and challenger versus mainstream. We base these distinctions on already existing classifications of party families. That is, we define as challengers from the left parties of the radical left, the Greens and Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S).<sup>8</sup> The challengers from the right are all the radical right parties. Juxtaposed to them, we define all the social-democratic/socialist parties as mainstream left and all the conservative, liberal, centrist and Christian-Democratic parties as mainstream right. Apart from these more ideological classifications (which reflect our ‘structuralist’ approach to party competition), in the following regression analyses we control for more strategic factors, such as government participation and vote share.

Figure 15.6 presents the predicted probabilities of the party-level politicisation measure for each issue domain, region and party type. The results for the economic issues highlight the different party configurations in the three regions. In southern Europe, the mainstream left occupies a middle ground between the mainstream right and challengers from the left. This is important as it shows that, although the centre-left had to implement the austerity measures (because it was in power), in the election campaigns it did not move all the way to the centre-right but remained more to the left than its centre-right competitors. At the same time, the distinct values for the challengers from the left highlight their role in politicising economic issues in SE. This result contrasts with NWE, where we observe a significant left–right divide on economic issues, irrespective of parties’ mainstream or challenger status. In CEE, we observe no significant differences regarding economic issues. Challengers from the left hold more outsider positions, but this difference is not statistically significant (in general, the results for leftist challengers in CEE should be interpreted cautiously, given the scarcity of observations).

The findings for cultural issues show the crucial role of challengers from the right in politicising them in all three regions. Challengers from the right adopt a conservative nationalist position in all three regions,

<sup>8</sup> We realise this is a controversial choice, and, as we shall see, it may skew our results somewhat. However, additional robustness checks indicate that our main interpretations are not affected by this choice.

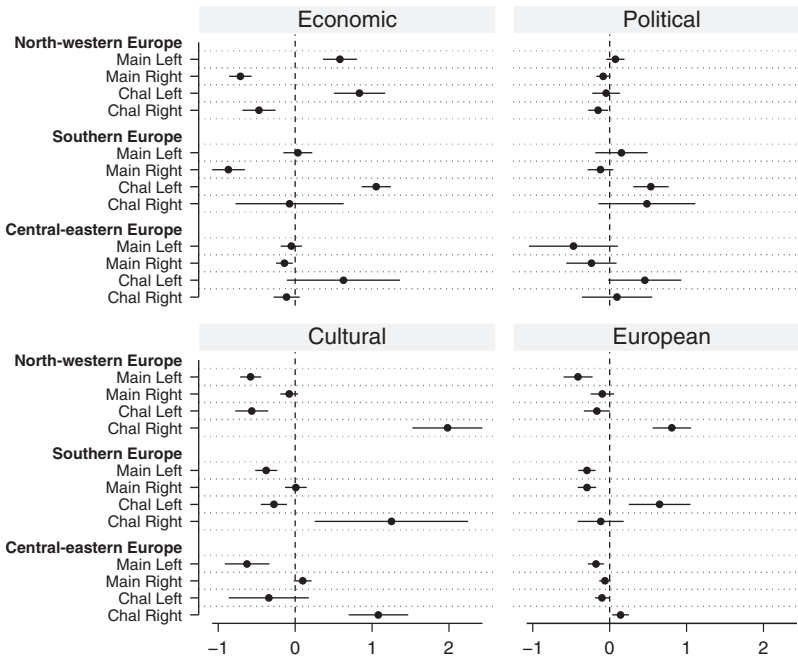


Figure 15.6 Predicted probabilities of party-level politicisation by issue domain, region and party type  
 Note: Standard Errors Clustered by Country-election. C.I. levels 84.4 percent (i.e. if C.I. do not overlap it means that there is a significant change at  $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

although the patterns of opposition are most clear-cut for NWE. In NWE, we also observe a significant difference between both party types from the left – mainstream and challengers – and the mainstream right, which very much represents their average position in their respective party systems.

Regarding the principal agents who politicise political issues, our results at the party level show that no party group politicised these questions in NWE. In SE and CEE, by contrast, we do observe a certain division between challenger and mainstream parties: challenger parties tended to be more supportive of democratic renewal and reforms. However, these differences are only statistically significant when we consider the contrast between the challengers from the left and the mainstream right in SE. As expected, the challengers from the left in southern Europe were the most homogeneous group calling for democratic renewal (as indicated by the small standard errors). Nonetheless, our

results suggest that conflicts over (domestic) political issues seemed much less prone to lead to stable divisions between mainstream and challenger parties than ones over cultural or economic issues. In SE, the position of the mainstream left is revealing. As suggested in Section 15.3, the mainstream left in opposition attempted to rejuvenate itself by promoting democratic renewal and also reform. Thus, it adopted similar politicisation strategies as the challengers from the left, which ultimately resulted in a non-significant difference between the two types of parties. For CEE, the results for the political issues support our general hunch that mainstream and challenger parties do not occupy distinct and stable positions on most issues.

The limited explanatory power of the challenger/mainstream divide in CEE is also visible in the case of European integration. Figure 15.6 shows that the difference between challengers from the right and all the other party types in CEE is statistically significant, but the size of the coefficient is small, reflecting the status of Europe as a topic which is not very politicised in CEE. By contrast, in NWE, we find the expected much more distinctive Eurosceptic voice of the challengers from the right, while in SE challengers from the left took on this role. The results mirror the distinct locations of the issue of European integration in the regional political spaces, and they underline that European integration was politicised with different meanings in the south and the northwest of Europe.

We also have an interest in discovering how the crisis affected the way the different party types politicised a given issue. For this purpose, Figure 15.7 shows the predicted probabilities for each party type and region again, but this time it compares party-level politicisation before and within the crisis. Overall, the figure reveals a pattern of continuity. On most issues, our media-based CSA data suggest that the various party types did not change their mobilisation strategy significantly or even at all in the crisis. The most notable differences are: (a) an increased politicisation of cultural issues by challenger right-wing parties in NWE; and (b) an increased politicisation of economic issues by challenger left-wing parties in SE. In addition, we observe a statistically significant shift towards a more pro-market position by the mainstream right and a more Eurosceptic position of the challengers from the left in SE. However, when we zoom in to the national level, this second result is almost entirely due to a few extreme cases (most importantly, the Greek Communist Party). Finally, we should note the relative stability and homogeneity of party-level politicisation in CEE throughout the crisis. What is distinctive about this region is that the challenger parties were not

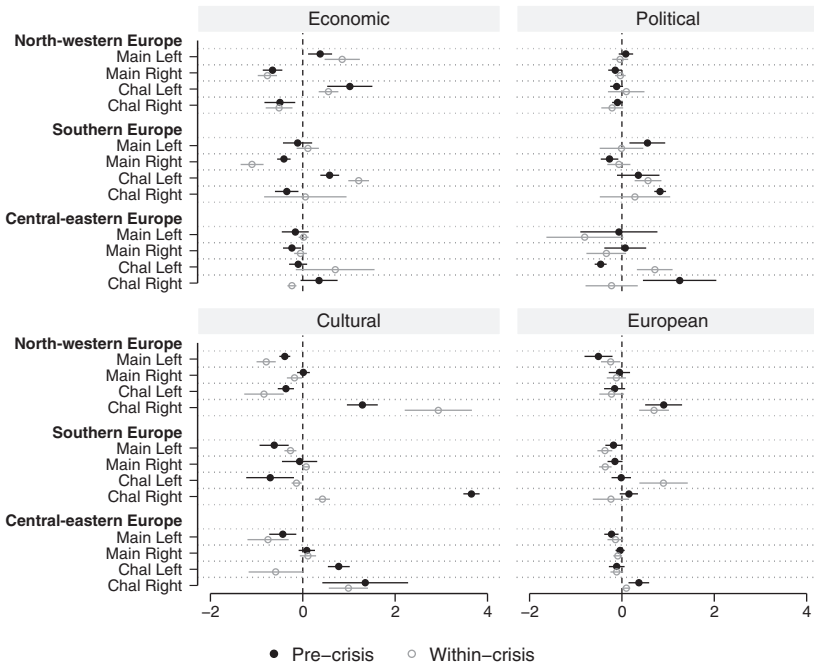


Figure 15.7 Predicted probabilities of party-level politicisation by issue domain, region, party type and period  
 Note: Standard Errors Clustered by Country-election. C.I. levels 84.4 percent (i.e. if C.I. do not overlap it means that there is a significant change at  $\alpha = 0.05$ ).

adopting politicisation strategies that were much different from the mainstream ones, supporting our idea that the mainstream parties successfully occupied niches that belonged to challengers in other parts of Europe.

### 15.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, we have complemented the detailed country case studies with a cross-regional comparison of how the multiple crises that the European democracies faced in the aftermath of the Great Recession affected the content and structuration of party competition.

First, we analysed the issues that became politicised (i.e. that dominated and polarised the public debate) before and after the onset of the Great Recession. In broad strokes, our cross-regional findings point to



increasingly diverging patterns across the three regions. As expected, the only common, but counter-intuitive, trend is that cultural or political issues became more important in structuring political conflict in all three regions. By contrast, economic conflicts were mainly boosted in the south and, to some extent, also in the north-west, while they were relegated to the background in central and eastern Europe. In north-western Europe, the Great Recession triggered an acceleration of the region's long-term transformation, i.e. an increasing politicisation of cultural issues (in particular, immigration). This is not what we observe in southern Europe, where the Great Recession was a much more critical juncture. The combined economic and political crises politicised questions about the best economic policy solutions to cope with the crisis and about the need for democratic renewal and reforms. Conflicts over cultural issues (in particular, cultural liberalism) structured conflict in southern Europe in the pre-crisis years, but they almost disappeared from the electoral campaigns during the crisis. Finally, we observe the least change regarding the issues politicised in central and eastern Europe. Although the countries under scrutiny (except Poland) were hard-hit by the economic crisis, the structuring conflicts centred ever more around more narrowly conceived political issues and/or cultural issues.

Second, we assessed how the various structuring conflicts shaped the regional political spaces. The empirical results indicate that the structure of the space in north-west Europe did not change. As in earlier studies (Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012), we still observe two fairly independent dimensions: an economic left-right dimension and a cultural integration-demarcation one. However, our new findings suggest a further differentiation of the party clusters along the cultural dimension. While the political left in north-western Europe seemed ever more homogeneous in its combination of an integrationist position (pro-Europe and multiculturalism) with economically left-wing positions, the political right seemed ever more split between culturally more integrationist and more nationalist stances. Again, the analysis for southern Europe shows a much more profound transformation. While the political space remained essentially one-dimensional in the crisis, the issues embedded and the party clusters changed. In the early/mid-2000s, cultural and economic issues were embedded in the major divide, essentially splitting the radical and mainstream left against the mainstream right. During the crisis, we observe that political and economic issues are key to understanding the structure of conflict. Moreover, the political left was very much split between the mainstream and an ever-stronger New Left/radical cluster. The results for Central and Eastern Europe also highlight the importance of non-

economic issues. However, in contrast to the north-west of Europe, the dominant cultural divide instead emerged between supporters and opponents of a nationalist-conservative programme. At the same time, the clustering of parties suggests some caution regarding over-strong claims about a common regional space, as we observe many more country- than ideology-based clusters.

Third, we shifted to the party level to identify the driving forces of the restructuring of conflict. Once again, our results indicate that challengers from the right were driving the cultural conflicts in north-western Europe. Overall, our data do not point to a general shift in the programmatic appeal of the radical populist right to the left on economic issues. Instead, we observe an even more radical insistence on their anti-immigration agenda. In southern Europe, the radical/New Left is the main driving force of conflict over economic and political conflicts. Again, the crisis did not change the pattern much, but it boosted the visibility of this party type. Interestingly, we barely find the same division of labour between the mainstream and challenger parties in central and eastern Europe. There, we often find a rather non-differentiated programmatic offer – or that parts of the so-called mainstream (like Fidesz in Hungary and PiS in Poland) are the actual drivers of the ongoing restructuring of cultural conflicts.

Our results point to important commonalities of the countries within a given region that are worth stressing. Most importantly, we show that certain issue domains were little politicised in all the countries in a region during the crisis: political issues in north-western Europe, cultural issues in southern Europe and economic issues in central-eastern Europe. Except for central and eastern Europe and Ireland in the pre-crisis period, the joint regional political spaces show coherent ideological party clusters that also point to commonalities across national political systems. The same holds true for the similar types of driving forces that we identified in the last part of our analysis.

Nonetheless, we also observe interesting deviations from the general regional story. Our results suggest that the four north-western European countries where the populist radical right had established itself long before the crisis (i.e. Austria, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland) still showed a more pronounced pattern of change as compared to Germany and the UK. For the UK, this might reflect the fact that we focus on inter-party competition, while many of the fault lines often lead to significant intra-party conflicts – European integration being the most telling example (see, e.g., Lynch 2015). In Germany, the 2017 election constituted a more critical test case for our thesis than the developments up to 2013 covered in our volume.

Deviations from the regional story are also important in southern Europe. Ireland and Italy fit the general regional story the least. We placed Ireland in this group of countries because of the strength of the economic crisis and the emerging austerity divide observed in the country chapter. However, from a comparative perspective, the Irish case still shows much lower levels of politicisation and structuration in general. At the same time, the absence of an emerging cultural divide also sets Ireland apart from the pattern in north-western Europe. Italian politics, by contrast, lacks the increasing politicisation of economic issues and the substantial alignment of opposition to both ‘old politics’ and ‘austerity’ that we observed in Greece, Portugal and Spain.

Lastly, in central and eastern Europe, we found the most pronounced country differences, which, at least for Romania, also have much to do with election-specific alliances and issues. Overall, the other three countries show a more clear-cut emergence of a cultural divide, although the Hungarian and Polish paths show more similarities given that the Latvian case is very much dominated by the divide between the Russian-speaking minority and the Latvian-speaking majority.

The next and final chapter summarises these country-specific manifestations in more detail, and it also focuses more on how the various crises unfolded over time.

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