Opposing a different Europe

The nature and origins of Euroscepticism among left-wing and right-wing citizens in Western Europe

van Elsas, E.J.

Citation for published version (APA):

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Opposition to European integration does not fit left-right politics in an unequivocal way. Across Western Europe, Euroscepticism is found among both radical left and radical right parties and voters— a pattern commonly illustrated by the image of a horseshoe, emphasising the similarities between the extremes. But to what extent do attitudes towards “Europe” actually provide common ground for the political left and right?

This dissertation studies the applicability of the ‘horseshoe model’ to public opinion in Western Europe. Its theoretical starting point is that Euroscepticism is a multidimensional attitude, the nature and origins of which are actually dependent on— rather than unrelated to— left-right ideology. In four empirical studies, based on survey data covering fifteen Western EU member states and four decades, it shows that the horseshoe only applies to Euroscepticism in its most general sense. However, systematic differences between the left and right are found when studying more specific EU attitudes. Left-wing and right-wing citizens are found to differ not only in their reasons for being Eurosceptic, but also in the type of EU opposition they hold. Thus, this dissertation concludes that rather than being unrelated, ideology is actually a crucial factor in structuring citizens’ Euroscepticism. This refines the common horseshoe understanding of Euroscepticism and the political space.

Erika van Elsas is a postdoctoral researcher at the Amsterdam School for Communication Research (ASCoR) at the University of Amsterdam. She carried out this research as a PhD candidate at the Department of Political Science of the same university.
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Erika J. van Elsas
Opposing a different Europe

The nature and origins of Euroscepticism among left-wing and right-wing citizens in Western Europe

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,
in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel
op donderdag 9 maart 2017, te 12:00 uur

door Erika Johanna van Elsas
geboren te Wageningen
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Faculteit:** Maatschappij- en Gedragswetenschappen
# Table of contents

List of tables 8  
List of figures 9  
Acknowledgements 10  

## CHAPTER 1 Introduction 13  
Euroscepticism and left-right ideology: the ‘horseshoe model’ 13  
The party level 16  
  *The party-citizen link* 16  
  *Party positions towards European integration* 17  
  *The EU as a ‘moving target’* 20  
The citizen level 21  
  *This dissertation: refining the horseshoe* 23  
  *Two dimensions of Euroscepticism* 23  
Outline of the chapters 26  
  *Case selection and data* 29  

## PART I: THE STRUCTURE OF PUBLIC OPINION 33  

## CHAPTER 2 The changing relationship between left-right ideology and Euroscepticism, 1973-2010 35  
Introduction 35  
The changing nature of European integration 37  
The changing meaning of left-right 39  
Left-right ideology and Euroscepticism 39  
Hypotheses 41  
Data and Methods 44  
Results 47  
Conclusion 52
**CHAPTER 3** United against a common foe? The nature and origins of Euroscepticism among left-wing and right-wing citizens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-wing and right-wing Euroscepticism</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring Euroscepticism</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Election Study 2009</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Election Study 2014</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Social Survey 2008/2012</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control variables</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-right and the two dimensions of Euroscepticism</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What motivates left-wing and right-wing Euroscepticism?</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PART II: THE DETERMINANTS OF ELECTORAL SUPPORT**

**CHAPTER 4** Same interests, different values? The electorates of left-wing and right-wing Eurosceptic parties compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The new conflict: interests or values?</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two dimensions of Euroscepticism</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The conflict over time</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of parties</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cross-sectional analyses</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longitudinal analyses (1989-2014)</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robustness checks</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## CHAPTER 5  A pro-EU mainstream versus anti-EU extremes? Exploring the diverse nature of EU issue voting across the left-right spectrum

105

### Introduction
105

### Theory
107

- **Mainstream party positions: Ambivalence and differentiation**
108

- **EU issue voting**
111

### Data and method
112

- **Method**
113
- **Variables**
114

### Results
115

- **Descriptive results**
115
- **Regression results**
118

### Conclusion
121

## CHAPTER 6  Conclusion

125

### Introduction
125

### The pros and cons of the horseshoe model
126

### Contributions to the literature
128

- **European integration as a sleeping giant**
128
- **Globalisation ‘losers’ and the salience of the cultural dimension**
130
- **The sources of Euroscepticism**
131

### Suggestions for future research
132

### Political and societal implications
134

### Appendices
139

- **English summary**
189
- **Nederlandse samenvatting**
193
- **List of data sources**
198
- **List of non-scholarly resources**
200
- **References**
202
List of tables

Table 1.1  Key variables, data sources and time coverage per chapter 30
Table 2.1  Overview of sample size and time frame per country 44
Table 2.2  Effect of left-right placement on relative fears related to eu 48
Table 2.3  Left-right and Euroscepticism in 12 EU member states (1973-2010) 49
Table 3.1  Items used in scales for support for redistribution and anti-immigrant sentiments 65
Table 3.2  Relation of two dimensions of Euroscepticism to left-right self-placement 67
Table 3.3  Interactions between left-right and support for redistribution and anti-immigrant sentiments 70
Table 4.1  Overview of sample size, number of countries and number of parties per EES wave 89
Table 4.2  Overview of attitudinal items used in analyses of 2009 and 2014 EES waves 92
Table 4.3a  Regression models explaining the probability to vote for Eurosceptic right-wing party 94
Table 4.3b  Regression models explaining the probability to vote for Eurosceptic left-wing party 95
Table 5.1  Summary of party positions on European integration 111
List of figures

**Figure 1.1** Euroscepticism by left-right positions across Western European political parties 14

**Figure 1.2** Schematic outline of dissertation 27

**Figure 2.1** Relative fears with regard to EU by left-right self-placement 48

**Figure 2.2** Predicted probability of Euroscepticism by left-right position in 12 EU member states (1973-2010) 50

**Figure 3.1** Predicted values of two dimensions of Euroscepticism across left-right scale in 2009 68

**Figure 3.2** Predicted values of two dimensions of Euroscepticism across left-right scale in 2014 68

**Figure 3.3** Marginal effect of support for redistribution on two EU dimensions by left-right in 2008 72

**Figure 3.4** Marginal effect of support for redistribution on two EU dimensions by left-right in 2012 72

**Figure 3.5** Marginal effect of anti-immigrant sentiment on two EU dimensions by left-right in 2008 73

**Figure 3.6** Marginal effect of anti-immigrant sentiment on two EU dimensions by left-right in 2012 73

**Figure 4.1** Marginal effect of education on support for right-wing and left-wing Eurosceptic party, 1989-2014 97

**Figure 4.2** Marginal effect of dissatisfaction with current EU on support for right-wing and left-wing Eurosceptic party, 1994-2009 98

**Figure 4.3** Marginal effect of opposition to EU strengthening on support for right-wing and left-wing Eurosceptic party, 1989-2014 99

**Figure 5.1** Average position on two EU dimensions by party voted for in last general election, 2009 115

**Figure 5.2** Average position on two EU dimensions by party voted for in last general election, 2014 116

**Figure 5.3** Average position on two EU dimensions by party voted for in last general election, 1994 117

**Figure 5.4** Marginal effect of two EU dimensions on electoral support, 2009 118

**Figure 5.5** Marginal effect of two EU dimensions on electoral support, 2014 119

**Figure 5.6** Marginal effect of two EU dimensions on electoral support, 1994 120
First of all I would like to express my gratitude to the Duitsland Instituut Amsterdam (DIA) and the program group Challenges to Democratic Representation of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR) at the University of Amsterdam for co-sponsoring this PhD project. Both institutes have provided a rich and inspiring work environment.

While writing this dissertation I have been surrounded by many kind and smart people, and I would like to use this opportunity to acknowledge their support. First and foremost I thank my supervisors, Wouter van der Brug, Ton Nijhuis and Armen Hakhverdian. Wouter, you have been a great supervisor in both academic and personal sense. You helped me in refining my arguments and crystalising the research puzzles. Next to that, your encouragement and understanding has kept me going throughout the project, not to forget your sense of humour, which you share with Armen, my daily supervisor. Armen, thank you for your cheerful guidance throughout the project, and for being there whenever I needed advice. You helped me to see the bigger picture and put things into perspective – not only when it came to research findings, but also the writing of a dissertation in itself.

Ton, I am thankful for having had the opportunity to be associated to the Duitsland Instituut Amsterdam. Your critical eye has been particularly important in both the start-up and the final phase of the project, as it has helped to sharpen both the research question and the conclusions of my dissertation. Our discussions and my participation in the Graduiertenkolleg have broadened my scope methodologically, epistemologically, as well as linguistically. Furthermore, I want to thank the nice colleagues from the DIA. Charlotte Broersma deserves special thanks for her help with several administrative intricacies.

I want to thank Ruud Koopmans and the colleagues from the Migration and Diversity department of the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB) for my pleasant stay there. Among the many nice people there, I especially thank Simon Maag, Malisa Zobel and Constanza Sanhueza for the good company.

At the University of Amsterdam I have shared an office with many people over the years. And if anything, the move of the Political Science department from the authentic, mice-crowded Binnengasthuis to the orderly, glass-walled Roeterseiland complex has proven that it is the people who make the atmosphere, and not the material surroundings. The feestkamer and the people around it have made office a place where I felt very much at home – a kind atmosphere where PhDs help each other and where there was always someone to share PhD and life events with over a coffee. Thank you Loes, Joep, Sjoerdje, Daphne, Marc, Mariken, Lars, Remko, Harmen, Hannah, Wouter, Lisanne and Lea! I also want to thank my other colleagues from the Challenges program group and the Political Science department. In particular, I thank Floris Vermeulen, Joris de Vries, Theresa Kuhn, Matthijs Rooduijn and Tom van der Meer for the pleasant collaboration.

Of the people I met and grew close to during these years, a few I would like to single
out. Emmy Bergsma, for the first year in our mysterious yet cozy mezzanine office and your good company ever since. Emily Miltenburg, for our mutual pep talks ever since the Research Master – I hope we will continue sharing our successes and setbacks in the corridors between our departments. Eefje Steenvoorden, for sharing laughs and stories while we were going through similar life-changing transitions. Maria Kranendonk, for the instant familiarity and for upholding the good office atmosphere. Eelco Harteveld, for all the fun in and outside of the office – I have great reminiscences of our many trips. I am happy to have Maria and Eelco by my side while defending this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank those who were important to me in life outside the PhD. I thank my friends for being there, for the much-needed distraction they offered, and, it must be said, for their understanding when I had no time for such distraction because of deadlines.

I thank my mother, father and my two brothers – you are a fantastic family and my solid basis. Though dispersed over the country and the globe, with you I always feel at home no matter where we meet. I am lucky to have you by my side. I also want to thank my great and supportive family-in-law.

Rijk, I want to thank you most of all. Ever since I started this PhD we have jokingly alluded to me thanking you in these acknowledgements, and I have always found it slightly awkward to thank someone who means everything to me in a few, public, sentences, with the added risk of resorting to clichés. But I will do so anyway, because you more than deserve the homage. Thank you for being by my side, for laughing with (and at) me, for analysing the world with me. Even if this dissertation was one of the few endeavours we did not take on together, it never really felt like that, because you were always there to make life easier, lighter, more beautiful and more fun. At the time of finalising this PhD project, our daughter has marked the beginning of a new era. I am happier than ever to live our life together, now with the three of us.