

Political Conflict in Europe in the Shadow of the Great Recession

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The Project proposal

i. State-of-the-art and objectives

This project seeks to assess the contemporary development of European democracies and the politicization of the European integration process in the shadow of the Great Recession. Since the world has entered the Great Recession with the breakdown of Lehman Brothers in Fall 2008, commentators have been afraid of the political repercussions of the economic crisis. The specter of the thirties is haunting many observers of European politics. The most pessimistic among them ask themselves whether democracy is going to survive in the face of the grave economic consequences of the crisis (e.g. Flassbeck 2012: 57, Scharpf 2011, Streeck 2012). This project proposes to study the structuration of political conflict in Europe, based on an analysis of political contestation in the electoral arena, the protest arena and in issue-specific public interactions. The key question is whether the Great Recession and its consequences are changing the long-term trends in the development of political conflict in Europe as they have been variously assessed previously (Hooghe et al. 2002, Hooghe and Marks 2009, Inglehart and Welzel 2005, Kitschelt 1995, Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012). In our own interpretation, these long term trends include above all the increasing importance of the cultural dimension of the two-dimensional political space for the structuration of political conflict in Western Europe, and its reinterpretation in terms of an increasing conflict between universalistic/integrationist cosmopolitans and particularistic/ isolationist nationalists. This is mainly the result of the resurgence of nationalist reactions against the economic, political and cultural forces of globalization driven by the radical populist right in the electoral channel, and of the mobilization by the new left in the electoral and the protest channels.

As far as the long-term consequences of this critical juncture are concerned, it may very well be too early to tell. Our objective for this project is more limited: our goal is to study whether and to what extent the long-term trends in the development of European political conflicts have been affected so far by the impact of the Great Recession on the European public, and how its political consequences are unfolding. More specifically, we shall try to find an answer to the following questions:

- Is the exogenous shock of the Great Recession *transforming the overall structure of political conflict* in Europe? Does it lead to a resurgence of *economic conflict*, or are the economic grievances rather interpreted in cultural terms, fuelling *cultural conflicts* that have already been shaping up before the crisis?
- *Which political forces are strengthened/weakened* by the Great Recession and its aftermath? Do we notice any major shifts in the power relations in Europe? In which national settings does the Great Recession strengthen *populist forces* from both left and right at the detriment of mainstream political actors?
- Have the different political forces modified their *programmatic claims* in reaction to the Great Recession, and if so, in what direction and with what kind of success?
- What are the *political dynamics* evolving in the different countries as a result of the extent of the national crisis, the international constraints, the government actions and the reactions of the challengers? How tight is the coupling of mobilization in the different arenas? And how do the dynamics vary between debtor and creditor nations, and between Western and Central-Eastern European countries?

The overall guiding hypothesis is that the unfolding of the Great Recession, indeed, has far-reaching consequences for the development of political conflicts in Europe, which contribute to a fundamental transformation, i.e. a realignment of the political forces.

In order to answer these questions the proposed study is divided into two empirical parts – a comparative static and a dynamic one, which attempt to *innovate* in several ways:

- In both parts, we propose to study the mechanisms linking the political mobilization taking place in the different arenas. This requires an innovative, new approach. As astute observers have pointed out (Hutter forthcoming, McAdam and Su 2002, McAdam and Tarrow 2010), the study of *elections* and that of *political protest* have largely led separate lives so far. While political sociologists have focused on social movements and their protest, comparative political scientists have studied parties and electoral contests, but the two types of political contestation have hardly at all been related to each other. It is time to bring them together in a common framework. The political reactions to the economic repercussions of the Great Recession provide us with an exceptional, quasi-experimental opportunity to study these interactions and their overall political consequences.
- Second, while building on our previous work on political conflict (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008, 2012), the first part of the proposed project *extends its scope in time and space*. Previously we have focused on six West European countries (A, CH, D, F, NL, UK) up to the Great Recession. We now intend to cover 30 European countries up to the present and to compare the structuring of the political contestation during the period immediately preceding the crisis with that in the period following the crisis. It is rare that West and Central-Eastern European countries are included in the same comparative study. In addition, extending the study for the six countries in time will provide us with the opportunity to study long-term developments.
- Third, the second part of the proposed project complements the *structural, comparative-static analysis* with a *dynamic analysis* of the interactions between the governments and their challengers in a selected set of twelve countries.
- Fourth, for the analysis of the dynamic interaction of politics in the different arenas, we propose a mixed-methods approach. To take up the often heard call for dynamic and process-oriented quantitative analysis (e.g. Tilly 2008), we build upon the well-established protest event analysis but innovate by proposing a new type of unit of analysis, which allows us to focus on *chains of events* taking place in different arenas rather than simply coding individual events.
- Finally, to be able to cope with the large amount of data we have in mind, we *invest in developing new semi-automated tools for media content analyses*, which will be a fifth major innovation of this project and an important contribution to the research community.

Theoretical framework

Our theoretical framework builds on our previous work and attempts to bring together several as yet little connected bodies of literature – the political process approach to social movements and its extension in the dynamics of contention approach, the literature on economic voting, on agenda-setting, and on strategic party competition. We shall briefly introduce this framework and formulate a few hypotheses to illustrate what we are proposing to study. Key variables to be explained in this study include the electoral strategies and success of political parties, the mobilization strategies and success of a whole range of other political actors, the salience of the issues related to the Great Recession for the various types of political actors, and the positions they take on them. Based on these variables, we are trying to compare and explain the transformation of the political conflict structure in European countries in the course of the Great Recession.

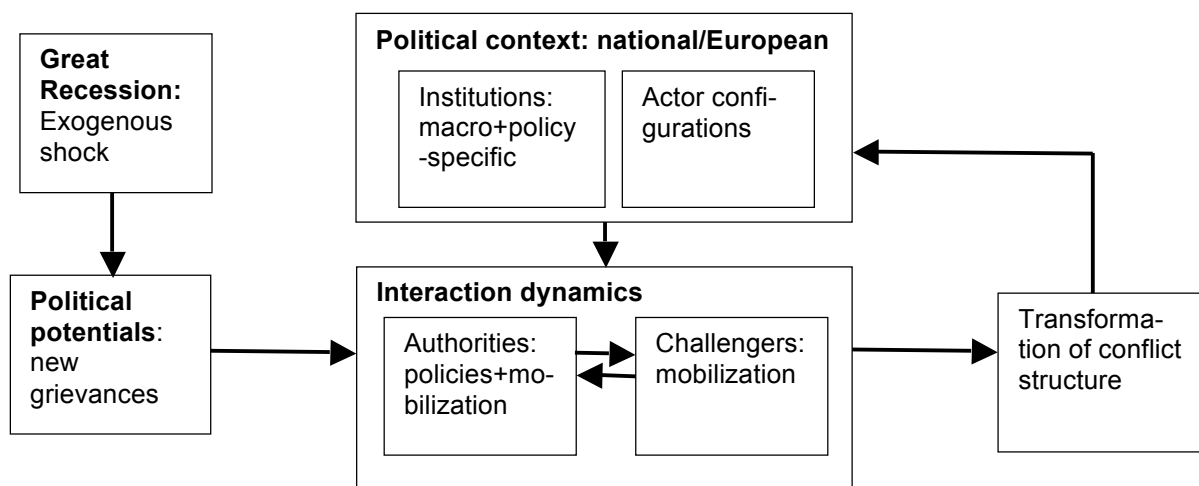
Political potentials and their mobilization

Ours is essentially a two-step approach which reasons that structurally grounded conflicts (grievances) are becoming politically salient to the extent that they are consciously perceived by the groups involved, and organized into politics by some collective actors. Social movement theory adopts such an approach (see the synthesis by McAdam et al. 1996). Kitschelt (1994, 1995) has applied this general strategy to the analysis of both social-democratic and radical-right populist parties. Van der Brug et al. (2005) have used such a two-

step model to explain why some anti-immigrant parties fail and others succeed, and we have used the same kind of reasoning to explain the transformation of the Western European party systems (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008, 2012). It is important to add that the way people are mobilized and the success of their mobilization heavily depend on the national political context (its institutional structure and actor configuration) and the context of the European multi-level governance structure, into which the national context is embedded.

Figure 1 provides the heuristic framework for how these concepts are related to each other. For the comparative static analysis of the first part of our study, the interaction dynamics constitute a black box, and we focus on the relationship between the mobilization potentials, the political opportunity structure (including the actor configuration) and the structuring effect of the mobilization. In the second part, we attempt to elucidate the interaction dynamics, which mediate the effects of political mobilization.

Figure 1: a heuristic framework for the analysis



An exogenous shock like the financial and economic crisis creates a tremendous amount of popular discontent. These grievances constitute the *conflict potential for mobilization* in any one of the various political arenas. Although the financial crisis seriously hit all the European countries, it did so to a different extent. In fact, it exacerbated existing economic imbalances between European countries (Lane 2012, Scharpf 2011), which the governments' policies were unable to cope with. As a result, the intensity of the grievances is particularly great in the 'debtor' countries, which had to adopt far-reaching austerity policies.

At first, European governments focused on the stability of their national banking systems, and on the consequences for the real economy. They adopted bank rescue packages (Weber and Schmitz 2011). They also countered the economic impact of the crisis by adopting modest fiscal expansionary measures (Armingeon 2012), relying on some version of 'liberal Keynesianism' (Pontusson and Raess 2012). Not all countries succeeded in reducing the short-term adverse effects of the crisis. The governments of the weaker economies not only had to resort to austerity measures, in several cases, these measures did not even achieve their intended goal of reducing the public deficits. As a result, the economic imbalances were aggravated, and the EMU governance structures revealed their weakness (Featherstone 2011, De Grauwe 2011, Eichengreen 2012). The ensuing complex policies of crisis management that involve hard bargaining between European governments, their domestic constituents, and supranational actors (the Commission, the European Banking Authority, the ECB, and the IMF) constitute the background for the political restructuring to be studied in the proposed project. They provide one of the key triggers for the political mobilization of the grievances of the European populations in the face of the Great Recession.

For our study, it is of crucial importance that the *national political space* is inserted in the *multilevel governance structure of Europe*. This is not only important for the shape the economic crisis took in Europe (the so called 'Euro-crisis'), but also for the possible manoeuvring space of national governments to deal with the crisis as well as for its political consequences. In particular, in the Great Recession, partisan composition (Armingeon and Baccaro 2012: 7) and cross-class sector-specific coalitions (Pontusson and Raess 2012)

have lost in importance for the determination of adjustment policies, given that governments of different political orientations and of different parliamentary strength found themselves implementing essentially the same structural adjustment programs. The Great Recession seems to reinforce preexisting trends of convergence of mainstream parties, as predicted, for example, by the cartel party thesis (Katz/Mair 1995, 2009). By contrast, conflicts between European nation-states have increased, arguably reinforcing the resurgence of nationalism that predates the Great Recession: in the context of the multi-level governance structure, the question of how the costs of adjustment are distributed not only pitches different groups within the European countries against each other, but also debtor against creditor nations. It is an empirical question addressed by our project, to what extent economic conflicts are politically reinterpreted in nationalistic terms.

While the *production of grievances* is largely determined by the interplay of domestic and international factors, their *mobilization* primarily depends on the *national political context* – its overall and policy-specific ‘political’ (McAdam 1982, Tarrow 2011, Kriesi 2004) and ‘discursive’ (Koopmans and Statham 1999) opportunity structure, its configuration of actors and the power relations between them (see *Figure 1*). For the mobilization, international conflicts are typically ‘domesticated’ (Tarrow 2011: 251). The domestic context concerns first of all the *national party system*, because parties are the most important organizations linking the citizens to policy-making, and because, in democratic societies, ordinarily, defiance is first expressed in the voting booth, simply because people have been socialized within a political culture that defines voting as the mechanism through which political change can and should properly occur.

The literature on *economic voting* provides us with more precise ideas about how the crisis may have played out in electoral terms (Duch and Stevenson 2008, Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2007). This literature indicates that incumbents are generally punished in times of an economic crisis, but that the impact is likely to *vary as a function of context conditions* (Powell and Whitten 1993; Duch and Stevenson’s 2008: Chapter 9, Hellwig and Samuels 2007, Kriesi 2011). Specifically, this literature shows that the kind of democracy (majoritarian vs proportional), the degree of institutionalization of the party system (Western vs Central and Eastern Europe), and the openness of the national economy constitute important aspects to take into account. This literature tends to suggest that the Great Recession is just another instance of economic distress, which has cyclical, but no long-term effects on politics. We take issue with this kind of short-term interpretation and suggest that, indeed, the politics of the Great Recession are likely to reinforce trends of a long-term realignment, which we have already observed before the crisis. From our point of view, it is no accident that the economic voting literature has largely failed to account for the kind of parties that voters turn to when punishing the governing parties (van der Brug et al. 2007: 18f., Tucker 2006: 4f.). In our previous analyses, we have shown that, in Western Europe, the driving force of the transformation of the space in the electoral channel has been the *new populist right* which has articulated the grievances of the ‘globalization losers’, whose mobilization has led to a realignment in the party system. By the early 2000s, the West European party systems have been generally characterized by a three-polar configuration consisting of the left, the moderate mainstream right, and the populist nationalist right. In Central and Eastern Europe, by contrast, populist mobilizations are a more general (centrist) phenomenon, given the unsatisfactory performance of the national governments and the lack of institutionalization of the party systems (Linde 2012, Ucen 2007).

- H1: The mobilization by populist challengers is expected to constitute the *driving force for partisan realignment*.
- H2: In Western Europe, the *new populist challengers from both the left* (mobilizing mainly in economic terms) and *the right* (mobilizing mainly in cultural terms) are expected to be reinforced at the detriment of mainstream actors. By contrast, in Central and Eastern Europe, *new centrist populist parties* are expected to flourish.
- H3: We expect that the mobilization by these challengers not only reinforces the economic dimension of conflict, but also the *renaissance of nationalism* that we have observed in the 1990s and 2000s. Populists of different stripes are expected to move into what we have called *the ‘structural hole’* of the political space (Kriesi et al. 2012: 22), which is characterized by the combination of a state interventionist/protectionist economic positions with nationalist/protectionist cultural positions.
- H4: The strength of the populist mobilization as well as its impact on the overall transformation of the conflict structure is likely to depend, however, on the *country-specific structural political* (e.g. on the type of democracy)

and economic context (e.g. on the intensity of the grievances). We expect particularly strong effects in debtor countries and/or countries with weakly institutionalized party systems (i.e. CEE countries).

The electoral arena observes its own rhythm and electoral punishment of the governments may be impossible in the short run – at least not at the national level, which is the one where the important economic policy decisions are made. Alternatively, electoral punishment of the national government may be meted out *in 'secondary' elections* at other levels – local, regional or European, which may be on the political agenda in the short run (e.g. Schmitt 2005: 651). Even if there are no immediate opportunities for direct electoral punishment, the electoral cycle is embedded in the on-going process of *protest mobilization* which we expect to interact with the electoral process in complex ways: protest mobilization not only influences election campaigns and outcomes (McAdam and Tarrow 2010), but also puts pressure on the government in between elections (Goldstone 2003: 8f.). In the comparative static analysis, we shall attempt to study the overall coupling of electoral mobilization and contestation in the protest arena. Our previous studies have shown that the two arenas are *only loosely coupled*, because of a kind of division of labour between the populist right (which mobilized the globalization losers in the electoral channel) and the new left (which mobilizes globalization winners on behalf of the losers in the protest channel) (Hutter 2012, forthcoming). Before the crisis, the left's protest mobilization had mainly been motivated by cultural issues (in defense of immigrants, human rights etc.). Under the impact of the crisis, we expect the left to become more self-interested and economically motivated, and to more closely link its electoral and protest strategies:

- H5: Because of the increased mobilization in economic terms on the left, we expect a *tighter coupling* between the mobilization in the two channels, especially in the countries hardest hit by the crisis.

Interaction dynamics

Studying the interaction dynamics implies endogenizing the *mobilization strategies* of the various actors: their strategies become mutually dependent. Our heuristic framework for the analysis of the interactive dynamics starts out with *a set of five highly stylized political actors* that includes: (1) international actors (such as the Troika, the ECB, or the IMF), (2) the national government, (3) the (mainstream) opposition, (4) other (competing) public authorities (such as the (symbolic) President, the Courts, or the voters in a referendum vote) or established interest groups, and (5) outside challengers (populist parties, social movement organizations, trade unions, public interest groups). We assume that, in times of crisis, the international actors and the national governments have the initiative, while the other three types of actors may or may not react to the actions of these key actors. We are most interested in their reactions that mobilize the larger public.

Mobilization involves the 'expansion of conflict' to an ever larger public (Schattschneider 1975), i.e. the *politicization* of the structurally produced, but latent political potentials. For politicization to occur, three elements have to be jointly present (Höglinger 2011): a) elite divisions with respect to the issue in question, b) intense public attention to the issue, and c) resonance of the issue with the citizen public's predispositions. In the comparative static approach, these three elements are taken as exogenous determinants of mobilization. Each one of them can, however, be influenced by the strategies of the political actors and the resulting dynamics of mobilization. In the footsteps of Schattschneider and Riker (1986, 1996), the agenda-setting literature recognizes that the *struggle for attention* among the actors in the political elite constitutes a key element of democratic politics more generally (Burstein 1998: vi). The salience of particular conflicts (Culpepper 2012) and the shifting attention paid to specific conflicts (Baumgartner and Jones 2002, 2005) become crucial aspects of politics.

The insights of the literature on both *strategic party competition* and *social movements* are also relevant here. The former recognizes that parties compete on the basis of both policy positions and the salience as well as ownership of issues (e.g. Downs 1957, Meguid 2005, 2008, Sides 2006). The latter suggests that, in order to influence political decision-makers, challengers attempt to expand the conflict in the public sphere by staging protest events with high news-value (Rochon 1990: 108, Koopmans 2004, McAdam 1983): size, disruption, and originality are the most important elements of protest events appealing to the media, whose

attention is crucial for getting not only on the public, but also on the political agenda. Faced with new challengers, established political actors (such as public authorities or mainstream parties) can either adopt an adversarial, accommodative or dismissive strategy. They can choose to fight the challengers on their own grounds, to coopt them or to deflect their challenge (by resorting to blame-shifting – trying to put the blame on predecessors, or supranational actors, or to debate-shifting – trying to refer to secondary issues or to personalize the issue (Kriesi 2004a)). The substantive claims made by both the challengers and the established actors are likely to depend on *issue ownership*, which arises from reputation based on record or credible promises, and on the master-frames actors typically use (Höglinger et al. 2012).

By raising the attention of the media, challengers attempt to draw the attention of the political authorities and, eventually, to influence *policy outcomes*. Influencing the media agenda and the political agenda are only first, and, of course, easier steps to this final goal (Olzak and Soule 2009). We are most interested in the challengers' effect on the overall structuring of politics in a given country, as well as on their impact on policy outcomes. Building on Walgrave and Vliegenthart (2012), McAdam and Soule (2002) and on our own previous work (Höglinger et al. 2012), we can formulate the following expectations:

- H6: Protest against the economic hardship caused by the crisis *targets* above all *governments*, because governments are the most powerful actors in domestic politics and because they are involved in the negotiations within the multi-level system of crisis management
- H7: Actors from the (populist) *left* are expected to appeal to the public in *economic* terms, i.e. in terms of 'social justice', 'social inclusion' (multiculturalism/universalism), and 'class conflict', while actors on the (populist) *right* are expected to appeal to the public in *cultural* terms, i.e. in terms of 'nationalism/patriotism' (our country against other countries) or 'social exclusion' (indigenous vs. immigrant population). *Mainstream* actors are expected to appeal to the public in *utilitarian/technocratic* terms, i.e. in terms of 'efficiency', 'economic imperatives' and 'political pressure'.

In order to study the interaction dynamics, we shall also take our cues from the *dynamics of contention approach* in the social movement literature (McAdam et al. 2001, Tilly 2008). This approach focuses on explanatory mechanisms. In our project, we are particularly interested in mechanisms that connect the conventional and contentious politics in the electoral and protest channels respectively. It will be the theoretical task of this project to *elaborate a systematic, limited set of mechanisms* that will allow us to analyze the interaction dynamics systematically. The mechanisms are designed to specify the links between the actors involved in the interaction dynamics. They can be thought of as an elaboration of the 'dynamic model of representation' (Stimson et al. 1995), which assumes that the voters affect the government's policy-making not only during elections, but also between elections. More specifically, we assume that the mobilization of challengers in the protest channel and in the policy-making arena between elections not only express, but shape public opinion and have an impact on the political agenda and the policy outcomes.

We start with the same concepts we use for the comparative static analysis: the primacy of elections for articulating challenges to incumbents, the shift to protest if electoral opportunities are not immediately available, the tighter coupling of elections and protest in a time of crisis, the focus of challengers on the government, and the dependence of the challengers' impact on the news-value of their protests. In addition, we shall elaborate some other mechanisms, which are likely to contribute to the dynamics of the interaction between challengers and authorities. Following Karapin (2011) in particular, we can distinguish between *opportunity-increasing dynamics* and *threat-increasing dynamics*. In the case of opportunity-increasing dynamics, the 'bold' (daring, novel, resourceful, large size) actions of the challengers allow for an extension of their coalitions, getting support among elite actors/public authorities, and eventually obtaining procedural or substantive reforms. Threat-increasing dynamics, by contrast, involve increasing (excessive) repression on the part of the elites and new substantive threats to the interests of the challengers (refusal to adopt policy reforms in the face of strong protest, or closing access to the public or decision-making channels). The two dynamics may also be combined with a strategy of divide-and-rule on the part of the authorities: support for the moderate part of the challengers and repression of their more radical wing (Karstedt-Henke 1980). Very tentatively, we can formulate two hypotheses concerning the conditions for these two types of dynamics:

- H8: We expect *opportunity-increasing dynamics*, when the challengers face a government composed of traditional allies (e.g. trade unions facing a government dominated by the left), and/or when there are some other public authorities able to check the government's decisions (e.g. a President, the courts or the people in a referendum vote).
- H9: We expect *threat-increasing dynamics*, when the challengers face a government composed of traditional adversaries, and/or when there are no other public authorities able to check the government.

ii. Methodology

A grand design and extensive data collection is needed to answer our research questions. We have the expertise and the EUI is a perfect place to cope with this challenge. Our research program combines three steps: (a) a quantitative large-N study of 30 European democracies for the period 2001 to 2015, (b) a more detailed, quantitative study on the long-term development of political conflict in the six countries covered by our previous work from the 1970s to 2015, and (c) in-depth case studies, relying on a mixed-methods approach, that focuses on the dynamics of contention in twelve countries (period 2001 to 2015). For the identification of *political potentials*, all three steps will rely on existing *surveys* such as ESS, CSES, and Eurobarometer data. For the *mobilization* in the electoral arena, the protest arenas and in public interactions, we shall mainly focus on public contestation, as reported in the *mass media*, and invest a lot in collecting a large amount of original data. To collect these data, we shall develop *new semi-automated tools for the content analyses*. This will be another major innovation of the project and an important contribution to the research community. *Table 1* provides an overview over the key features of the data collection procedures.

Table 1: Overview over data collection procedures

	Type of study	Political potentials	Electoral arena	Protest arena	Issue-specific interactions
Part I	Large-N study (30 countries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey results: ESS, CSES, Eurobarometer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Election results (secondary statistics) • Party manifesto coding (MRG/CMP data) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protest event coding (international news wires) • Strike statistics (ILO statistics) 	• -
	Detailed study (6 countries from previous study)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey results: ESS, CSES, Eurobarometer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core sentence-based coding of election campaigns (national newspapers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protest event coding (national newspapers) 	• -
Part II	Detailed case studies (12 countries)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey results: ESS, CSES, Eurobarometer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core sentence-based coding of election campaigns (national newspapers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protest event coding (national newspapers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed qualitative reconstruction (various sources) • Coding of 'event triplets' (national newspapers)

Building on our previous work, we propose to focus on political contestation in the public sphere since, in contemporary 'audience democracies' (Manin 1995), the public sphere constitutes the forum where conflict is expanded by the political elites to catch the attention of the citizen public. The basic methodological choice is to explore political conflict based on mass media reports. Research on the transformation of national political competition routinely notes the importance of the media for political opinion-making and decision-making processes (Bennett et al. 2004; Ferree et al. 2002; Swanson and Mancini 1996). Political competition is increasingly transferred 'from the backrooms of parliamentary committees and the central offices of parties and associations to the public sphere' (Kriesi 2004: 184). Hence, virtually all political

actors try to gain public support through the mass media, and political statements mediated by journalists receive much public attention (Schmidt-Beck and Farrell 2008: 15).

More specifically, we propose to study public contestation in *the electoral arena, the protest arena, and in issue-specific public interactions*. Election campaigns and protest events constitute key moments of intensified mobilization and contestation. Thus, they provide an excellent opportunity to study the structuring of political conflict in the electoral arena and the protest arena, respectively. While a closer analysis of election campaigns leads to detailed results on the structuring of political conflicts by political parties, the focus on protest events broadens the scope of actors to include social movement organizations, trade unions, and public interest groups in particular (i.e., organizations that typically expand the scope of conflict beyond the conventional electoral arena and give voice to claims that go otherwise unheard). The study of issue-specific interactions broadens the scope of actors even further to include all sorts of mainstream actors in addition to parties and outside challengers. Since the sequence of public interactions covers all communications related to a particular issue irrespective of the arena in which it occurs, they allow us to study the dynamics of contention across political arenas in more detail. We shall choose sequences of interactions which cover key contentious issues related to the crisis.

A large-N study of 30 European countries shortly before and after the crisis

We propose to study the 27 EU member-states plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. We shall compare the periods before (2001-2007) and after (2008-2015) the start of the crisis. This first step is intended to provide us with a broad assessment of the political consequences of the crisis in both the electoral arena and the protest arena as well as the (static) relationship between the two. To assess the broad patterns of change in the two arenas, we plan to rely on secondary analysis of existing data sets and on an innovative, semi-automated protest event analysis based on international news wire.

To study the *electoral arena*, we focus on a *secondary analysis of national election results and party manifesto data* provided by the Comparative Manifestos Project (MRG/CMP; <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/>). The analysis of aggregate shifts in the support for different groups of political parties closely follows the standard approach used by the economic voting literature (see Duch and Stevenson 2008, Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2007). For analyzing the (shifting) polarization related to the cultural and economic issue dimensions, we propose to rely on the comparative manifesto data (e.g. Rovny 2012). Given that manifesto data provide results that are comparable to media campaign data for the parties' issue positioning (although not for the salience of issues) (Helbling and Tresch 2011), we decide for this, from our point of view, second best solution. Coding the public contestation during electoral campaigns for 30 countries would not be feasible, even if we are able to use advanced semi-automated procedures.

For the study of protest events, we rely on *strike statistics* (<http://laborsta.ilo.org/default.html>) provided by the ILO, and we take on the challenge to collect *original protest event data* for 30 countries over a period of 12 years. For the collection of protest events, we follow a long-standing tradition of research on social movements and contentious politics by relying on *protest event analysis* (PEA) (e.g. Kriesi et al. 1981; Tarrow 1989; Tilly et al. 1975). The definition of a protest event, data sources, and sampling strategies are of particular importance. For the purposes of this part of the study, we propose data collection based on international news wires and using semi-automated procedures for both the selection and the coding of the articles (see below). By relying on international news wires as sources, we follow the lead of Imig and Tarrow (2001) as well as Beissinger and Sasse (2011). Specifically, we will select relevant news wires from Agence France Press (France), Associated Press (US), Reuters (UK) and Deutsche Presse Agentur (Germany). These news agencies are not only globally important in terms of their size and outreach (Bielsa 2008), but also provide news wires in English. This makes data collection efficient and reliable, since the same linguistic methods can be used for all news wires. Furthermore, this will reduce the geopolitical bias of the single agencies.

A systematic long-term analysis of political structuration

Fortunately, for a more in-depth long-term quantitative analysis, we can use the election campaign and the protest event data for the six West European countries covered by our previous work (A, CH, D, F, NL, and UK). The data reaches back to the 1970s and goes up to 2007. In the proposed project we shall extend it up to 2015. This will allow us to study in detail how the Great Recession modifies our previous conclusions based on this country sample.

To study the structuration in the *electoral arena*, national newspaper articles related to the electoral competition and national political parties in general are coded with the help of a *core sentence analysis* (CSA) (e.g., Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings 2001; Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012). Following this type of relational content analysis, each grammatical sentence of an article is reduced to its most basic ‘core sentence(s)’ that contains only the subject (the actor), the object (another object or a political issue) and the direction of the relationship between the two. The direction between subject and object is quantified using a scale ranging from -1 to +1, with three intermediary positions. CSA allows us to measure both the positions actors take and the salience they attribute to certain issues. This allows us to trace how the salience and the degree of polarization have developed over time. Core sentences constitute an inductive means for capturing the full complexity of political statements without imposing strong theoretical expectations, such as a priori categories. The sources are articles published in one national quality newspaper and the most widely distributed tabloid per country in the two months before Election Day (see <http://www.ipz.uzh.ch/forschung/npw.html>).

To study the structuration in the *protest arena*, we again apply PEA analysis. In this part of the study, we shall, however, follow Kriesi et al. (1995) and our most recent updates (Hutter forthcoming; Kriesi et al. 2012), covering all protest events reported in one national newspaper (and not just the ones reported by international news agencies) in this period.

A series of 12 case-studies

To study the interaction dynamics, we propose an ambitious design with no less than 12 case studies for the same time comparison as the one chosen for the large-N study (2001-7 vs. 2008-15). This allows comparing in more detail the experience of a subset of Northwestern, Southern, and Central- and Eastern European countries that have been more or less seriously hit by the crisis (for the case selection, see *Table 2*). This gives us a more detailed picture of the political consequences of the crisis and allows us to focus more closely on the interaction dynamics and the coupling of the reactions in the different channels of mobilization. Studying these dynamic interactions is essential if we want to understand the complex repercussions of the crisis on European politics and the future of European democracies more generally.

Table 2: Case selection – Case studies (including the national elections we expect to cover)

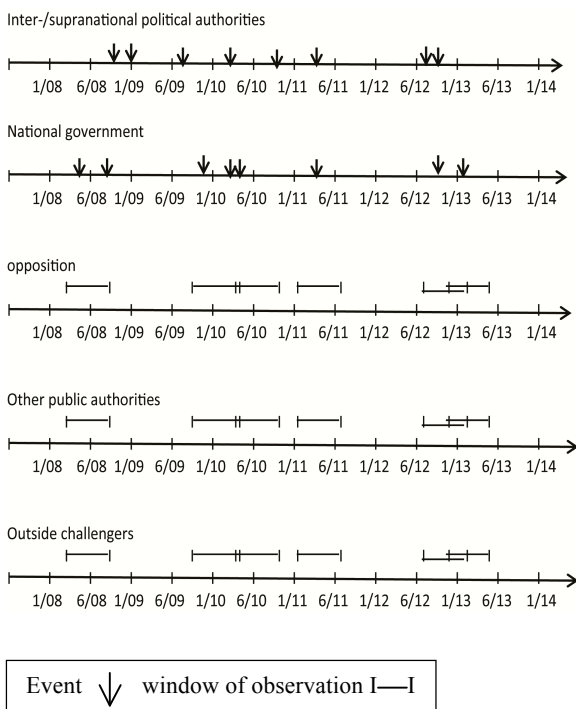
	Northwestern Europe	Southern Europe	Central-Eastern Europe
Hit hard	Iceland: 2013,2009,2007	Greece 2012,2012,2009,2007	Latvia: 2015,2011,2011,2006
	Ireland: 2015,2011,2007	Spain: 2015,2011,2008	Hungary: 2014,2010,2006
Hit moderately/ hardly at all	UK: 2015,2010,2005	France: 2012,2007	Poland: 2015,2011,2007
	Germany: 2013,2009,2005	Italy: 2013,2008	Czech Republic: 2014,2010,2006

First, we propose to study the *development of political conflict in electoral and protest politics* with the help of the same methodological approaches, which are used for the long-term study discussed above. This means that we code at least two national election campaigns in the twelve countries (one national election before the crisis, and all national elections since 2008, see *Table 2*) with the core-sentence approach (CSA), as well

as all protest events with PEA for the same time period. In contrast to the Large-N study, national newspapers are again used as sources. This step allows assessing in detail the development of political conflict in the twelve countries and puts the results obtained for the six West European countries in a broader comparative perspective.

To study the *issue-specific dynamic interaction of contestation across levels and arenas*, we aim for a *qualitative* reconstruction of the dynamic political processes taking place since the onset of the crisis in 2008, based on a reading of the selected articles (and secondary literature that already exists) about these events. Here, we rely on established process-tracing approaches (e.g., George and Bennett 2005). In addition, our goal is to supplement the qualitative approach with a more rigorous *quantitative* analysis of the dynamic interplay between activities within and across different political levels and arenas (with a special emphasis on the relationship between challengers' activities in the protest arena and activities within more institutionalized political arenas). The combination of these two types of analysis also constitutes a major innovation since we take up the often heard call for dynamic and process-oriented designs in social movement research (e.g. Tilly 2008) without referring to qualitative methods only and without only focusing on the interactions within single encounters.

Figure 2: timelines for event collection



More specifically, we propose to begin the reconstruction of the 12 cases with an *iterative identification procedure of key events* (illustrated by Figure 2). The procedure starts by identifying the relevant events produced by international actors and national governments with the help of automated search procedures, using a list of the actors (e.g. governing parties and individual members of government) and the issues involved. Based on these events, we can define ‘windows of observation’ in the timeline, which are centered on these events in order to identify the reactions of the other three categories of actors (opposition, other public authorities/established interest groups, outside challengers). These events and reactions constitute the *building blocks for the interaction sequence*. Next, we attempt to connect the individual events/reactions by a systematic procedure of process tracing. To do so, we build upon the well-established PEA, but innovate by focusing on *chains of events* rather than simply coding individual events. To reconstruct the dynamics of contention, we propose a *new unit of analysis*. The idea is to break down the continuous sequence of political actions into quantifiable parts without losing the connection between the individual elements of the sequence. Our new units of analysis are *triplets of events* of the following form (Kriesi 2009): ‘triggering event (action of international actor/ national government) – reaction of opposition/other public authority/challenger

– reaction of international actor/national government’. These triplets may be linked to each other to the extent that the reaction of the target in a given triplet becomes the triggering event of the next triplet.

At first sight, this may seem to be a rather insignificant operative change compared to simple event counts. But, in fact, this at first sight innocent move makes a world of difference, and is challenging to implement. In order to constitute the triplet, we need to establish links between events, which may be difficult to define/delimit in the first place. We shall have to define ‘stylized events’, which may be composed of many individual events taking place at one at the same time or in a short lapse of time, articulating similar claims and addressing the same target or related targets. In order to establish the links between events, we cannot rely on newspaper sources only, but have to take into account multiple sources allowing us to document the mutual reactions. Moreover, the task establishing these triplets is further complicated by the fact that the stylized actors do not constitute unitary actors, and that the targets may often or even most of the time choose not to react. We expect that we will be able to handle these challenges, just as we have learnt to deal with event counts, which originally did not look simple either.

Semi-automated selection and coding procedures

As already pointed out, for all three steps, we shall heavily rely to computer-assisted coding. For this purpose, we shall cooperate with computational linguists, with whom we have already built up working relationships in the past. First, both in the large-N study and in the case studies, the events will be collected by a comprehensive keyword search in the databases and stored in a text index. Second, the relevant articles will be transformed into a linguistically annotated and filtered text corpus. Third, by means of semi-automatic processes, the limited number of relevant variables like actor, issue, frame, form of decision, location (for international and government actors) or actor, issue, frame, protest forms, location, and number of participants (for protest events) are identified. More specifically, a set of manually provided concept definitions is used as a word space model which yields semantic representations for the variables (Turney and Pantel 2010). Such models have been shown to closely mimic human judgement (Rothenhäusler and Schütze 2009). In a feasibility study, all the necessary software has already been tested. These tests revealed that we can reduce the effort needed for the *selection* of the relevant articles to 25% of the time needed for manual approaches without losing data quality. And we expect similar efficiency gains for the *coding* of events.

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