

Political mobilization in times of crises: the relationship between economic and political crises

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Introduction

The background of this paper is the question of how the contemporary Great Recession is influencing politics: what are the conditions under which an economic crisis in general, and the austerity politics of the Great Recession in particular, lead to a political crisis? Political crises are salient events that punctuate the history of a country. They interrupt the steady state equilibrium of incremental policy making under the auspices of a dominant coalition. When the problems the political system faces can no longer be solved incrementally, they result in political crises – ‘salient events like wars, revolutions, overt challenges to governmental legitimacy – in which passions are aroused and the very survival of the system is often at stake’ (Verba 1965: 555).

There are, of course, political crises that do not result from economic crises. Political crises are the result of poor governance in general, not just of poor economic performance. In particular, political crises may also result from corruption and partiality, disregard for the rule of law, large-scale-scandals and general ineffectiveness of government. Granted that political crises are not always the result of economic crises, there are famous examples from history – the experience of the inter-war period in Europe in general and of the Weimar Republic in particular, but also the Latin American experience in the 1980s and 1990s – that point to the possibility of dramatic political implications of deep economic crises. As Gourevitch (1984: 129) has reminded us, ‘the 1930s were too costly for us not to think about what we can learn

from them for the present'. From a contemporary European perspective, I would suggest that this is even more true for the more recent Latin American experience (see Rovira Kaltwasser 2013).

Before I embark on my exploration of possible answers to the question about the crises, let me specify the scope condition of my question: I am formulating this question with respect to the European context. In other words, I am asking the question in the context of more or less established democracies with regular repetitions of free and fair elections. More specifically, I assume the involvement of a set of five highly stylized political actors, which include: inter- and supranational actors (mainly EU-agencies), the national government, the (mainstream) opposition, other (competing) public authorities (such as the (symbolic) President, the Courts, the voters (in a referendum vote) or established interest groups), and new challengers (populist parties, social movement organizations, public interest groups). My reasoning starts from the assumption that national governments (possibly in combination with supra- and international agencies) are the key actors who have the initiative in dealing with the economic crisis: in the Great Recession, it is the national governments that (are forced to) adopt austerity policies, to which the other three types of actors (opposition, other public authorities, outside challengers) react, setting in motion an interaction dynamic that eventually determines the political consequences of the economic crisis. In the terminology of Gourevitch's (1984: 97) 'political sociology of political economy', the governments choose a policy-approach to deal with the crisis, which suits their politics, while the challengers who seek different policy goals have a need for a politics that will help fulfill their policy. Political protest is part of the politics of the challengers, but the point I wish to make here is that it is embedded into the dynamic interaction with the other key actors that, in turn, determines the outcome of the crisis. It is this dynamic interaction which should constitute the focus of the analysis, not protest per se. My goal in this paper is rather modest and exploratory: I would like to provide a heuristic framework for approaching this kind of analysis.

Political crises: crisis situations and the dynamics of crises

In analogy to Tilly's (1978) distinction between revolutionary situations and revolutionary outcomes, with respect to political crises, I propose to distinguish between *crisis situations* and *crisis outcomes*. A crisis situation is created when routine incremental problem solving no longer works, when institutions are no longer taken for granted and self-reinforcing, when compliance of the citizens is no longer guaranteed, and when positive feedback processes are set in motion that accentuate rather than counterbalance the emerging crisis. In the terminology of a model of path-dependency, the political crisis situation constitutes a 'critical juncture' which renders politics more plastic and which modifies the preferences of actors. New alliances become possible and policies may be switched to a new path (Gourevitch 1984). In the terminology of a well-known model of the policy process, a political crisis situation corresponds to the 'punctuation' of the 'equilibrium' of normal politics (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 2002). At the moment of punctuation, the policy monopoly of the dominant coalition breaks down and major shifts in political power become possible. Generally, the crisis situation constitutes an opportunity for change.

How do I recognize a crisis situation when I see it? In discussing Latin American crises of democratic representation, Mainwaring et al. (2006) distinguish between attitudinal and behavioral indicators. Among the former, they count lack of confidence in political institutions, among the latter they list electoral volatility, collapse of party systems, wide spread support for outside candidates in presidential elections and depressed electoral participation. In line with this distinction between attitudinal and behavioral components of a political crisis, I would like to distinguish between *latent political potentials* and their *overt mobilization*. The latent potentials refer to the attitudinal components, which constitute the more or less fertile ground for a political crisis. The political crisis only breaks loose, however, once this latent potential is mobilized and manifests itself in behavioral terms. This is to say that a political

crisis does not develop as a matter of course, but is the result of political mobilization – either in electoral terms (as indicated by Mainwaring et al.) or in terms of political protest or both. In terms of protest mobilization, we are dealing with large-scale (encompassing) mobilizations of broad social groups, which are triggered by the government's approach to the economic crisis (its austerity policies in the case of the Great Recession) and explicitly challenge not only its policy approach, but its legitimacy more fundamentally. This kind of encompassing mobilization is to be distinguished from more group- or issue-specific and local protest that does not challenge the way the government is dealing with the crisis and that is unlikely to contribute to the creation of a political crisis (see Shalev 2013).

The *crisis dynamics* are linking the crisis situation to the crisis outcomes. These dynamics are constituted by the interaction sequence that is touched off by the mobilization against the government's policies to meet the economic crisis. They are likely to be highly contingent and we shall be hard put to formulate general hypotheses about the development of political crises caused by economic hardship. In most general terms, we have learnt from the social movements' literature that political mobilization depends on the interaction between three sets of factors: grievances, organization, and opportunity.

Grievances constitute the latent crisis potentials. They result from the exogenous shock of the crisis, but they may also be the result of long-term social change and endogenous political processes. As a matter of fact, it is unlikely that the economic crisis creates such mobilization potentials from scratch. In any given society there are more or less sizeable latent mobilisation potentials linked to the structural conflicts, which predate the crisis and which pre-structure the way the crisis mobilization will play out. The mobilization potentials newly created by the crisis add to this already existing stock of grievances. Most likely, the short-term impact of an exogenous economic shock interacts with the long-term endogenous processes of change.

Thus, a deep economic crisis may serve as a catalyst for the mobilization of political

potentials that have already been building up for many years. The economic crisis may reshape an already on-going mobilization process: it may reinvigorate it by intensifying its mobilization, and/or it may redirect it by focusing it on the issues raised by the economic crisis. But the economic crisis may also, for the first time, trigger the articulation of mobilization potentials which have remained latent until the occurrence of the crisis.

People with grievances seek to express them, and they do so by raising their voice or by exiting (Hirschman 1970). They raise their voice to the extent that they are organized and have an opportunity to do so. *Organization* is crucial, and the most important distinction in this respect is the one between top-down and bottom-up. Mobilization can either be organized by members of the political elite (top-down) or by grass-roots organizations (bottom-up) or both. Top-down mobilization of large-scale protest by elites corresponds to what I shall call a '*populist strategy*'. Let me clarify the notoriously slippery, but widely used term of 'populism'. I propose that we should conceive of populism both as an ideology and as a political strategy. As an *ideology* populism adopts a Manichean view of society dividing it into two antagonistic camps – the virtuous people and some corrupt elites, effectively pitting one against the other (Canovan 1999: 3; Laclau 1977: 172-3; Mudde 2004: 543; Wiles 1969: 166). Populism claims that the people are sovereign, that they have been betrayed by the corrupt elites and that the primacy of the people has to be restored (Mény and Surel 2002: 11f.). Populism as an ideology manifests itself in specific discursive patterns for identifying foes and solidifying the community of friends (Hawkins 2009: 1042; Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Pauwels 2011). Populism as a *political strategy* is conceptualized as a specific way of competing for and exercising political power: essentially, it refers to the top-down political mobilization of mass constituencies by a personalistic and paternalistic leader who challenges established elites (Roberts 2006: 127). Populism in the strategic sense is, in the final analysis, 'a project of power' that seeks to gain the authority of the sovereign state for the personalistic leader so as to allow him to represent the will of 'the people' (Urbinati 2013: 140).

While the various sub-types of top-down mobilization can all be characterized as ‘populist’, mobilization from below is conventionally understood and conceptualized as ‘movement politics’ (Roberts 2007: 14). Such mobilization from below typically follows a radically different pattern: in contemporary Western societies, social movements are ‘primarily networks of informal groups, semi-formal and formal organizations, and individuals’ that ‘draw upon, or generate, new solidarities and group memberships which cut across the boundaries of any specific traditional political cleavage’ (Diani 2000: 397, 399). They are characterized by what Gerlach and Hine (1970) have once called SPIN-structures: these are integrated network-structures which are at the same segmented (composed of many groups) and polycentric (composed of many different leaders). These structures ‘self-organize’ without central or ‘lead’ organizations. More recently, this kind of mobilizing structures have started to benefit from digital technologies, or ‘connective’ mobilizing techniques that allow for carrying out large-scale mobilization processes with a minimum of formal organization and allow citizens to play a more active role in the mobilization processes (Bennett and Segerberg 2012).

Turning to *opportunity*, we should note, as Piven and Cloward (1977: 15) have already done a long time ago, that ‘ordinarily, defiance is first expressed in the voting booth simply because, whether defiant or not, people have been socialized within a political culture that defines voting as the mechanism through which political change can and should properly occur’. Accordingly, as already noted, one of the first signs of a political crisis is electoral volatility – a sharp shift in voting patterns. More generally, in democratic societies, the action repertoire of protests is likely to make use of the available institutionalized channels of access, which means that the privileged institutional space, i.e. the privileged arena to voice grievances are the electoral arena, the judicial arena, and, where available, the direct-democratic arena. In democracies, voters resort to the protest arena to the extent that they are unable to express themselves in institutionalized channels, or their voice in these channels is ineffective.

The electoral arena observes its own rhythm, however, which means that the expression of the voters' discontent 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 taken. This constraint imposed by the electoral cycle is alleviated by the availability of elections at different levels – there are not only national, but also local, regional, and European elections, taking place at different moments in time and offering as many opportunities to voice discontent. Voters may use each one of these elections to protest against the governments and their policies at various levels. If mobilization in the electoral channel is the most obvious choice, increasingly, direct-democratic institutions are also available for the articulation of grievances. As our comparative analysis of new social movements in Western Europe has shown, such institutions are readily used by social movements when they are available (Kriesi et al. 1995). Other institutional options for the articulation of grievances include litigation in courts. Relying on courts for imposing reforms is, however, severely limited by the bounded nature of constitutional rights and by the fact that the judiciary is appointed by the other branches of government.

In the absence of available options in the institutionalized arenas discontented elites (top-down mobilization) and citizens (bottom up mobilization) may choose to resort directly to protest, and to try to force political concessions from political elites by appealing to the general public. This is Schattschneider's (1960) idea of the expansion of conflict. Public protest is designed to unleash a public debate, to draw the attention of the public to the grievances of the actors in question, to create controversy where there was none, and to obtain the support of the public for the actors' concerns. Controversial public debates and support by the general public open up the access and increase the legitimacy of speakers and allies of the protest movements among journalists and decision-makers – the (mainstream) opposition, or other (competing) public authorities (such as the (symbolic) President – who tend to closely follow the public debates (Gamson und Meyer 1996: 288). Challengers who succeed in producing events which become visible in the news media, resonate with other actors (who

feel obliged to react) and elicit more positive than negative responses can compete with much more powerful adversaries (Wolfsfeld's 1997: 47; Koopmans 2004). As Koopmans (2005: 27f.) points out, the concretely visible response patterns of other actors often emerge in the interaction process between social movements and authorities, i.e. movements may 'stumble on opportunities' in a trial and error process. In resorting to protest, challengers may enact established action repertoires (see Tilly 1978), they may, in a process of institutional learning, convert institutionally available repertoires for their own purposes (see Chen 2012), or they may develop new forms of action (see McAdam 1983).

We can expect public protest to interact with the electoral cycle in complex ways: protest mobilization not only influences election campaigns and election outcomes (McAdam and Tarrow 2010), but it also puts pressure on the government in between elections (Goldstone 2003: 8f.). Short of participating in the electoral process themselves, movements can influence the electoral process and the government's policies between elections through ongoing alliances.

Crisis outcomes: electoral and policy outcomes in the short-term and the long-term

The possible political outcomes of an economic crisis heavily depend on its duration (Roberts 2003: 52). The longer the economic crisis lasts, the more it will spread the political costs across established systems of interest representation, and the greater the likelihood that it will give rise to important political mobilizations. Moreover, political mobilizations are more likely to have success, the deeper the crisis. Goldstone's (1980) reanalysis of Gamson's (1975) classical study found that social movement success is more likely in periods of crisis (major wars, economic or political crises).

The political outcome of the crisis is, however, not determined by the crisis situation. It depends entirely on the interaction dynamics, which means that it is very difficult to attribute

outcomes to actors. As Tilly (1999: 268) has observed, ‘the range of effects far surpasses the explicit demands made by activists in the course of social movements, and sometimes negates them’. There are many different ways to classify outcomes of political mobilization (see Giugni 1998). For the purposes of classifying crisis outcomes, none of these traditional typologies is really very useful, however. Instead of relying on existing typologies, I propose to combine two distinctions for the classification of crisis outcomes: the distinction between electoral and policy outcomes, with the distinction between short- and long-term outcomes. Given that, in times of crises, the main adversary of the challengers is the government, the electoral results are crucial for determining the outcome of the crisis. But elections only constitute the first step in the sequence of events: the next step concerns the policies adopted by the new government. Do they meet the demands of the challengers and to what extent do they do so?

In *electoral terms*, we can distinguish between the short and the long term. The literature on *economic voting* provides us with a short-term view about how an economic crisis may play out in electoral terms (Duch and Stevenson 2008, Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2007). This literature is based on the assumption of instrumentally rational voters, who will reward the incumbents with their vote, when the economy is good, and punish them when the economy is bad. Note that it is not the personal financial situation, which is considered to be decisive for the economic vote, but the perception of the national economy. 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 2014). Specifically, this literature shows that the kind of democracy (majoritarian vs proportional), the degree of institutionalization of the party system, and the openness of the national economy constitute important aspects to take into account. It tends to suggest that the Great Recession is just another instance of economic distress, which has cyclical, but no long-term effects on politics. This literature has

largely failed to account for the kind of parties that may benefit when voters turn to punishing the governing parties (van der Brug et al. 2007: 18f., Tucker 2006: 4f.).

In the short run, incumbents are, however, not always punished in times of crisis. The outcome may also be a return to the status quo before the crisis, as is illustrated by the events of May 1968 in France, where one of the largest upheavals in any established democracy led to the return of the old guard and to the punishment of the challengers' allies on the left in the elections of June 1968 (Converse and Pierce 1986). Only 15 percent of the electorate had changed its vote since the previous elections in 1967, but the effect was devastating for the left. Fear of civil war, identification with de Gaulle, and policy concessions (Grenelle agreements in May 1968) drove a majority of swing voters to the right. In another example of the preservation of the status quo, the encompassing protest in Israel in summer 2011 just ended in a return to the status quo once the summer was over.

In the long-term, the most important electoral outcome concerns the restructuring of power in the party system and of the structural coalitions which the major parties represent. The restructuring consists in a power shift from the old to a new dominant coalition. The outcome of the crisis may be a radical change in both the dimensions of the partisan space as well as the configuration of power within the re-dimensioned space. In order to account for the kind of parties that benefit from a crisis such as the Great Recession, we need to consider long-term trends that link partisan success to social change. Such a long-term perspective is provided by *cleavage theory*. Contrary to the economic voting literature, the equally vast literature on this perspective takes a long term view on voting patterns and expects them to move as a result of long term shifts in the structure of social conflicts. As old social conflicts lose in importance and new conflicts emerge from the fundamental changes society is undergoing, the pattern of political conflict is changing as well. As new political actors emerge and old political actors adapt to the changing conflict structure, the pattern of voting is

changing, giving rise to a re-alignment in the party system. From the perspective of cleavage theory, the Great Recession may constitute a ‘critical juncture’ that accelerates and/or reshapes such realignment processes in the party system by giving rise to extraordinary punishments to mainstream incumbents which may turn out to be irreversible in the medium term.

In *policy terms*, the crisis may give rise to incremental (short-term) change, as is illustrated by the just mentioned Grenelle agreement in France, or it may give rise to fundamental (long-term) reforms and institutional change, as is illustrated by Roosevelt’s New Deal in the US in the 1930s, or by the introduction of direct-democratic institutions in Switzerland in the 1860s (Kriesi and Wisler 1999). A deep crisis of long duration, such as the Great Depression of the 1930ies or the contemporary Great Recession, is likely to create ‘windows of opportunity’ for fundamental reforms and institutional change going beyond incremental change. A previous change in the governmental coalition is a precondition for more far-reaching reforms, but it is not sufficient to bring about such reforms. Under contemporary conditions, the maneuvering space of the government may be restricted by constraints imposed by the economic situation, international political pressure or both. Given such constraints, even a government favorable to the challengers or composed of their representatives may not be able to adopt the far-reaching reforms it had originally promised. In this respect, the Latin-American experience is again telling (see Lupu 2012, 2013; Roberts 2013): as the Latin-American crisis deepened in the 1980s and 1990s, some left-wing governments had to abandon their campaign promises and, under international pressure, were forced to adopt neoliberal austerity policies which were out of sync with their traditional programmatic stance. This created uncertainty about policy effects of electoral outcomes and weakened the voters’ attachments to the parties in question, i.e. the neoliberal convergence of major parties led to party brand dilution, to a decline of partisanship and, eventually, to a process of de-alignment in the party system involving the collapse of single incumbent parties or of entire party systems.

The ‘windows of opportunity’ for fundamental reforms are highly conditional. For the time being, we can only describe them in rather general terms. Following Karapin (2011), 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 electoral success and substantive reforms. Threat-increasing dynamics, by contrast, involve electoral failure, 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: We expect *opportunity-increasing dynamics*, when

- the government is composed of a reform coalition (allies of the challengers or their own representatives), and has some maneuvering space for concessions, and/or
- there are some other public authorities able to induce the government (e.g. a President, the courts or the people in a referendum vote) to adopt fundamental reforms.

By contrast, we expect *threat-increasing dynamics*, when

- the government (even if composed of a reform coalition) is constrained such that it cannot make concessions, or
- the government is composed of status-quo coalitions, and there are no other public authorities able to incite the government to adopt fundamental reforms.

Crisis dynamics: European experiences

For the discussion of the European experiences of the crisis dynamics, we should keep in mind two points concerning the overall opportunity structure. First of all, *systems of interest intermediation have been institutionalized to a variable extent* in the different parts of Europe. In broad strokes, neglecting country-specific differences, in Northwestern Europe, the party systems are highly institutionalized and the transformation of the party system by the mobilization of new cleavages – most notably by the mobilization of the globalization losers – constitutes a long-term trend that is likely to have been little influenced by the Great Recession. By contrast, the party systems in Southern and, above all, Central- and Eastern Europe are weaker and, therefore, more likely to be susceptible to the short-term shock of the economic crisis.

In Northwestern Europe, at the time of the outbreak of the crisis in fall 2008, a long-term process of restructuration of the party systems has already been under way for two decades at least. It has contributed to the erosion of the mainstream parties in many countries long before the onset of the crisis. There is some reason to assume that the crisis provided additional fuel to this long term restructuration process. First, the Great Recession is likely to have contributed to the erosion of the mainstream parties' representation function. According to this trend, above all put into evidence by Katz and Mair (1995, 2009) and Mair (2000, 2002, 2006), mainstream parties have moved their center of gravity from civil society to the state and have strengthened their governmental role at the detriment of their representation function. Mair (2002: 88; 2011: 14) expected in fact a growing divide within the party system between mainstream parties which habitually govern and take responsibility, and new challenging parties which give voice to the people, i.e. which fulfill the representation function and which often adopt a rather populist style. Following up on this analysis, by restricting the maneuvering space of the mainstream parties, the Great Recession has played

into the hands of new populist challengers within the party system ('parties which claim to represent, but don't deliver'), by offering them the opportunity to mobilize against the mainstream parties and by presenting themselves as the true advocates of the people's will.

Second and more specifically, in Northwestern Europe, the exogenous shock of the Great Recession is likely to accentuate the transformation of the partisan space driven by the rise of the *new populist right* that we have already observed before the crisis, as a result of globalization and the emergence of a new 'integration-demarcation cleavage opposing globalization 'winners' and 'losers' (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008, 2012). Arguably, the parties of the new populist right have constituted the most important movements in these countries for the past two decades – movements which have established themselves in the form of parties, and have more or less explicitly avoided protest mobilization (which has always been the preserve of the left in Europe (Hutter 2012, 2014)).

In Central and Eastern Europe party systems have not (yet) developed stable roots in society, the concept of cleavages structuring the party system hardly applies to them; they are hardly considered legitimate by the citizens of their countries, and their organizations tend to be unstable. The most important empirical evidence for the lack of institutionalization of these party systems comes from Neff Powell and Tucker (2013), who show that the very high level of volatility in these systems since the democratic transition has above all been due to the entry and exit of parties, and not to switches between established parties. Their low level of institutionalization makes Central and Eastern European party systems particularly susceptible to party collapse and to populist mobilizations by new challengers. The level of volatility in Central- and Eastern Europe has, indeed, been accentuated by the crisis, but it was already unusually high before the Great Recession (see Hernandez and Kriesi 2014), which points to the existence of large potentials of discontent already before the crisis. This discontent results from the generally low level of political and administrative performance. As Linde (2012) has

shown, perceived corruption and feelings of unfair treatment by authorities to a large extent explain the lack of regime support in these countries. In several Central- and Eastern European countries, this deep-seated disenchantment of citizens with democratic politics has given rise to political crises and to the mobilization of populist challengers before they were hit by the Great Recession.

It is in Southern Europe that the Great Recession directly contributed most to political crises. Briefly, after the transition from authoritarian regimes in the 1970s, the party systems of Greece and Portugal lacked cleavage anchoring and stabilizing mass membership bases all along. Spain presents a more mixed case: cleavage anchoring was strong early after the transition to democracy, but had declined greatly by the mid-1990s (Gunter 2005). Italy had a highly institutionalized party system (Morlino 1998: 210f.), but it broke down in the early 1990s under the joint destabilizing impact of a huge scandal ('tangentopoli'), the increasing power of organized crime, the introduction of a new electoral system (referendum of April 1993), and a serious economic crisis accompanied by European pressure with respect to the way to deal with it. The new party system that emerged from this crisis of the early 1990s was just as little institutionalized as the party systems of the other Southern European countries (Gunter 2005, Gunter and Montero 2001; Pasquino 2001). Measured in terms of electoral volatility, the crisis proved to have a heavily corrosive effect on all the Southern European party system, except for Portugal (Hernandez and Kriesi 2014).

The second point to take into account in the European context is the fact that Europe has developed into a *multi-level governance structure* and that, as a result of the close economic interdependence of the European Union's member-states, the Great Recession in Europe has developed into the 'Euro-crisis'. This crisis has been mainly driven by the economic imbalances between the Northwestern and Southern European members of the 'Eurozone' (Lane 2012, Scharpf 2011). The governments of the weaker, Southern European economies in

particular were unable to cope with the crisis, and the EMU governance structures revealed their structural weakness (Featherstone 2011, De Grauwe 2011, Eichengreen 2012). The ensuing complex policies of crisis management involved above all the European Union's intergovernmental channel of representation and gave rise to hard bargaining, above all between the governments of the creditor countries and those of the debtor countries, their domestic constituents, and supranational actors (the Commission, the European Banking Authority, the ECB, the Eurogroup, and the IMF). The European governments represented their national interest as 'debtor' (Southern European, plus Ireland) or 'creditor' (North-western European) nations in this bargaining process – whatever their partisan composition. To the extent that party politics played a role, it was essentially restricted to the domestic level and this above all in the debtor countries.

In other words, in the Southern European 'debtor' countries, the Euro-crisis gave rise to a crisis situation that greatly reminds us of the Latin American experience of the 1980s and 1990s. Under the pressure from the EU (represented by the 'Troika'), the national governments had to adopt austerity policies that were not only very harsh for large parts of society, but, in the case of incumbents from the left (as in Greece, Portugal and Spain), also flatly contradicted their campaign promises. The model case is Greece. Let me present this case in a few broad strokes to illustrate the extent to which the Great Recession gave rise to a political crisis and its electoral consequences: In fall 2009, the Greeks had the possibility to sanction the incumbent government in national elections. In the face of the economic crisis, the incumbent right-wing ND was promising only austerity in order to decrease the runaway public debt. PASOK, the socialist party in opposition, in sharp contrast, offered not only a stimulus package to boost demand, but also the vague prospect of 'green development' as a new model for the country. PASOK won an overwhelming victory at the polls. The elections constituted a typical example of economic voting: the incumbents were seriously punished and the mainstream opposition took over.

The new socialist government under Andreas Papandreou was, however, quickly hit by the tough reality of the economic crisis. Instead of a stimulus program, the Papandreou government had to announce a series of austerity measures in February 2010. These measures were immediately confronted by large-scale mobilizations by challengers further to the left who considered that PASOK had 'lost its soul'. The protestors mobilized 'against the political corruption', symbolized by Parliament (Psimitis 2011: 196), which suggests that they perceived convergence between the major parties. Over the next three years, Greece saw no less than 27 general strikes against the austerity programs. In addition to general strikes, Greece experienced large-scale demonstrations, sit-ins, arson attacks against public buildings and widespread destruction of private property, verbal and physical attacks against MPs and the Parliament, and terrorist attacks, many of which were directed against immigrants. The anti-austerity protest in Greece undoubtedly constitutes an encompassing movement in the sense of Shalev (2013) in which, according to the estimates of Rüdig and Karyotis (2013), no less than 30 per cent of the entire population was engaged in one way or another in 2010. As also shown by Rüdig and Karyotis, at its core, this was a movement rooted in Greece's traditional left-wing political culture. In other words, the impressive mobilization of protest in reaction to the economic crisis built on pre-existing potentials of discontent that had already been mobilized before.

The protests did not have an impact on the government's policy, however. After the first international bailout in spring 2010, the government was under pressure to meet the conditions of the creditors which imposed a tough austerity program. As a result, the government kept losing power and credibility. The second Greek bailout in July 2011 accelerated the decay. It was at this moment that Papandreou took the fateful decision to submit the second bailout agreement with the EU leaders and creditors to a national referendum. The European leaders, who had fought hard for this agreement, felt deceived by his decision. Under the resulting pressure, Papandreou resigned and was replaced by a technocratic

government under the leadership of the ex-director of the Greek National Bank, Lukas Papademos. Reluctantly and only under international pressure the conservative opposition (ND) agreed to give its vote of confidence. These events clinched the convergence of the two major parties in terms of economic policy.

After the second bailout, the two mainstream parties started to disintegrate and the party system reconfigured under the impact of the new political conflict opposing the partisans and foes of the bailout agreement (Dinar and Rori 2013: 274-6): In the early, May 2012 elections, the punishment of the two major parties was exemplary. Together they lost no less than 45 per cent of their 2009 votes, jointly obtaining no more than 32 per cent. PASOK was literally destructed losing more than 30 per cent, but ND was not able to benefit from this collapse and also lost 15 per cent. The winning anti-bailout forces were, however, too fragmented to be able to form a government. The election resulted in a deadlock, which led to the organization of a second election in June. The June election saw a limited comeback of ND to become the largest party with 29.7 per cent. The big winner of the elections was, however, Syriza, a left-wing opposition party that had been founded in 2004 (Moschonas 2013: 35). Gaining votes mainly from PASOK, KKE, the Greens and other smaller parties of the left, Syriza rose to become the second strongest party in the June elections and the strongest party in the 2014 European elections.

Based on data from the European Manifesto Project, Halikiopoulou et al. (2012) show that, on the new political conflict dimension of the bailout issue, the two pro-European mainstream parties were radically opposed by the smaller opposition parties from the left (KKE and Syriza) and the right (LAOS). This new conflict could be regarded as the Greek version of the 'integration-demarcation' cleavage that we have identified in Northwestern Europe. The specifically Greek aspect is that this conflict has predominantly been articulated by a populist

left (KKE and Syriza), and only to a lesser extent by the new populist right which has been the driving force of its establishment in Northwestern Europe.

Conclusion

In this sketch of a theoretical framework for studying the impact of economic crisis on political crises, I have taken an eclectic approach, bringing together different types of literature, most notably the literature on elections and on social protest. As astute observers have pointed out (Hutter 2014, 2012; McAdam and Su 2002; McAdam and Tarrow 2010), these literatures 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 mobilization have hardly at all been related to each other. It is my contention that, in order to understand the political consequences of great exogenous shocks like the Great Recession, we greatly benefit from combining their insights. But these are not the only literatures that – to the detriment of our understanding – tend to lead separate lives. Comparative political scientists tend to focus either on short term (economic voting) or long-term (cleavage politics) electoral change. Specialists of party politics have either studied the institutionalization of party systems (including the different versions of party-voter linkages, party strategies and institutional set-ups) or the collapse of individual parties and party systems. Other comparativists have focused on populism without taking into account its relationship with other forms of political mobilization. Most of the comparativists have focused on particular world regions (Latin America or Europe) without considering that their findings might be of relevance for other parts of the world. I propose to combine these different approaches and to learn from the isomorphism of crisis situations in different parts of the world.

Although I may have connected an unusual range of literature, there is still more to do. In order to understand the crisis dynamics properly, we need to know more about the policy processes in the different countries: How did the governments react to the Great Recession? Why did they react the way they did, what were their policy options and why did they choose one option rather than the others? This question refers to the study of policy ideas, which, as some (e.g. Blyth 2013) have argued, is crucial for understanding the current events. It also refers to the study of the social alliances represented by the key actors, which is equally important for explaining the adoption of different policy-strategies (e.g. Gourevitch 1984, 1986). For the study of these social alliances, we need to have new stylized accounts of the relevant social groups today, as Gourevitch's distinction between capital, labour, and agriculture is no longer fully applicable under contemporary circumstances. What kind of success did the governments' strategies have in the various countries? As we have seen from the Latin American experience, governments who adopt austerity politics successfully (such as the Argentinian Peronists) can get away with it, while it is the unsuccessful incumbent parties that risk disintegration (Lupu 2013).

From the point of view of the challengers, we also need to take into account that, under contemporary circumstances, domestic crisis dynamics are interdependent in more ways than I have allowed for in my conceptualization so far. Thus, successful mobilization processes provide models for the articulation of discontent in other national contexts, as has been shown by Beissinger (2007) and as has been illustrated by the spread of the module provided by the Spanish Indignados during the crisis. Which political phenomena become modular examples for others and why do modular political phenomena spread to some countries but not to others? Diffusion processes certainly need more attention. We should also consider the possibility of inter-temporal modular phenomena in one and the same country: as illustrated by France, the same kind of political crisis mobilizations may occur at different moments in time (1789, 1830, 1848), the previous occurrences serving as modular examples for later ones.

Moreover, we need to know more about the conditions under which challengers may have success, keeping in mind that there is a whole range of forms of success (reaching from successful agenda-setting within the existing power structure to becoming the new dominant coalition, imposing its own economic policies, which prove to be capable of overcoming the economic difficulties).

Third, my conceptualization did not sufficiently take into account the media. Yet, as Koopmans (2004: 368) has pointed out, it is ‘in the news media...that the most relevant part of the mutual observation and interaction between protesters and authorities takes place. Authorities will not react to – and will often not even know about – protests that are not reported in the media, and if they are reported, they will not react to the protests as they “really” were, but as they appeared in the media.’ Even if the protest mobilizations I have in mind here are of a dimension that they are bound to be noticed by authorities, it is still generally true that the consequences of protest events increasingly depend on whether and how they are communicated to relevant others who were not on the scene. A full understanding of the interaction dynamics that are set in motion by a crisis situation needs to take into account the selection mechanisms in the public sphere distinguished by Koopmans – visibility (media attention for the event), resonance (responses by other actors) and legitimacy (balance between positive and negative responses).

Finally, as I have suggested at the outset, there are political crises that have preceded the Great Recession and have mainly to do with poor performance of governments in non-economic terms. To what extent is there a possibility that economic crises feed on political crisis, i.e. are caused, reinforced, prolonged by already existing political crises? This question is above all related to the Central- and Eastern European experience. And, do political crises give rise to populism independently of their association with economic hardship? Is it the properly political aspect of the crisis that gives rise to populism?

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