Euroscepticism in Election Manifestos
of British Political Parties

A Research Proposal Presented to
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405

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Table of contents

Abstract ................................................................. 3
Introduction ................................................................. 4
Literature review .......................................................... 6
Methods ................................................................. 10
Outcomes .............................................................. 11
References ............................................................... 13
Abstract

British Referendum on EU demonstrated the rise of Eurosceptic feelings in the UK and the importance of anti-EU agenda to British politics. The study examines the influence of party-based Euroscepticism on the British domestic policy and the way its influence is subsequently transferred into foreign policy. This study aims at establishing in which manner internal struggle for power within British parties, as well as between them, reinforces Eurosceptic ideas in their election manifestos in an attempt to appeal to a broader electorate. To achieve this purpose, the study provides a comparative analysis of election manifestos of three British political parties: Conservatives, Labour and UKIP. Preliminary results suggest that much of the current Eurosceptic agenda in Britain can be attributed to the desire of political parties to use anti-Europeanism as a political tool, which encourages parties to 'borrow' criticism of EU from election manifestos of each other. These findings might allow researchers in the field of European studies to advance their understanding of anti-EU sentiments within individual EU member states and create a model of the interaction between such states and the EU.

Keywords: Euroscepticism, British Referendum, Brexit, EU-Britain relations
Introduction

British referendum on the EU membership is likely to establish a case for countries willing to challenge their membership in the organization that has been regarded as 'the world’s most advanced project of political integration' (Gromyko & Nosov 2015, p. 7). The case of Brexit referendum provides an opportunity to examine a number of issues concerning both the present state of European integration and the nature of tumultuous EU-Britain relations. Recent research has therefore outlined the importance of analyzing British Euroscepticism to the field of European studies (Torreblanca & Leonard, 2013). However, it is rarely mentioned that British referendum can also shed light on the internal political dynamics of the United Kingdom.

Relations between the EU and Britain have always been intense. Only after two years of being a participant in the project of European integration Britain initiated a referendum of 1975, similar to the one of 2016, where British people had the chance to decide the future of their country within the European Economic Community. The 1980s have seen a major rise in Eurosceptic movement following the hard anti-EU views of then-leader Margaret Thatcher and her famous speech in Bruges devoted to the flaws of Europeanism (European Parliament, 2010). Already the Thatcher period made evident deep splits that existed in the Conservative party concerning European integration, as a pro-European Deputy Minister Sir Geoffrey Howe felt compelled to resign due to disagreements over the direction that British-European relations were taking (European Parliament, 2010). Their main rivals, the Labour party, were affected by the same problem in 1990s, which was exacerbated for both parties with the advent of a third Eurosceptic power, the UKIP in 1992. Today we see that European issues continues to influence British domestic and foreign policy as David Cameron, against his will, declared the second British referendum on the EU.
A we examine British Euroscepticism, we must provide a clear definition. In this paper we adopt the definition of Euroscepticism suggested by Taggart (1998, p. 385), who described the phenomenon as qualified or unqualified opposition to the European integration. Despite being broad and generic, this definition will act as a starting point in our research and will be further supplemented by additional details.

The topic of EU criticism has been a major research focus in scholarly literature. Euroscepticism theoretics P. Taggart and A. Szczerbiak (2002) have argued that opposition to the EU in any country follows a three-component model: negative attitudes at the grassroots level, their party-based continuation and finally, realization in the form of policy outcomes. With regard to British politics, two components of this model have been much discussed by scholars. The Eurobarometer survey has been measuring public opinion on the EU in its member states, including Britain, for several decades, thus contributing to the body of studies on grassroots Euroscepticism. Numerous monographs by renowned scholars contribute to our understanding of the international dimension of British Euroscepticism (Forster, 2002) and evolution of the UK relations with the EU (Gifford, 2008). However, little research has been reported on party-based Euroscepticism in Britain.

In this study we address this research gap by focusing on EU-sceptic ideas found in manifestos of three British political forces: the Conservatives, the Labour and UKIP. Specifically, we will use comparative analysis to examine multiple sources, including election manifestos, official documents, press statements and interviews with those involved in the policy process. The findings may have significant implications for understanding not only British-specific criticism of European integration, but also Eurosceptic political dynamics in the EU member-states in general.
Literature review

Context

This study relates to the research area that focuses on specific features of British Euroscepticism. Several studies inquired into different factors that contributed to the negative attitudes towards European integration, such as history, national identity, media effects, political and economic features (Forster, 2002; Grant, 2008). These studies generally focus either on grassroots Eurosceptic attitudes among British population or on the way Euroscepticism manifests itself in British international affairs. However, little research has been reported specifically on negative attitudes towards the EU found in British political parties. Thus, the role of Euroscepticism in the internal struggle for power within parties as well as in political field has been largely disregarded.

Quantitative approach

A number of studies have attempted to estimate British Euroscepticism quantitatively. One example is Eurobarometer, which is a public opinion survey conducted biannually in the EU member states, including Britain. It evaluates public attitudes to such issues of European integration as: EU citizenship, trust in EU institutes, the Euro and the EU enlargement. Due to the usage of largely the same questions since 1973 and application of a carefully designed sampling system, the survey can be considered representative. Standard Eurobarometer has illustrated the dynamics of the EU support in Britain over the years. The major conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that the EU institutes are associated with ineffectiveness and the lack of representation by more than a half of respondents. However, the study merely describes the trend and fails to outline possible reasons for negative attitudes or implications for the future of the EU, which would benefit the research area significantly.
Another attempt at a quantitative estimation of attitudes towards European integration has been made by the YouGov research agency, which collects data on the issues that affect interplay between Eurosceptic ideas and party success at parliamentary elections. The study (YouGov, 2016) has found that 76% of UKIP voters, which is the most hard-driving anti-EU party, are attracted by anti-immigrant views of party leaders, and 59% - by their promise to leave the EU upon victory. In other words, immigration and anti-European rhetoric were established as two main factors at play. The framework illustrated by this study paves the way for the future research in this area, which could expand this model to assess factors that attract electorate of other British political forces, including two main British parties, and more importantly, establish the level of interplay between their programs as far as Eurosceptic content is concerned.

Qualitative research

The first inquiry into the nature of party-based criticism of the EU can be found in a study by P. Taggart and A. Szczepanik (2003), who suggested the distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' Euroscepticism. The study established two types of factors that facilitate opposition to European integration within parties: ideological (or value-based) and pragmatic (interest-based) factors. The research argued that whether a party chooses to use anti-Europeanism as an instrument to attract electorate depends mostly on political environment in the country and party's chosen electoral strategy. Overall, the research highlights the effects of political struggle between political parties rather than within them.

The approach taken in this study is restricted to external dimension of political struggle. The research has treated political parties as monoliths, or 'black boxes'; which compete only with each other. With regard to Britain, this assumption ignores the complex nature of British political parties, which consist of numerous fractions. These fractions
compete between each other and the final agenda of a party can either be a 'melting pot' of party members' political views or merely a representation of the strongest group. On a number of occasions party leaders were forced to step back from their position due to their inability to reconcile opposing view on European integration within their own party, one of the most famous examples being the resignation of Margaret Thatcher (European Parliament, 2010). Consequently, in a two-party political system, such as the one in Britain, a party will try to mitigate internal conflicts to prevent the outflow of voters in favor of third parties, which could potentially result in the victory of the second party. Thus, internal party conflicts can sometimes provide a stronger incentive for parties to include or exclude anti-European issues from their manifestos than actual political goals of winning the office by conforming to the expectations of voters. Since the issue of European integration has for a long time been one of the major division lines within the Conservative party as well as within the Labour party, the study of Euroscepticism in intra-party dynamics merits scholarly attention.

Many renowned researchers have directed their attention to various aspects of British Euroscepticism and prerequisites for its spread. In his book, Forster (2002) inquired into the history of British anti-Europeanism and traced it back to middle ages, therefore emphasizing the persistent nature of this phenomenon and determining historic reasons for its appearance. The book, however, is unable to provide a satisfying answer to the questions of why negative attitudes towards European integration have been on the rise since the middle of 2000s or if modern Euroscepticism is qualitatively different from its past forms.

Gifford (2008) succeeded at providing an extensive overview of EU-Britain relationships and the way they have evolved since 1973, when Britain entered EEC, to modern times. The study is valued for outlining early effects of globalization and their possible connection to regionalism, a topic that has re-entered the scientific field only
recently in light of the British referendum on European Union as well as American presidential elections. Overall, the book focuses more on the external dimension of British Euroscepticism and the impact that global political and economic processes had on emerging negative attitudes towards the EU. The internal dimension, however, remains largely unexplored.

An alternative explanation was provided by Grant (2008), who highlighted media effects on the rise of modern Euroscepticism. Additionally, the study revealed prevalence of Eurosceptic beliefs among political and business leaders of the British nation. While shedding powerful light on another aspect of British Euroscepticism, the study failed to establish if there is an objective explanation to such affiliations and to which extent those personal beliefs manifest themselves either in party programs or real actions.

**Research purpose**

Overall, the existing body of research has established that British Euroscepticism has deep roots and can be explained by historical, cultural and economic factors as well as the logic of European integration. At the same time, several researchers highlighted the importance of addressing Euroscepticism as a phenomenon that is linked to party struggle in countries, where anti-European sentiments are strong. Little attention has, however, been paid specifically to the party dimension of British Euroscepticism, which, as demonstrated by the recent British Parliament elections, has played an important role in determining electoral preferences and party affiliations. Thus, the issue of party-based Euroscepticism in Britain merits special attention. To address the research gap, we plan to focus on EU-critical ideas found in manifestos of three British political forces. The study has the following objectives: (1) to analyze Euroscepticism in light of inter-party political struggle in Britain (2) to compare election manifestos of political parties and establish whether parties 'borrow'
Eurosceptic agendas and specific EU-related issues from one another, and (3) to explore the influence of internal struggle for power within a political party on the final decision to use Euroscepticism as an instrument.

**Methods**

**Research purpose**

The aim of this study is to compare and contrast Eurosceptic ideas of major British political forces through analysis of their election manifestos. Because agenda formed by political parties correlates with the political demands of the electorate, it seems worthwhile to include the study of grassroots Eurosceptic attitudes in our research.

**Data collection**

With this aim in mind, we will employ a mixed-methods approach to achieve a comprehensive overview of the problem. We believe that quantitative methods will usefully supplement the qualitative methods. We gather quantitative data from surveys of public opinion from 1979 to 2016 (European Commission; YouGov, 2016). Our qualitative methods are focused on the analysis of election manifestos and speeches by political leaders. Those materials can be freely accessed at the European Comission and Political Science Resources websites. Our methodology is based partly on a study by a British political scientist A. Forster (2002), who also referred to Eurobarometer questionnaires and manifestos of the Conservative and Labour parties. Due to the changes in British political landscape we include a third, emerging British political force, namely UKIP, in the study. We refer to programs of party-based Brexit campaigns Leave.EU (2016) and Vote Leave (2016) as additional sources. These programs can be found on their respective websites.
**Data analysis**

To study specific features of British party-based Euroscepticism, we will employ a multi-method research design. Comparative method might usefully help contrast and comparatively evaluate the extremity of anti-EU claims in programs of major British political parties. We will outline major political steps towards the EU proposed in manifestos of three parties and establish whether a correlation can be found between their agendas and if the correlation was stronger or weaker during the most recent round of elections as compared to the previous years. This set of conclusions will be supplemented by qualitative comparative analysis of public statements and speeches made by leaders of those parties. It might also help to establish the correspondence of Eurosceptic sentiments among members of establishment to grassroots Euroscepticism in different time periods. By means of statistical analysis we will specifically select survey data regarding British citizens and follow the changing percentage of EU opponents in Britain. As a result we are likely to be able to outline a trend in British grassroots Euroscepticism.

**Scope and Limitations.**

In this study we do not attempt to cover the full political spectrum of the modern Britain. Our study is therefore restricted to three political forces and the period from 1979 to 2015. The analysis is somewhat bound by the populist nature of election manifestos, which often lack solid facts. The effect of this limiting factor can be partly compensated for by balancing claims found in manifestos against actual political steps implemented by leaders.

**Outcomes**

This study addresses criticism of the EU found in election manifests of British political parties. The aim of our research is to explore features of British party-based
Euroscepticism. This research is pertinent to the field of European studies because it addresses a previously understudied connection between internal political dynamics of a EU member state and the course that the leadership of this country is going to take towards European integration. In an effort to deepen and broaden European integration, the EU leaders should not underestimate the effects of party-based Euroscepticism explored in this study.

The perceived outcomes of this study are twofold. First, our study will shed light upon the effect of transforming political system on the appearance of Eurosceptic mottos that parties borrow from manifestos of each other in an attempt to attract electorate. Our preliminary results suggest that contrary to the popular explanation, much of the Eurosceptic agenda cannot be attributed directly to the pressure of grassroots Euroscepticism, but rather results from the desire of parties to use Euroscepticism as a political tool.

Second, this research will establish the place of British-specific Euroscepticism within a broader European paradigm. These findings appear significant because they might advance our understanding of whether the extremity of British Euroscepticism that can be observed today is symptomatic to the current EU state or more of a statistical outlier explained by internal British factors. This, consequently, will allow researchers in the field of European studies to better understand internal reasons of EU member states for criticism of the European integration and outline its further possible strategy in relation to highly Eurosceptic states such as Britain.

The results of this study will be presented in the department of International Affairs at the National Research University Higher School of Economics. Upon conclusive results, the data obtained could stand for publication in an academic journal such as Politica Externa, which publishes research on international affairs.
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