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Introduction: Models of political conflict in the European Union

Marco R. Steenbergen and Gary Marks

In the era following the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, the European Union has been transformed into a multilevel polity in which European issues have become important not only for national governments, but also for citizens, political parties, interest groups, and social movements. How is conflict over European integration structured? This is the question that this book addresses.

The question of contestation over European integration has two related components. First, how do domestic and European political actors conceive the basic alternatives? Can debates over European integration, despite their complexity, be reduced to a relatively small number of dimensions? Does contestation over European integration resolve itself into a single underlying dimension, or does it involve two or more separate dimensions? Second, how is contestation over European integration related, if at all, to the issues that have characterized political life in Western Europe over the past century or more? In particular, how is contestation over European integration related to the left/right divide concerning the role of the state and equality vs. economic freedom?

These topics were first raised by neofunctionalists writing in the early days of European integration. Ernst Haas paid close attention to the domestic sources of opposition and support for European integration in his classic study, *The Uniting of Europe*, published in 1958. However, most scholars continued to view European integration as the result of foreign policies conducted by government elites acting on a “permissive consensus” (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). European integration was conceived to take place among, but not within, countries.

This view became untenable as the European Union became a more openly contested arena for political parties, interest groups, subnational governments, and social movements after the Maastricht Accord of 1991 (Ansell, Parsons, and Darden 1997; Bache forthcoming; Caporaso 1996; Hooghe and Marks 1999; Imig and Tarrow 2001; Peterson and Bomberg 1999; Pollack 2000; Taggart 1998). Comparativists began, once again,

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to explore European integration as an extension of domestic politics (Laffan 1996; Niedermayer and Sinnott 1995; Risse 1996; Sbragia 1992; Schmitter 1996; Tsebelis 2000; Wessels 1997). While economic models of preference formation appeared promising for explaining trade policy, many comparativists were sensitive to the way in which ideology frames preferences, and wished to broaden the study of European integration to public opinion, social movements, and party politics (Banchoff and Smith 1999; Bell and Lord 1998; Caporaso and Keeler 1995; Jachtenfuchs and Kohler-Koch 1996; Katz and Wessels 1999; Ladrech and Marlière 1999; Mair 1999; Raunio 1996; Ray 1997; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). They therefore made the connection with the tradition of scholarship on dimensions of contestation, to which we turn next.

Dimensions of contestation

The literature on dimensions of contestation goes back at least to Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) pioneering work on cleavage structures. Lipset and Rokkan's theory of social cleavages hypothesizes how macro developments – the national revolution, the Protestant Reformation, and the industrial revolution – produce enduring structures of conflict that shape organizational formation and perceptions of the political world. The question we pose in this volume is whether and how the issues arising from European integration are linked to these structures and, in particular, to the ubiquitous left/right divide.

In order to make progress with this question, we need to amend the Lipset/Rokkan framework in three respects. These amendments lead us to examine the response of particular *actors* and *organizations* to European integration; whether there are different patterns of contestation for different *issues*; and how the interaction of territorial *arenas* at different levels shapes contention.

Actors

First, we examine how the issues arising from European integration connect to existing structures of conflict in existing democratic systems. The historical transformations analyzed by Lipset and Rokkan took place prior to democratization. European integration, in contrast, plays out within democracies having highly institutionalized systems of contestation. Political parties, interest groups, and social movements actively mediate the impact of European issues.

While it is clear that modern systems of interest mediation are not frozen, they are deep-rooted, and this reinforces continuity of

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contestation within them. Political actors have an incentive to interpret new issues in the light of existing cleavages such as the left/right ideological dimension. Why should this be so? First, one can invoke the concept of path-dependence to argue that it is extremely costly for political parties to abandon existing cleavage structures (Marks and Wilson 2000; Scott 2001). Parties attract ideologically motivated activists, they build strong institutional ties to particular constituencies, and they develop reputations for particular programs and policies. One can make a similar case from a rational choice perspective. Whereas stable political equilibria exist in a political space that is dominated by a single dimension (due to the median voter theorem), stable equilibria in multidimensional political spaces are much more difficult to arrive at (see, for example, Hinich and Munger 1997). The problem is already quite complex in a two-dimensional space, but becomes intractable in spaces of higher dimensionality. Thus, introducing new dimensions of conflict is costly to those benefiting from the status quo because it will entail instability. Finally, one can invoke cognitive political psychology to make the argument. The more complex the political space, the more difficult it becomes for actors to operate in this space due to cognitive limitations. Moreover, information-processing theory argues that decision-makers interpret new information in light of what they already know, suggesting a tendency to accommodate new issues to old cleavages (Steenbergen and Lodge forthcoming).

Issues

Second, we shift from analysis of cleavages to more fine-grained analysis of issues. Lipset and Rokkan's concept of cleavage ties together social structure, the organization of political conflict, and the substantive character of that conflict. Cleavages arise to the extent that social structure – chiefly, occupation, religion, and spatial location – determines political preferences. In contemporary European democracies, this causal connection has weakened. The links between social structure and political preferences that Lipset and Rokkan diagnosed in 1967 appear looser today. In this volume we relax the assumption that European integration can be conceptualized as a cleavage. In order to explore the structure of preferences on European integration, we therefore operate at the level of issues, not cleavages. To what extent, we ask, do the issues arising from European integration hang together as a single dimension, and to what extent is this dimension (or dimensions) connected to existing structures of conflict?

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Finally, one of our core concerns is to examine dimensions of contestation at the national and European levels. We attempt not only to explain variation across national polities, but also to analyze dimensions of contestation among European political parties and members of the European Parliament. We cannot therefore follow Lipset and Rokkan in taking the national polity as the unit for the analysis for party systems (Allardt 2001: 22–3).

Models

In the Lipset/Rokkan framework, dimensions of contestation that arose from the class cleavage, the religious cleavage, and the center–periphery cleavage are enduring because they are rooted in social structure and political organization. From their standpoint in the mid-1960s, Lipset and Rokkan believed that the resulting pattern of cleavages was “frozen” into place. Few scholars still argue that these cleavages are permanent (Dalton, Flanagan and Beck 1984; Franklin 1992; Hix and Lord 1997; Karvonen and Kuhnle 2001). However, their ideological residue is still visible in the politics of the EU member states. The ideological continuum from left to right is a central organizing dimension in Western Europe (Barnes and Kaase 1979; Hix 1999a, 1999b; MacDonald, Listhaug, and Rabinowitz 1991; Hix and Lord 1998; van der Eijk and Niemöller 1983). There is some debate whether this continuum can be divided into an economic and a libertarian-authoritarian dimension (Kitschelt 1994), or an old politics versus new politics dimension (Franklin et al. 1992). But no one doubts the importance of the categories left and right in Europe.

While few comparativists take issue with the maxim that ideology – and in particular the left/right divide – constrains how individuals and organizations interpret new issues, the tightness of fit is debated. There are four logical possibilities:¹

- Contestation takes place on a single anti-integration vs. pro-integration dimension; the left/right continuum is irrelevant for understanding contestation on European integration.
- The dimensions are unrelated (i.e., they are orthogonal to each other).
- The dimensions are fused in a single dimension.
- The dimensions are related to each other in two-dimensional space, but they are not necessarily fused (i.e., the dimensions are oblique).

¹ The following discussion draws on an earlier version of the chapter by Matthew Gabel and Simon Hix presented in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, April/May 2000.

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Each of these possibilities reflects a particular scholarly view on the subject. The first is consistent with an IR (international relations) model of contestation; the second is developed by Simon Hix and Christopher Lord (1997); the third is consistent with a speculation articulated by George Tsebelis and Geoffrey Garrett (1996); and the fourth corresponds to Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks' model of regulated capitalism vs. market liberalism (1999).

The international relations model

International relations approaches imply that European integration, and contestation about European integration, are independent from the left/right dimension of domestic contestation. This assumption is shared by realism, intergovernmentalism, and neofunctionalism.

Realist scholars hypothesize that national leaders take positions on the European Union in response to geopolitical pressures (Hoffmann 1966). Pursuit of the national interest, rather than domestic ideological differences, determines whether national leaders support or oppose further European integration.

Liberal intergovernmentalists argue that economic pressures bearing on national producer groups are primary. Exporters favor deeper economic integration; import-competing producer groups are opposed (Moravcsik 1998). The link between economic integration and supranational decision-making is functional. Governments will create supranational institutions to the extent that they cannot use national institutions to solve the credible commitment problem of international contracting. Liberal intergovernmentalists maintain, against realists, that domestic conflict is important in explaining why some governments support and others oppose integration. But that conflict is about the gains and losses from trade, and is independent from the left/right dimension that structures much domestic contestation.

Neofunctionalists emphasize that functional pressures for political integration are mediated by cross-national coalitions and supranational entrepreneurs. The integration process – which may lead national elites to redefine policy problems and even their identities – is independent of the conventional left/right dimension of domestic political contestation. Support of and opposition to further integration arises as elite actors – bureaucrats and politicians – assess costs and benefits in a dynamic context of problem-solving, spillover, and learning (Haas 1958).

The international relations model that we draw from these literatures conceives of contestation across the range of EU issues along a single dimension. Conflict on this dimension involves diverse sets of

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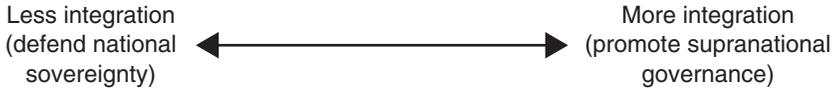


Figure 0.1 The international relations model.

actors – national governments for realists, governments and producer groups for intergovernmentalists, and bureaucrats and politicians for neofunctionalists. However, in each case, contestation is independent from the left/right concerns that frame domestic politics. Hence in figure 0.1 we represent the international relations model as an autonomous dimension ranging from “less integration” to “more integration.”

The Hix–Lord model: two orthogonal dimensions

Simon Hix and Christopher Lord have argued that contemporary EU politics is increasingly two-dimensional (Hix and Lord 1997; Hix 1999a, 1999b). A left/right dimension, summarizing diverse economic and socio-political issues in the domestic arena, remains orthogonal to a “national sovereignty” dimension ranging from less integration to more integration (figure 0.2).

The orthogonality of these dimensions reflects contrasting pressures. Major political parties have a big stake in the existing left/right pattern of contestation and they seek to extend it to new issues that arise on the political agenda. When challenging parties and groups raise new issues, the major parties respond by trying to force them to compete as well on the left/right dimension.

But national sovereignty issues are difficult to assimilate into the left/right dimension. Hix and Lord argue that the major parties are divided on national sovereignty. They therefore prefer to compete on the left/right dimension while bottling up competition on issues of European integration. “Traditional parties distinguish . . . [among] themselves in the domestic arena over the role of state authority in the making of social and economic policies, and not on the question of the institutional design of the emerging supranational political system in Europe” (Hix and Lord 1997: 26). They do this by taking a generally pro-integration stance, leaving opposition to minor parties at the ideological extremes.

According to Simon Hix, the independence/integration and left/right dimensions cannot be collapsed into a new single dimension because they mobilize cross-cutting political coalitions (1999a). The left/right dimension involves the allocation of resources and values between *functional* groups, whereas the national sovereignty dimension involves

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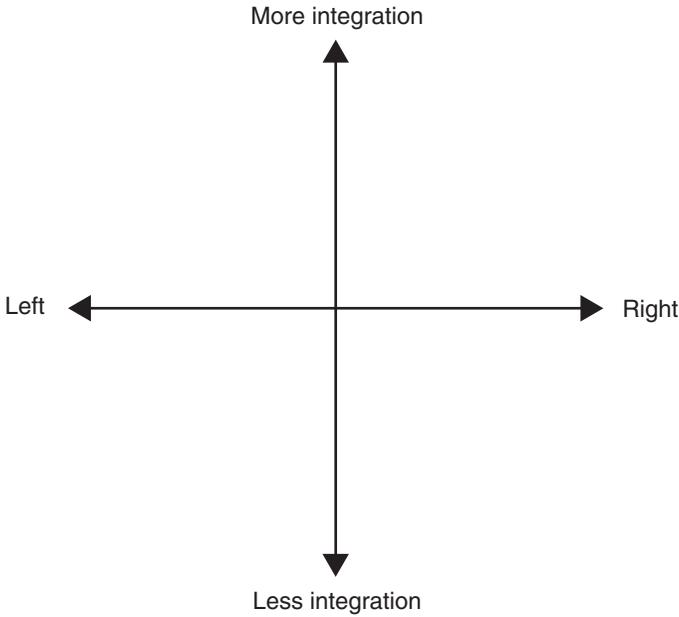
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Figure 0.2 The Hix–Lord model.

the allocation of resources and values between *territorial* groups. The upshot of this is that social classes and political parties are internally divided over European integration. Correspondingly, the four possible dichotomous alternatives – left/more integration, left/less integration, right/more integration, and right/less integration – are all feasible policy positions, and are likely to be pursued by different forces. Hence, these two dimensions co-exist orthogonally in EU political space in the same way that functional and territorial cleavages persist in other territorially divided polities (such as Belgium, Switzerland, Canada, or the United States).

The regulation model

George Tsebelis and Geoffrey Garrett have speculated that European integration might be subsumed into the left/right dimension (2000). In this scenario, EU politics is fused to domestic competition between the left, which pushes for common economic regulation across Europe, and the right, which favors less EU regulation. Both the international relations model and the regulation model conceive of a single dimension of contestation for European issues, but they take sharply opposing positions on

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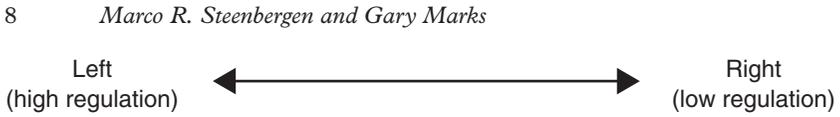
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Figure 0.3 The regulation model.

how this dimension relates to the left/right dimension in domestic politics. Whereas the international relations model implies that European integration is autonomous from the conflicts that have historically structured domestic contestation, the regulation scenario hypothesizes that European contestation is an expression of such conflicts.

The widely recognized primacy of national politics in EU elections establishes the plausibility of the regulation model. European elections are “second-order” elections in which political parties and voters are chiefly motivated by national issues (van der Eijk and Franklin 1995; Reif and Schmitt 1980). Moreover, “European elections usually occur between national elections, when the popularity of the party/coalition in government is typically relatively low” (Tsebelis and Garrett 2000: 31).

National political parties dominate voting in the European Parliament, and their performance in national elections shapes the composition of national governments, which send delegates to the Council of Ministers. Consequently, legislative actors in the Parliament and national representatives in the Council may be constrained by the same left/right dimension that structures national politics in EU member states. Kreppel and Tsebelis find evidence that traditional left/right divisions characterize many issues that are debated in the European Parliament and the EU political process (1999), while Garrett has argued that bargaining over institutional reform in the Single European Act was shaped by national preferences concerning the extent of intervention in the European economy (1992). In both cases, one may argue that political parties in the European Parliament and in national governments will only support reforms that shift the status quo closer to their ideal position along the left/right dimension.

Whereas the international relations model conceives European integration as a single dimension that is entirely independent of the left/right dimension, the regulation model hypothesizes a single dimension that is subsumed into the left/right dimension. This is represented in figure 0.3.

The Hooghe–Marks model: “regulated capitalism” vs. “neoliberalism”

Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (1999, 2001) identify a left/right dimension ranging from social democracy to market liberalism and a

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European integration dimension from nationalism to supranationalism. In their view, these dimensions are neither fused together nor orthogonal to each other. Rather, Hooghe and Marks claim that certain aspects of European integration are likely to be absorbed into the left/right dimension. To the extent that this is the case, pro- and anti-EU and left and right become indistinguishable. However, not all aspects of integration are easily incorporated into the left/right dimension and to the extent that they cannot be, a distinct pro-/anti-integration dimension emerges.

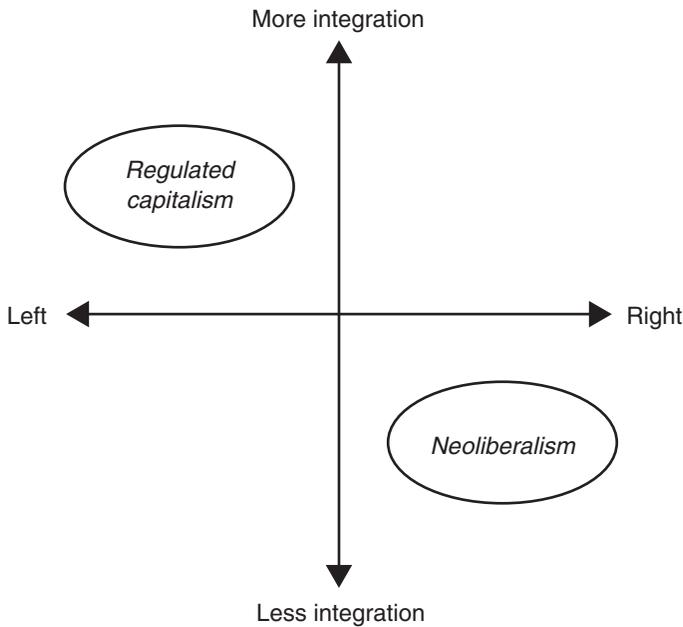


Figure 0.4 The Hooghe–Marks model.

Hooghe and Marks hypothesize that the center-left is likely to become more pro-European as the debate over European integration focuses on market regulation rather than market-making. The center-left, including in particular social democrats, support *regulated capitalism*, a project to build environmental, social, infrastructural, and redistributive policy at the European level (1999).² As regulatory issues are taken up at the

² Mark Pollack suggests that Prime Minister Tony Blair’s “third way” approach is an alternative to Hooghe and Marks’ regulated capitalism (2000). However, Blair’s “third way” and “regulated capitalism” both reject government ownership, Keynesian demand-side policy, and heavy-handed government regulation in favor of “market-enhancing or market supporting – rather than market-replacing or even market-correcting – policies” (Hooghe and Marks 1999: 87).

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European level, social democrats become more favorably disposed to further integration.

Those on the political right, in contrast, become more opposed to European integration. They wish to combine European-wide markets with minimal European regulation, and once economic and monetary integration is in place, they become skeptical of the benefits of further European integration. The neoliberal project rejects supranational authority, and strives instead to provoke regulatory competition among national governments within an encompassing market.

Contestation in EU policy space is therefore structured in two camps. Figure 0.4 depicts this hypothesis through ellipses in two of the quadrants. One can think of a line that passes through these ellipses, sloping down from regulated capitalism on the center-left to neoliberal capitalism on the right. Thus, Hooghe and Marks propose a two-dimensional model of the EU political space where the left/right dimension and the national sovereignty dimension jointly structure actors' policy positions in EU political space.

Plan of the book

These models generate conflicting expectations about the connection between the issues raised by European integration and the left/right divide. To evaluate their validity we must disaggregate, and examine variation among actors, issues, and arenas. Is the dimensionality of EU political space, and its connection with domestic structures of conflict, actor-specific or arena-specific? To what extent do the issues arising from European integration hold together as a single dimension? Do particular subsets of issues connect to domestic dimensions of contestation? We gain leverage with these questions by investigating a range of issues for several kinds of actors at the national and European levels. We have chapters by Gabel and Anderson, van der Eijk and Franklin, Ray, and Brinegar, Jolly, and Kitschelt on citizens; Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson and Steenbergen and Scott on national political parties; Gabel and Hix on European political parties; Thomassen, Noury, and Voeten on European members of parliament; Wessels on interest groups; and Imig on social movements. We seek a general understanding of European contestation on the basis of a wide-ranging analysis of actors, issues, and arenas.