

## **Social Cohesion under Pressure in the EU? - Divergences in Public Opinion Change throughout the Crisis**

Alexander Seymer (University Salzburg)

Welfare states are heavily challenged in their redistributive schemes by the austerity policies in the EU due to the financial crisis (Bieling, 2012; Theodoropoulou & Watt, 2011). Independent from the theoretical approach explaining welfare arrangements, mainstream approaches consider crises to open a window of opportunity to deviate from more continuous paths of welfare state developments (Vis, Van Kersbergen, & Hylands, 2011). This potential welfare change can be driven either by institutional structures as top-down restructuring in line with the regime argument (Jakobsen, 2010) or by a shift in public opinion leading to voter realignment (Hakhverdian, 2012). Despite the results from research indicating little change so far on national level (Armingeon, 2012; Vis et al., 2011), the paper aims to explore the effects of the crisis on public opinion to identify potential threats for the support of social cohesion.

Three main arguments shall drive the analysis. Firstly, shifts in public opinion are strongly dependent on country's performance in the crises (Hypothesis 1). Some countries showed quick responses like Sweden and Germany while others experience durable crisis conditions with high unemployment rates and economic decline, e.g. Greece and Spain. The lack of perspective in the latter countries should lead to a clearer shifts in public opinion. Secondly, the crisis lead to a more substantial change in public opinion by a decline in trust in political institutions, satisfaction with governments, support for the EU integration, social trust and support for redistribution (Hypothesis 2). Only a comprehensive analysis of all dimensions sheds light on divergences with respect to social cohesion support. Thirdly, the focus on countries is misleading as regions of countries experienced the crisis differently, which may be counterbalanced by outperformers (Hypothesis 3). Thus, the analysis will be based on NUTS1 regions to account for heterogeneous countries like Germany and Italy.

In order to measure change in public opinion, the abovementioned attitudes of the third (ESS3, 2006), fourth (ESS4, 2008) and fifth wave of the European Social Survey (ESS5, 2010) are aggregated at NUTS1 level to estimate a latent growth curve model. ESS3 will be considered a pre-crisis state, ESS4 shall measure the start of the crisis effects while ESS5 measures public opinion in 2010. The transition from 2006 to 2008 should show a rather constant level across countries while from 2008 to 2010 a clear decline should appear. The latent growth curve model provides the frame to consider variables as latent constructs improving measurement quality, compare nested models and finally, macro predictors like unemployment and economic growth rates can be estimated in the model linked to the public opinion change to support hypothesis 1. An alternative dataset could be the Eurobarometer, which provides more data for the time of interest, but the quality of measurement is less distinct than ESS. Nevertheless, Eurobarometer data may be considered for single dependent variables in case ESS data constraints limit the analysis.

The results help to understand potential long term effects of the crisis on the willingness to support social cohesion policies due to a lack of trust into political institutions. Furthermore, hypothesis 3 point out that the effects of differential distinctions ("unterschiedliche Unterschiede") and precious similarities ("prekäre Gleichartigkeiten") as central challenges of EU integration (Vobruba, 2005) settle along regions and less along countries. Hence, all EU member states should address this decline in a common effort to regain trust.

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