Explaining the salience of anti-elitism and reducing political corruption for political parties in Europe with the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey data

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Abstract

This article addresses the variation of anti-corruption and anti-elite salience in party positioning across Europe. It demonstrates that while anti-corruption salience is primarily related to the (regional) context in which a party operates, anti-elite salience is primarily a function of party ideology. Extreme left and extreme conservative (TAN) parties are significantly more likely to emphasize anti-elite views. Through its use of the new 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey wave, this article also introduces the dataset.

Introduction

What explains variation in the salience of anti-elite rhetoric and reducing political corruption for parties across Europe? These questions have been significant to the party systems of central and eastern Europe since their transitions from communism (Engler, 2016; Hanley and Sikk, 2016; Vachudova, 2009), but corruption has also been a persistent problem in southern Europe (Charron et al., 2014; Putnam et al., 1994). The rise of the 5 Star Movement in Italy, Syriza in Greece, and Podemos in Spain illustrates the contemporary relevance of anti-elite rhetoric and political competition surrounding corruption. Politicizing corruption can be electorally advantageous for certain types of parties (Bågenholm and Charron, 2014; Hanley and Sikk, 2016), and anti-elite/establishment rhetoric is a key feature of populist (Mudde, 2004) and challenger parties (Hobolt and De Vries, 2015). Most recently, the "Brexit" vote in the United Kingdom makes apparent the significance of anti-elite/establishment rhetoric for European politics.

In this article we examine these issues via two new items in the 2014 wave of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES).

In the process, we also introduce this most recent round of the longest-running expert survey on party positioning in European democracies, and cross-validate the CHES data with party positions derived from party manifestos and country-level information on political corruption. We show two things: political corruption is much more salient among parties from countries with poor quality of government

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(QoG), whereas anti-elite salience is more a function of ideology. Extreme leftist and extreme socially conservative parties are most likely to oppose political elites, while the national origin of a party is largely irrelevant. Taken together, this provides an important contribution to our understanding of party competition. Although it may first appear intuitive that the anti-corruption and anti-establishment foci of political parties would be two sides of the same coin, in fact these have different causal logics. The first depends largely on the corruption problems that confront a society. The latter arises in conjunction with the ideological moorings of a party.

Similarities and differences in the salience of anti-elite and anti-corruption party appeals

Recent years have witnessed the electoral rise of anti-establishment movements and political parties (Hanley and Sikk, 2016; Hobolt and De Vries, 2015). These challengers tend to rely on anti-elite rhetoric, pointing out the supposed distance, lack of understanding, and political corruption of political leaders (Pop-Eleches, 2010), who—these opponents contend—are aloof from both the needs and interests, as well as the mores, of "ordinary citizens." European political arenas thus currently face calls for political renewal that combine anti-elite and anti-corruption voices. Political parties on the ideological extremes should thus be more likely to rhetorically emphasize the shortcomings of the political system, be it by pointing out the aloofness of its political elite or by pointing out its corrupt character (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011). Both orientations are features of populism, a thin ideology most readily found in parties of the radical right and radical left (Mudde, 2004, p. 549; Rooduijn et al., 2014, p. 564).

Research suggests that other features of political parties will enhance the salience of both anti-elite and anti-corruption rhetoric. Recently created political parties can present themselves as clean and untainted in comparison with established political actors. Similarly, it is easier for parties in opposition to blame parties in government for the problem of political corruption; this is particularly true for challenger parties (Hobolt and De Vries, 2015) that have not yet participated in government. In line with Bågenholm and Charron (2014) we expect that the salience of anti-establishment and anti-corruption rhetoric will be greater for new parties than for older established competitors, and greater for parties in opposition than for those in government.

Canonical studies of the radical right highlight the fusing of anti-corruption with anti-elite rhetoric (see e.g. Kitschelt and McGann, 1995, Chapter 5) and anti-establishment parties frequently break through in high corruption environments (Hanley and Sikk, 2016), but anti-elite and anti-corruption rhetorics function according to somewhat divergent logics. Although populist messages often stress the corruption of elected officials (Abts and Rummens, 2007, p. 408), an emphasis on reducing political corruption does not necessarily make a party populist. We go on to show that while the salience of anti-elite rhetoric is closely associated with (extreme) ideological views of political parties, anti-corruption salience mostly occurs in political systems plagued by higher rates of political corruption.

When evaluating the effect of ideological extremism on anti-elite rhetoric, we differentiate between economic left-right and placement on the socio-cultural (GAL-TAN) dimension, which spans from social liberalism to social conservatism. Left-wing populism tends to stress economic issues (March, 2007), whereas right-wing populist parties tend to be extreme in their authoritarianism and nationalism (Mudde, 2007). Both extremes, the economic left and the cultural right, should be more inclined to criticize the political establishment in much the same way as they have opposed European integration (Hooghe et al., 2002; Otjes and Louwerse, 2015).

> *Hypothesis 1: Parties of either the economic left or the socio-cultural right will be more likely to emphasize anti-elite, anti-establishment rhetoric.*

The salience of reducing political corruption differs across the regions of Europe (Engler, 2016; Hanley and Sikk, 2016). While southern and eastern European countries are regarded as having widespread corruption at the highest levels of government (see Wachs, 2014), the prevalence of corruption is considerably lower in the west and the north of the continent (Charron et al., 2014). Following these authors, we anticipate that high levels of corruption in a country will generate a demand for anti-corruption policies among voters and that parties in these systems will be more likely to pick up on this demand (Bågenholm and Charron, 2014, p. 909).

> *Hypothesis 2: Parties in countries with high levels of political corruption will be more likely to stress the importance of reducing political corruption.*

The next section moves on to describe the data with which we test these expectations.

The 2014 CHES

Administered in 2014 to 337 political scientists specializing in political parties and European integration, the 2014 CHES, available at chesdata.eu, provides information about the positioning of 268 parties on political ideology, European integration, and various policy areas.[1] The survey covers political parties in 31 countries, including all European Union member states, plus Norway, Switzerland
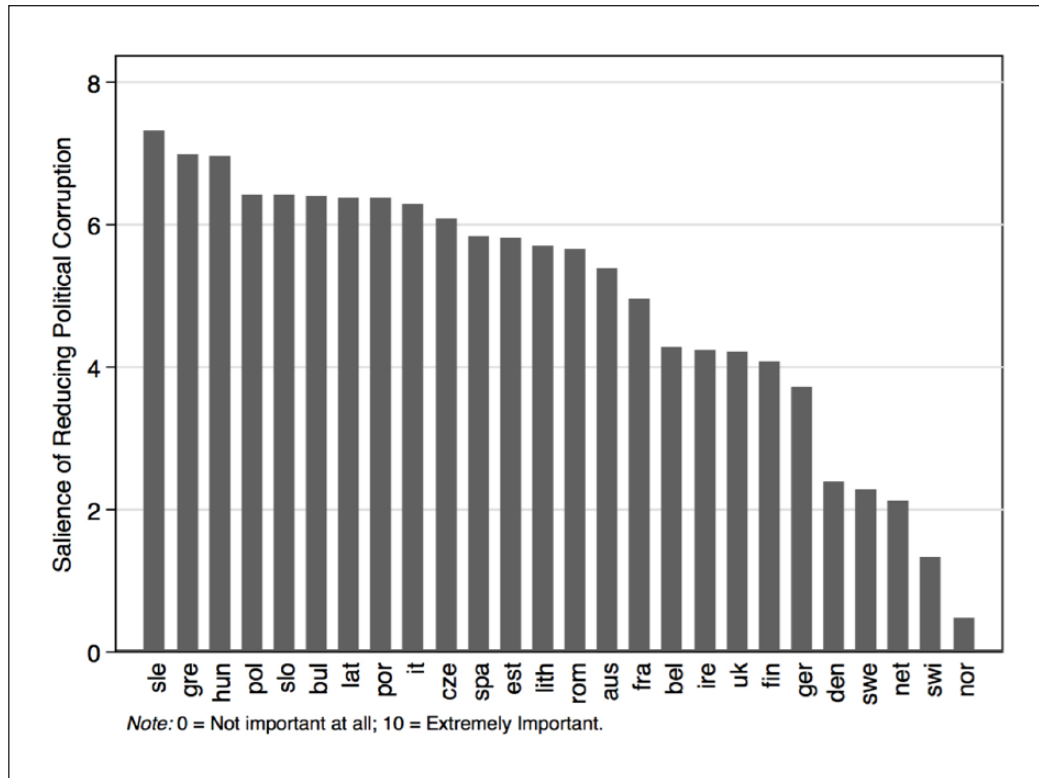
Figure 1. Country-level variation in corruption salience, unweighted by party vote share. (Source: CHES 2014).

and Turkey.[2] The 2014 survey has been combined with prior waves to produce a trend file with five time points from 1999 to 2014, making the CHES the longest-running, most extensive expert survey on political parties in Europe.

Prior waves of the CHES data have been cross-validated with a variety of alternative sources of party positioning information (Bakker et al., 2015; Hooghe et al., 2010; Marks et al., 2007; Steenbergen and Marks, 2007). These show a high level of correlation, particularly with placements derived from aggregate voter placements, a finding consistent with other research (Dalton and McAllister, 2015; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012).[3]

For the first time, the 2014 CHES included questions about the "salience of anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric" and the "salience of reducing political corruption" for the political parties of Europe. All experts were asked to provide salience scores for all parties in a given party system on these two questions; responses could range from 0 (not at all important) to 10 (very important).

Figure 1 displays the party-based salience of reducing political corruption aggregated to the country level. It shows that political corruption is a more salient issue in southern and eastern Europe, but considerably less salient in northern and western Europe. Turning to cross-validation for the CHES salience of reducing political corruption variable, the Manifesto Project Dataset includes party-level data on the percentage of quasi-statements in a party's manifesto devoted to political corruption (per304). Specifically, the category refers to the "Need to eliminate political corruption and associated abuses of political and/or bureaucratic power" (Volkens et al., 2016). This variable correlates with the CHES salience of reducing political corruption variable at $r = 0.47$, which is a relatively strong correlation given that many parties have 0s in the manifesto data, meaning that no quasi-statements in the manifesto pertained to reducing political corruption.[4]

Figure 2 shows variation in the salience of anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric across the party families of Europe. Consistent with our expectations, we see that this type of rhetoric is much more important to the parties of the extreme left and extreme right than the more centrist party families. Cross-validation exercises for this new CHES salience variable are more difficult because of data limitations. To our knowledge, there are no existing party-level measures of anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric salience. But as mentioned above, anti-elite and anti-establishment positions are a core feature of populism, and we therefore validate our measure of the salience of anti-elite sentiments with a method (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011) that uses a dictionary of populist words to identify the degree of populism in the election manifestos of parties. Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) developed language-specific dictionaries for the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and the
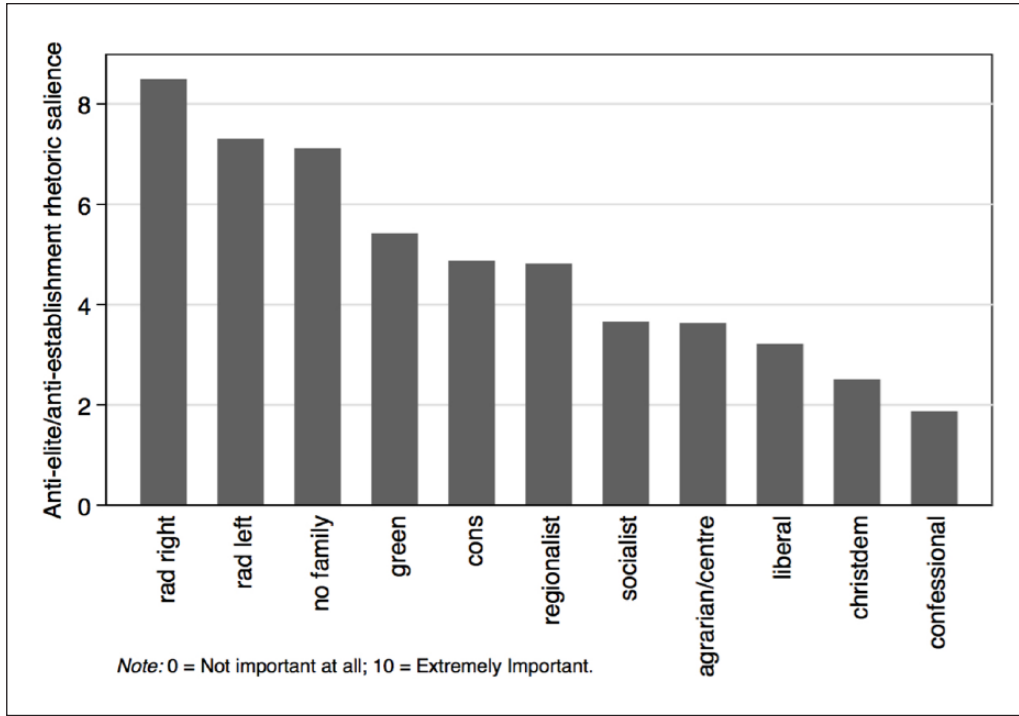
Figure 2. Salience of anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric, by party family. (Source: CHES 2014).

United Kingdom and we used them to identify the degree of populism in recent election manifestos. The two measures correlate reasonably well ($r = 0.51$). The main outliers are the Italian parties Democratic Party (PD), The Five Star Movement (M5S) and Lega Nord (LN). Remarkably, the text analysis method categorizes the latter two as much less populist than the PD. The placements of these three parties by experts seem to have more face validity. Without these three outliers the correlation between the two variables is $r = 0.75$.

As an additional check on the face validity of the anti-establishment/anti-elite question, Figure 3 depicts the correlation between a party's position on European integration and the salience it places on anti-elite and anti-establishment rhetoric. As one would expect, these variables correlate rather highly with one another ($r = -0.70$) and show that parties that oppose European integration generally emphasize anti-elite/anti-establishment rhetoric whereas pro-EU parties are much less likely to use this type of rhetoric.

In the next section, we present a more detailed examination of variation in the salience of reducing political corruption and anti-elite/anti-establishment for political parties across European countries.

Anti-elite and anti-corruption salience for political parties across Europe

We model anti-elite and anti-corruption salience as a function of a set of party and country-level predictors: first, we model the effect of economic (left-right) and social (GAL-TAN) placement of political parties, and add their quadratic terms given our expectation that extreme parties emphasize anti-elite and anti-corruption topics.[5] Variable *age* measures the number of years a party has existed since 1945 in western Europe, and since 1990 in eastern Europe (Döring and Regel, 2016). Since an age effect is likely to be non-linear, we also include a squared term for age. The variable *In_government* is a dummy variable scored 1 for parties that were in government in 2014. We weight each party (observation) by its vote share in the most recent national elections to reflect the fact that larger parties tend to be more significant actors in party systems. At the country-level, we use the PRS Group's International Country Risk Guide (ICRG) country-level indicator of QoG. This variable is the mean value of the ICRG variables measuring corruption, law and order, and bureaucratic quality, and was taken from the QoG Institute's Basic Dataset (Dahlberg et al., 2016).[6] The variable ranges from 0 to 1 with higher values indicating higher QoG. The terms u_j and e_{ij} represent the country- and party-level random components respectively. Given the multi-level nature of our data, we specify a random intercept multi-level model as follows

$$salience_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * econ\_left\_right_{ij}$$
$$+\beta_2 * econ\_left\_right_{ij}^2 + \beta_3 * galtan_{ij} + \beta_4 * galtan_{ij}^2$$
$$+\beta_6 * New_{ij} + \beta_7 * Age_{ij} + \beta_8 Age_{ij}^2 + \beta_9 * In\_government_{ij}$$
$$+\beta_{10} * Quality\_of\_government_j + u_j + e_{ij}$$

Figure 3. Correlation of EU position and salience of anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric. (Source: CHES 2014).

We summarize the results in Figures 4 and 5 and provide details in Table 1. As expected, anti-corruption salience is strongly influenced by a party's country-specific level of QoG, and to a lesser extent by its ideology. As Figure 4 demonstrates, countries with lower QoG tend to have parties that emphasize anti-corruption topics. Turning to ideology, we see weak support for a curvilinear relationship between ideology and anti-corruption salience. While the effect of economic left-right is not statistically significant, the effect of socio-cultural preferences is statistically significant, but substantively weak. Finally, the model provides significant evidence that more recent parties and parties outside government emphasize anti-corruption issues more than their more established competitors and government parties.

The analysis of anti-elite salience presents a number of notable findings. First, Figure 5 shows no significant effect of QoG. Second, the figure demonstrates that variance in anti-elite salience is largely a function of party ideology. While extreme parties tend to emphasize their opposition to political elites, the figure demonstrates that the salience is significantly greater for radical left and TAN parties. Note also that the effect of economic and GAL-TAN placement on anti-elite salience is substantively much stronger than it is for anti-corruption salience. The finding that anti-elite parties are primarily located on the TAN side of the GAL-TAN dimension and on the left side of the economic left-right dimension is consistent with prior research on

opposition to European integration (e.g. Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Kriesi, 2007). Hence, emphasizing opposition to elites brings together two groups of parties—the extreme left and the extreme TAN—that generally position themselves quite far from one another on many other issues, at least in western Europe (see Rovny, 2014, for details on eastern Europe). This shared ambivalence if not outright opposition to European integration from the economic left and extreme TAN parties is illustrated in the current governing coalition in Greece between the leftist Syriza and nationalist ANEL. Finally, the figure also supports the expectation that recently created parties and parties outside government place greater emphasis on opposing political elites than do established and governing parties.

In sum, we find that anti-corruption salience is best explained by the presence of corruption—which clusters geographically—party age and government status. Political parties from countries with lower QoG pay much more attention to political corruption. Similarly, recent parties and parties outside government emphasize anti-corruption issues more than established and governing parties. The effect of political ideology is insignificant or small. Anti-elite salience, by contrast, is primarily a function of ideology, party age and government status. Extreme leftist and extreme TAN parties are most likely to oppose political elites, while their national origin is largely irrelevant. This finding is particularly interesting given the evidence that anti-establishment reform parties with moderate social and
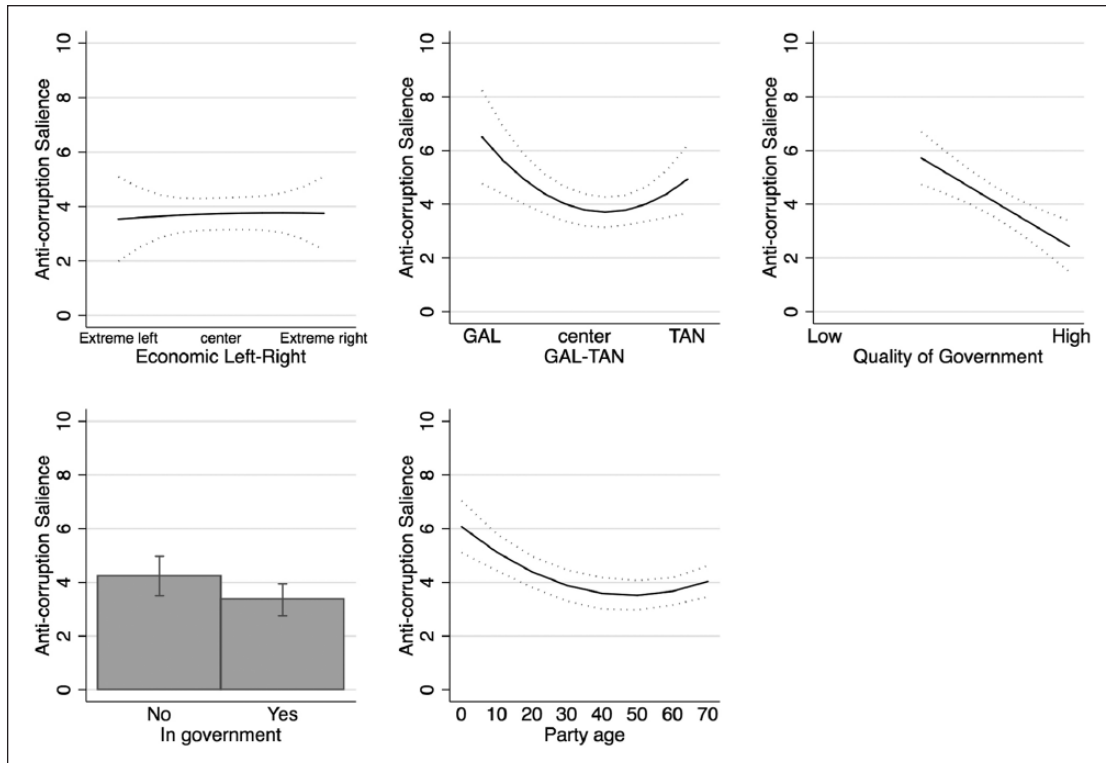
Figure 4. Predicting anti-corruption salience with ideological placement. Predicted values with 95% confidence intervals. (Source: CHES 2014).
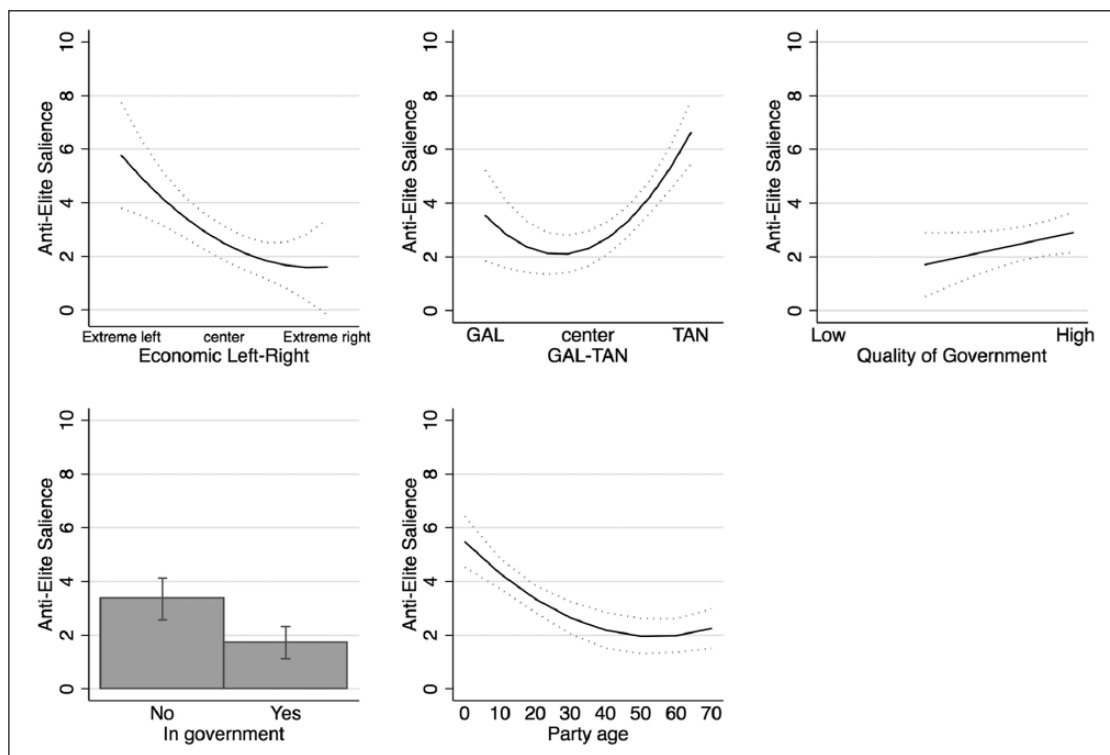

Figure 5. Predicting anti-elite salience with ideological placement. Predicted values with 95% confidence intervals. (Source: CHES 2014).

Table 1. Multi-level model results.

	(1)	(2)
	Corruption	**Anti-elite**
Level 1 fixed effects		
Economic left-right	0 .058	−0.895**
	(0.290)	(0.356)
Economic left-right^2	−0.004	0.048
	(0.027)	(0.034)
Galtan	−0.929***	−0.799***
	(0.303)	(0.291)
Galtan^2	0.077***	0.111***
	(0.027)	(0.027)
Age	−0.106***	−0.131***
	(0.026)	(0.032)
Age^2	0.001***	0.001***
	(0.000)	(0.000)
In government	−0.882***	−1.621***
	(0.310)	(0.265)
Level 2 fixed effects		
Quality of government	−5.472***	1.997
	(1.324)	(1.230)
Random effects		
Constant	13.248***	9.319***
	(1.141)	(1.240)
σ_u	0.773	0.703
	(0.097)	(0.086)
Observations	197	197
Number of groups	23	23

Standard errors in parentheses *** p <0.01, ** p <0.05, * p <0.1

economic policies have found recent success in eastern Europe (Hanley and Sikk, 2016), which is a tension that should be examined in future research. As with anti-corruption salience, recent parties and parties outside government tend to emphasize anti-elite rhetoric more than established and governing parties, and it could be productive to examine variation in the extent of parties' previous governing experience as an extension of this finding.

Discussion

Anti-elite/establishment rhetoric and the reduction of political corruption have emerged as critical features of contemporary European politics. These issues have long been a central aspect of post-communist European party competition and are increasingly prominent in southern European countries as well. Understanding the salience of political corruption for parties in southern and eastern Europe is important, not only because of the profound and debilitating impact of corruption on the capacity of states and on the welfare of citizens (Halleröd et al., 2013; Holmberg and Rothstein, 2011), but also because anti-corruption and anti-elite appeals have transformed the nature of political

competition and displaced traditional socio-economic appeals (see e.g. Pop-Eleches, 2010).

The politics of anti-elitism is also of growing importance in northern Europe, where political corruption is not as salient. In particular, northern Eurosceptic parties like UKIP (anti-establishment salience score of 9.3 on the 0–10 scale) in the UK deploy anti-elite messaging in an attempt to decouple national polities from the European Union and other forms of transnational cooperation. The recent referendum on EU membership in the UK makes abundantly clear the impact that this form of party competition can have on modern European politics (Hobolt, 2016).

This paper has shown that party-based, anti-elite salience is closely related to ideology, but that the salience of political corruption for parties is more closely tied to national context. These results hold in the 2014 CHES data together with—and controlling for—the more general finding that newer and opposition parties tend to emphasize both issues more than older parties, consistent with previous research. These new questions included in 2014 supplement core items in the CHES that have now been collected over five time points, making the dataset an increasingly useful source of information for dynamic analysis of party positioning across Europe.

Declaration of conflicting interest

None declared.

Notes

1. An EU Candidate Survey is also available as a separate dataset. This survey was administered at the same time (allowing comparisons among candidates but also between members and candidates).
2. In one of the first published expert surveys on party positioning, Huber and Inglehart (1995) aimed for at least five completed surveys per country. Users should note that there were fewer than five completed surveys for Cyprus, Luxembourg, Malta and Norway in the 2014 CHES data.
3. Furthermore, Bakker et al. (2014) demonstrate the cross-national comparability of expert assessments.
4. Bågenholm and Charron (2014) also produce a party-based measure of corruption salience, but this variable is

dichotomous and ends several years before 2014, making it less suitable for comparison with our measure.

5. The correlation between the economic left-right and GAL-TAN positions of the parties in this analysis is ($r = -0.40$). The *Dansk Folkparti* (DF) and French *Front National* (FN) illustrate that these positions are often quite independent of one another. The economic left-right position of these parties is centrist (4.5 for DF) or center-right (5.9 for FN), but both are extreme in their cultural conservatism: 8.4 for DF and 8.9 for FN. Furthermore, note that the squared term is used to test curvilinear relationships.

6. The QoG institute collects data related to the QoG institutions. These data are widely used in corruption research and have been recognized with a dataset award from the American Political Science Association (APSA) Comparative Politics Section in 2009.

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