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Shaping political identification: the case of Greece in times of crisis

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Abstract

This study examines the mechanisms by which a deep economic and political crisis affects how people identify with politics. Specifically it explores how the current crisis shapes the content of left-right identification and imposes the existence of a new dimension of political identification. The dynamic nature of left-right identification is activated with issue salience. Salient issues make their way in the left-right schema and in that way enable citizens to navigate the political arena. We theorize that salience is a necessary but not sufficient condition, and we add two more conditions that need to be fulfilled: that of parallel mapping and that of persisting party loyalties.

To test these propositions the study employs the case of Greece, the country hit most severely by the crisis. The Greek case provides a unique combination of conditions that allows us to investigate the impact of a very salient issue on the left-right identification, when the other two conditions are absent. The issue of the economy was the single most important issue in the 2012 Greek elections framed as the bailout dimension: being in favour or against the bail-out agreements between Greece and the Troika (EU Commission, European Central bank, and the IMF).

Using data from the Greek 2012 election the paper examines the content of the left-right identification and that of the bail-out dimension. The findings show that left-right is mainly anchored on socio-cultural issues, while the bail-out dimension is independent from left-right and anchored on socio-economic issues.

The study demonstrates that a society undergoing a severe economic but also political crisis such as the case of Greece does not provide the conditions necessary for smooth political identification. Issues traditionally connected to the left-right identification lose their explanatory power over it. When they become salient again they cannot be absorbed by the, until now all absorbing schema, but force a new dimension of political identification.

Introduction

Since their debut at the French Assembly during the revolution the terms 'left' and 'right' connote two distinctive political ideologies and lifestyles that persist through time. Voters, politicians, journalists and political scientists alike use these terms to describe political preferences. Parties, candidates and voters are mapped on the left-right dimension, which is used as a 'political Esperanto' (Laponce 1981: 56). The political 'left' depicts socially progressive and economically redistributive values, while political 'right' captures socially conservative and economically liberal values. Overall, it offers a schema of political identification that is recognizable and accepted as a common research tool and to a large extent its semantics structure real world political debate.

Despite this, recent real world events such as the looming European financial crisis have put their mark on the structure of party competition by introducing new issue dimensions and by challenge the meanings associated with the dominant left-right dimension. This study examines how deep economic and political crisis affects how people identify with politics. Specifically it explores how the current crisis shapes the content of left-right identification and imposes the existence of a new dimension of political identification.

The current financial crisis prevented politics from being business as usual and blurred the political arena. Various mechanisms were put at work such as high salience of the economy, low clarity of blame allocation, loosening of party loyalties and high insecurity. We expect that these changes reset the meaning of left-right identification. Voters were left to rely for their understanding of the political spectrum on issues that allowed maximum differentiation among parties on the two extremes of the spectrum, shaping their left-right identification. This is in line with findings suggesting that left-right identification is influenced by current conflicts within a political system. (Freire 2006; Adams, De Vries and Leitner 2012; Adams, Green and Millazo 2012). Based on this we test the idea that the issue creating the highest tension between the two extreme of the left-right dimension affects voters' left-right identification the most.

At the same time the crisis made the economy the single most important issue across Europe. This issue was framed as a trade-off between two potential solutions: severe austerity measures, on the one hand, and rejection of austerity policies imposed by the EU, on the other. The increase in salience of the economy could increase the importance of traditional left-right concerns on shaping left-right identification (on salient issues shaping left-right identification see De Vries et al. 2013: 228). However, that could be the case only if party competition on this issue followed the existing left-right identification structure. In the opposite case of party competition not following the patterns expected by left-right structure, the creation of a new dimension should be expected. This new dimension is highly salient and orthogonal to the left-right identification working as an

instrument helping voters cope with the complexities of the financial crisis and make political decisions. We expect that this new dimension is informed mainly by individual positions on the economy.

The Greek 2012 elections offer an excellent case in point to test these propositions. The crisis has hit the country in a most severe way that influenced the political agenda and forced political parties to position themselves on new crisis related issues. The issue on the solution of the crisis was seen as the trade off between two extremes: On the one hand were the positions against the bailout agreements proposed by the Troika – a body consisting of the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – and positions supporting the bailout agreement on the other (Gemenis and Nezi, 2012b). Party loyalties could not function as low cost information source and new parties kept splinting out in the period between 2009 and 2012 elections based on disagreement on the new dimension. Voters were left to decide for themselves based on their own economic positions what the best solution to the financial crisis is. At the same time the main issues differentiating political parties on the left-right dimension were issues on the socio-cultural dimension such as immigration, legalization of drugs, and policing.

These propositions are tested using individual level data from the Voting Advice Application 'Choose4Greece'. The study is based on an analysis identifying the content of left-right and bailout agreement self-placement. The analysis shows that voter's self-placements are strongly linked to cultural issues, more so than to socio-economic issues. Socio-economic issues remain a significant anchor for left-right identification, but its strength is significantly lower than that of cultural issues. This finding is in line with recent work connecting cultural issues to left-right identification (De Vries et. al 2013) but also with older work showing that economic values have a very little role in shaping left-right identification in Greece even in the 1990s (Freire 2008). The second finding confirms the existence of a crisis solution dimension that is anchored on mainly positions on the economy and to a small extent on left-right identification.

These findings bring us a step closer to understand the mechanism connecting the changes in the political agenda and the dynamics of voter's left-right identification. De Vries et. al. (2013) having showed that the issue basis of left-right identification has a dynamic nature, theorized that there is a connection between the salience of an issue and its importance in shaping identification with politics. Our results make clear that issue salience is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for an issue to influence left-right identification. Structuring the two extremes of an issue along the same lines as left-right polarization is an additional condition that needs to be fulfilled. The lack of this condition leads to an additional dimension of high salience for voting behaviour to be established.

In what follows we begin by discussing the left-right identification and its function in Western Europe. We then move to analyzing the role of salience, persisting party loyalties and mapping on

the political space as conditions that determine inclusion of an issue in the left-right schema. Consequently, we introduce the Greek 2012 election as a case in point. After describing our methodological approach emphasizing the special challenges posed by VAA data, we then present our results in regard to the meaning and content of the left-right and bailout dimensions and discuss the implications for electoral and representation research.

Theory

According to Fuchs and Klingemann (1989) left-right identification is the predominant device of measurement and summarizing the ideological position both of individual citizens and political parties. It functions as is an organizing element of the shared political consciousness between mass publics and elites in a society (Kroh 2003; Laponce 1970; Van der Eijk 2001). Identification on the left-right dimension entails three main components: social, value and partisan (Inglehart and Klingemann, 1976). The social component captures the influence of position in the social structure on individual left-right identification – namely in terms of occupation, religion, and geographical location. The value component stresses the importance of individual attitudes towards the major value conflicts in Western European democracies – eg. Role of the state in the economy, role of religion in the state, traditional lifestyle or 'new politics' (Huber, 1989; Knutsen, 1995) influencing individual left-right identification. Finally, the partisan component reflects partisan loyalties on left-right identification (Fuchs and Klingemann, 1989; Huber, 1989; Knutsen, 1997).

Despite the minor but persisting importance of social factors (Freire 2006, 2008) most research on left-right identification was dedicated to the role of values and issue conflicts as main determinants of left-right identification (Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990; Knutsen 1998; Lachat 2008). This body of literature investigates how issue mobilization by political parties shaped voters' left-right identification, capturing, the importance of elite mobilisation and the changing nature of left-right. As new politics issues gained importance in the political agenda the concept of the 'left' became connected with post-materialist values (Kitschelt and Hellemans 1990:213). On the other side of the spectrum the 'right' captures agenda issues related to immigration and law and order (Bale, 2003: 69). The work of Huber (1989) made it clear that conflicts and debates observed within a political system at a given time influence citizen left-right identification.

Salience is a key factor influencing which issues structure voter preferences (Zaller 1992; Steenbergen et al. 2007). Regardless how an issue entered the political agenda, it being a sociological bottom-up or a strategic top-down mechanism[1], the mobilization of a new policy issue is followed by voter identification with it. New politicised issues connect with people's interests and daily lives and political parties strive to draw public attention to it framing it as a new controversy (De Vries and

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[1] For a discussion on different ways by which issues enter the political agenda see De Vries et. al 2013: 226-227

Marks 2012). Thus, cues offered and made salient by parties drive voter preferences and identifications. Recent research has shown that the content of left/right identification adapts to incorporate in its meaning changes in issue salience, namely the emergence of new issues and the lost importance of others (De Vries et al. 2013: 228). These findings are in line with older studies claiming strong integrative capacity for left-right identification incorporating new salient issues and changing substantive meanings to adapt to new political contexts (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Van der Eijk et. al. 2005).

The mechanism through which new issues enter left-right identification passes through the partisan component of the later. As a political issue becomes salient political parties tend to incorporate it into their existing ideological profile. This can be seen as an attempt of ensuring ideological consistency and minimizing electoral risk (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Hinich and Munger 1993). As a result, the issue becomes associated with the existing party profile. For example, a party that places itself on the 'right' will brand its position on the new issue as the 'right wing' position, redefining also for voters what it means to be on the 'right'.

The complexity of politics forces voters to find shortcuts in form of attitudinal cues (Feldman and Conover 1983; Popkin 1991). For cues on new issues voters can rely on actions and information delivered by parties they support (Feldman and Conover 1983; Popkin 1991; Zaller 1992). These cues can help form opinions with very low cost of information (Hinich and Munger 1993; Zaller 1992). A voter shaping an attitude on a new issue can rely on the cues delivered by his preferred party. Through this mechanism primal political identifications – namely left-right identification – are updated by including issues that are new in the political agenda.

High and persisting salience of new issues appearing on the agenda or old existing issues regaining salience is a necessary condition for these issues to shape the content and meaning of left-right identification (De Vries et. al. 2013). The role of the partisan component of left-right identification makes it clear that this condition is not sufficient. There are two additional conditions that need to be fulfilled for an issue to enter the primal political identification dimension. On the one hand salient political divisions have to follow the same patterns as left-right divisions. That is to say that the two extreme positions on the new issue should map on the two extremes of the left-right dimension. Following the same pattern reduces the possibility of confusion and enables the absorption of the new issue into the party profile. This condition will be referred to as the condition of parallel mapping. On the other hand political partisanships have to hold. In case of loosening of party loyalties the mechanism connecting new issues and left-right identification by using cues from parties is broken. The mass-elite linkage enters a phase of disequilibrium and the absorption of the new issue by the primal political identification dimension cannot take its course. This condition will be referred to as the condition of persisting party loyalties.

The absence of the conditions of parallel mapping and persisting party loyalties hinders the incorporation of the new salient issue on the major political identification dimension. Assuming the new salient issue is of great importance for current affairs parties and voters are loss about the new demand and need to find a solution to resolve the inconsistency (Stimson, Thiebaut and Tiberj 2012: 296). Parties might have strategic considerations that help them choose which side of the issue they will support that not map on the existing left-right divisions. The absence of the parallel mapping condition will result at the new issue forming a new dimension of political contestation. To what extent this new dimension structures party competition depends on its salience for current affairs. The absence of the persisting party loyalties condition implies the absence of the top-down mechanism of opinion formation. The lack of partisan cues to help form opinions on significant issues disorient citizens and result to great instability in the political system.

The logic of necessary and sufficient conditions for an issue to be incorporated left-right identification takes us a step closer to the creation of a comprehensive conceptual framework explaining the dynamics of left-right identification and the role of political agenda and electoral circumstances. The case of Greece during the severe financial crisis offers a unique example of the above described conditions: high salience of the economy, absence of parallel mapping and absence of party loyalties. We will now have a better look in the Greek case.

After the fall of the junta in 1974 the class cleavage dominated Greek politics. The two main parties, PASOK and new Democracy represented the two sides of this political conflict which was also depicted in the meaning of left-right identification (Vernardakis, 2011). The 'left' reflected support for redistributive economic measures and high state intervention. The 'right' captured support for market economy. Political parties identified with the labels left and right, which led to a high significance of the partisan component for left-right identification. Indeed, Freire (2008) shows that the partisan component is the single most important predictor of left-right identification. As parties were the main agents for the top-down flow of new ideological cues, their slow but steady convergence on the economic dimension (Vasilopoulos and Vernardakis 2011) and their positions on new cultural issues (Gemenis and Dinas, 2010), reshaped the meaning of left-right.

Over the past thirty years the political agenda changed and party profiles were updated to include positions on new issues. Issues like nationalism and immigration (Ellinas, 2013), as well as issues associated with the ecology and new politics agenda (Gemenis 2010) entered the scene and forced all parties to take positions. Meanwhile, the left-right semantics never stopped being used in the public discourse of all political parties. Thus the new issues slowly became part of the left-right identification allowing it to consistently be the strongest predictor of party choice in Greece (Dinas 2008, Freire & Costa Lobo 2005, Karyotis & Rudig 2013, Nezi 2012).

At the time of the crisis issues such as traditional lifestyles, immigration, ecology, role of church had been established as part of the left-right identification and differentiated between the two extremes of the spectrum. In fact the 2012 elections re-shaped the party system pushing the two major contesting poles from the familiar PASOK-New Democracy Schema to the new SYRIZA-Golden Dawn constellation. The liberitarian leftist party SYRIZA mainly differentiated itself from the other extreme of the spectrum the neo-nazi Golden Dawn on cultural issues. Their position on economic issues did not differ much. We hypothesize that at the time of the 2012 elections left-right was mainly explained by positions on socio-cultural issues.

The severe financial crisis brought to light again the importance of the issue of the economy and shaped a new political debate around the proposed solution. The issue developed as the trade off between two extremes: On the one hand were the positions against the bailout agreements proposed by the Troika; positions supporting the bailout agreement on the other (Gemenis and Nezi, 2012b). Political parties were forced to position themselves on new crisis related issues. The constant media attention on the crisis and the bailout agreement and the dramatic changes in daily life they brought upon, made the issue the single most important factor of structuring party competition (Katsanidou 2013) and predicting vote choice in the May and June 2012 elections (Nezi and Katsanidou 2013). The first condition enabling economy to have a high impact on left-right identification, the condition of salience was fulfilled.

The issue of the bailout became the most salient for the 2012 elections (Dinas and Rori 2013). Political parties were forced to take position on this matter. Their positions were mainly informed by strategic considerations (Gemenis and Nezi 2012b) and did not coincide with the existing left-right division[2]. The new extremely salient issue did not fulfil the condition of parallel mapping forcing the creation of a new dimension.

This new dimension captured opinions about the bailout agreement and cross-cut the existing left-right dimension for parties and voters. The bailout agreement has two components. On the one hand it refers to the content of the solution to the crisis: the neoliberal austerity policies put forward by Troika. On the other hand there is the discourse around the bailout agreement touching upon national pride and the European question (membership in the EU and the Eurozone). Political discourse portrayed the bailout agreement as loss of sovereignty and capitulation to external actors. To gain the lost national pride Greece was supposed to leave the Eurozone, go back to the national

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[2] In favour of the bailout agreement placed themselves PASOK, the liberal Drasi, populist party LAOS, and the New Democracy splinter Group DISY, while New Democracy and leftist DIMAR supported a pro-bailout government without openly positioning themselves in favour of the bailout agreement. Against the bailout placed themselves left wing parties such as SYRIZA and ANTARSYA, the communist party KKE, the right wing populist ANEL, the extreme right Golden Dawn, and a series of short lived splinter groups (for a detailed discussion see Dinas and Rori 2013; Gemenis and Nezi, 2013).

currency and potentially also leave the EU. We hypothesize therefore that the position on the bailout dimension is determined by the individual's position on economic and on European issues.

Condition of Persisting Party Loyalties

The Greek crisis caused a dramatic loosening of party loyalties. New parties kept splinting out in the period between 2009 and 2012 elections based on disagreement on the new dimension. The effective number of parties at the electoral level jumped from 3.16 to 9, while electoral volatility went from 9.8 to a phenomenal 48.4. Under these conditions the mechanism connecting new issues and left-right identification by using cues from parties was not functioning and the left-right could not absorb nor influence the new dimension. The condition of persisting part loyalties is violated. We hypothesize therefore very little impact of the left-right identification on the individual position on the bailout dimension.

On the basis of this logic we expect that political identification in 2012 Greece was divided into two dimensions, which were anchored in different issues and not dependent on each other. Our expectations are formally hypothesized:

H1: Identification on the left-right dimension is mainly explained by socio-cultural issues and less so by economic issues

H2: Individual positioning on the bailout dimension is explained mainly by positions on the economic and EU issues, and less so by positions on socio-cultural issues.

H3: Placement on the left-right dimension does not influence placement on the bailout dimension

Data and method

To test these hypotheses we use only until this time available data related to the Greek 2012 elections[3]. The Voting Advise Application (VAA) 'Choose for Greece' offers variables on demographics, self-placement on various dimensions of interest, as well as a unique battery of 30 attitudes questions on prominent agenda issues[4]. VAAs are internet based applications offering voting advice based on calculating the ideological congruence between voters and political parties (Gemenis, 2013) making voters more willing to answer correctly. Contrary to traditional surveys, users answer an online questionnaire with the expectation to be given advice in return.

Despite Choose for Greece offering the only available dataset, we would like to look into some methodological problems arising from using VAAs in general. Data quality, a usual issue for internet

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[3] The looming financial crisis only deteriorated one of the major problems of conducting political behaviour research in Greece: the lack of national election studies. Before the crisis researchers resulted in using pre-election surveys conducted by polling companies (Dinas 2008, Karyotis & Rüdig forthcoming, Nezi 2012, Vasilopoulos & Demertzis forthcoming), which are less than ideal for use in political research. This luxury disappeared due to financial straits of the polling companies. Two studies conducted by Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (one survey with the CSES component and the VAA 'Help me Vote') did not make their data available until January 2014, time of authorship of this chapter.

[4] The VAA was designed and launched by the 'Preference Matcher' consortium (www.preferencematcher.org).

based surveys, was thoroughly addressed by the Preference Matcher team[5]. The dataset contains 75,294 cases after the cleaning process. Data representativeness was a bigger problem to solve. VAAs are not representative since users self-select into the sample. Users belong to the younger, higher educated, technologically able strata of the population. This issue is addressed through the use of a demographic weight. The study applies survey weights that construct cross-classifications of the weighting variables making the data representative of the Greek population in demographic terms[6].

However self-selection poses a more difficult problem: political interest and, perhaps, party identification may play a role on whether someone would fill-in a voting advice application or not. The sample is effectively a convenience sample which by no means is representative of the voting population in Greece. Capturing respondents with higher than average political interest is not a major concern for this study in fact it can be used constructively. For this exercise a representative sample is not necessary, only a sample providing a certain degree of variance. Our goal is to explain identification on the left-right dimension and positioning on the bail-out dimension. Using politically interested individuals reduces the noise and provides clearer results. This allows for analyzing the content of ideological dimensions, but does not permit inference on the impact of these dimensions on the vote outcome.

The study of political identification and its relationship to socio-economic, socio-cultural, and European issues OLS regression was used. We run an analysis on a demographically weighted sub-sample of 45,508 cases that have no missing values. The two dependent variables left-right and bail-out identification were constructed with two self-placement questions. These questions used a scale from -100 to +100, which is rescaled to a variable ranging from 0 to 2 to closer match the range of the independent variables.

The independent variables are all additive indexes built using responses on policy statements ranging from completely disagree to completely agree. The responses were re-coded to represent the same opinion direction. Three indexes were created: socio-economic, socio-cultural, and European. All indexes were constructed with the following steps: The analysis revealed one factor for every index with an Eigenvalue higher than one. In the summated rating scales were added four socio-economic,

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[5] The preference matcher team excluded all cases in which users needed less than two seconds on each of the 30 attitudes questions, all cases with less than three seconds on three or more of the 30 attitudes questions, all cases with less than 120 seconds on all of the 30 questions together, all cases in which the respondent answered fifteen successive attitudes questions in the same way. To address the issue of multiple responses per respondent, the VAA installed a cookie on users' web browsers and transformed the user IP number into a unique identifier that could not be traced back to the user. These identifiers were used to remove multiple entries. Subsequent entries from the same identifier were retained only if the provided demographic information suggested that this was a different user.

[6] For the VAA sample the raking weight was constructed with variables: a) number of residents per region and b) a variable indicating 36 demographic categories which was in turn created by cross-classifying census data on age, gender and education.

five socio-cultural, and two European issues[7]. All items added in the indexes had factor loadings higher than 0.5. The reliability and dimensionality of this scale was examined using Cronbach's alpha (all higher than 0.6). Control variables include age, gender, and education level.

Results

Our case fulfils only one of the three conditions for left-right identification to absorb new issues, that of high salience. The economy is the single most important issue in the 2012 national elections. The condition of parallel mapping and the condition of persisting party loyalties are notoriously not fulfilled given the high volatility and the exploded effective number parties. The results on table 1 reflect these conditions. The first model shows left-right identification being anchored mainly on socio-cultural issues and less so on socio-economic issue. A typical one standard deviation in socio-cultural issues index brings a leftward shift of 0.48 points on the left-right scale. In contrast, one standard deviation shift in socio-economic issues index results to a shift to the right of only 0.19 points. Our first hypothesis that left-right identification has a strong base in socio-cultural issues, and a weaker base in socio-economic issues can be accepted.

The 2012 elections reshaped the political system and gave way to a new polarization between the leftist SYRIZA and the extreme right Golden Down party. Their rhetoric forged the understanding of left-right even more, as the main differences between the two political parties are on socio-cultural issues. On the economy they both support economic growth measures and are heavily against the bailout agreements. This new polarization can be one reason for the domination of those issues that allow the maximum differentiation between the two extremes.

The dependent variable in the second model is the self-placement on the bailout issue. In line with our second hypothesis the socio-economic issues index and EU issues index explain better self-placement on the bailout issue than positions on the socio-cultural issues index. One standard deviation change of the socio-economic index results in 0.33 points change towards the pro-bailout end of the scale. Similarly, for EU issues, a single standard deviation shift produces a 0.30 point pro-bailout chance. The impact of a standard deviation change in socio-cultural issues is statistically significant but is very small, resulting in only 0.08 points pro-bailout change.

Even when controlling for left-right identification, the superiority of the socio-economic and EU indexes remains. What changes is that the socio-cultural dimension increases its impact from 0.08 to 0.14. However, our third hypothesis cannot be accepted. The left-right identification influences the position on the bailout dimension, but only to a small extent. One standard deviation change on the left-right scale produces only a 0.11 change in the bailout change. A right wing individual is more

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[7] Wordings of questions used can be found in the appendix

likely to be also pro bailout. Even though they are not completely independent from one another, the impact of left-right on bailout position is small.

The economy framed as the bailout agreement debate is salient and independent from the primal political identification schema. It provides a new divide that is only partially influenced by left-right identification. In fact when looking at political parties we see a similar pattern. The leftist SYRIZA considered entering in government coalition with other parties on the anti-bailout side of this divide such as the right with populist ANEL. The fact that they belong to opposing camps of the left-right division does not stop them from considering governing together. They are basing a potential common government program on their proposals for the economy, the exit from the bailout agreements and the complete divorce from austerity measures. Simultaneously, both these parties have signalled their unwillingness to cooperate in a government coalition with neighbouring parties on the left-right, who place themselves on the pro-bailout camp. These developments on the party level reinforce the citizens' view that these two dimensions are independent from each other.

Table 1: Explaining self-placement on the left-right and the bailout dimensions in the 2012 election

	Left-Right Self-placement	Bailout Self-placement	Bailout Self-placement
Constant	1.2***	0.17***	0.17
Socio-economic dimension	0.19 (0.17)***	0.33(0.27)***	0.31(0.25)***
Socio-cultural dimension	-0.48 (-0.49)***	0.08 (0.08)***	0.14 (0.13)***
EU issues		0.30 (0.36)***	0.29 (0.35)***
Left-Right self-placement			0.11 (0.10)***
Demographics			
Age	-0.01 (-0.02)	0.04 (0.05)***	0.04 (0.05)***
Education	0.00 (0.00)	0.04 (0.09)***	0.04 (0.09)***
Gender (male)	0.05 (0.05)***	0.05 (0.04)***	0.05 (0.04)**
N	44508	44508	44508
R- squared	0.27	0.28	0.28

Annotations: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. b Coefficients, Beta's in parenthesis

Demographic control variables are all significant for the bailout dimension but only gender has a significant impact on left-right identification. In fact men are more likely to place themselves on the right and being pro-bailout than women. Age and education have also a small pro-bailout impact.

Overall our results show that under the condition of high salience of the economy, while the two other conditions of parallel mapping and of persisting party loyalties are missing the economy is not incorporated in the meaning of left-right. Salience is not enough to make an issue dominate in determining left-right identification. The lack of the other two conditions forced the economy to appear as a new dimension, given its overpowering salience. Positions on this issue dimension in the shape of the pro or against the bailout agreement were determined by positions on socio-economic and EU issues. The existence of a partially cross-cutting dimension of political identification can be attributed to the impossibility of it being absorbed by the left-right dimension.

Discussion

This study explored the influence of an economic and political crisis on how people identify with politics. Using the only currently available data from the Greek 2012 elections we showed how the economy as an issue develops under the condition of high salience. The link between economic issues and left-right identification was found to be weak, while cultural issues played the most significant role in determining left-right positioning. The economy shaped a new dimension of contestation that was only weakly anchored on left-right identification and mainly informed by socio-economic and EU issue positions. We explain these findings building on previous studies showing salience as the key factor that enabled issues to be incorporated to the left-right overarching schema. We theorize that salience is a necessary but not sufficient condition, and we add two more conditions that need to be fulfilled: that of parallel mapping and that of persisting party loyalties. Our results show that a society undergoing a severe economic but also political crisis such as the case of Greece does not provide the conditions necessary for smooth political identification. Issues traditionally connected to the left-right identification lose their explanatory power over it. When they become salient again they cannot be absorbed by the, until now all absorbing schema, but force a new dimension of political identification.

These findings are important, firstly, because they make clear that high salience of an issue is not enough to influence how people identify with politics. That adds to the debate on the meaning of the left-right and the debate on dimensionality of the political space. Testing a crisis case such as Greece in 2012 furthers our understanding on how and under which conditions issues enter the main dimension of political identification.

Secondly there are implications for the field of political representation where the link between citizens and elites goes through specific dimensions. Lefkofridi et. al. (forthcoming) used the left-right and authoritarian-libertarian dimensions to demonstrate the existence of a significant amount of left-authoritarian voters who remain unrepresented due to lack of similar-minded parties. Our

findings show that these left-authoritarian voters would have self-identified themselves as anti-bailout/right wing within the Greek system. Viewing recent developments in Greek politics, there were several options of parties positioning themselves on this opinion package (the right populist Independent Greeks, and the extreme right Golden Dawn) allowing for congruence on both dimensions (Gemenis and Nezi 2012a). In fact under the new categorization there are no voters in the Greek political system that should face the problem of underrepresentation.

Thirdly, a significant methodological implication refers to the common practice of matching parties with voters on various ideological dimensions. On top of the existing problems of this matching mechanisms in studies of electoral behaviour and representation (for discussion see Katsanidou 2013b), one more is added. Voters in Greece in 2012 have a very different meaning of left-right than what is traditionally expected. Thus, when matching voters with parties, this has to be done with care, matching voter self-placement on left-right with positions of parties on the socio-cultural dimension and voter self-placement on the bailout dimension with positions of parties on left-right issues dealt with in the bailout agreements. Alternatively, the self-placement questions should be avoided altogether and in their place should be used additive indexes of questions representing specific predefined ideological dimensions (Gemenis 2013).

However, there are limitations of this study that should not be ignored. Firstly, the type of data used come from a self-selected sample. These tend to be citizens with higher interest in politics and therefore potentially different to a random sample of the population. Further research should replicate this study when other data become available. Secondly, it would be interesting to see whether the crisis had an impact on the content of left-right identification in other countries and whether their political space underwent similar changes, testing the three conditions for shaping left-right identification also in different contexts. Thirdly, focusing more on Greece, research has to investigate the impact of the supply side and the political discourse on the transformation of voters' political space. Did the party political space also change? Do these changes follow the changes of the voters' political space? Has the quality of representation improved due to the new ideological divisions? Such questions could be explored in future work on the Greek political space and the comparative discussion of the content of the left-right identification.

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Appendix

All items are measured in a four point scale from 0 (completely disagree) to 4 (completely agree).

Items were re-coded to reflect the direction of the scale.

Socio-economic dimension (0 economic left 2 economic right)

- Priority should be given to economic growth even if this leads to a wider gap between rich and poor.
- Privatization will help reduce the deficit.
- To combat unemployment, workers must accept the new forms of flexible working conditions (e.g. part time jobs).
- Co-funding the universities by private investors will have negative effects on higher education.

Socio-cultural dimension (0 authoritarian 2 liberitarian)

- Strong policing in town centers should be implemented to tackle crime.
- Possession of soft drugs (eg, cannabis) for personal use should be decriminalized.
- Reducing defence spending (e.g. closing military camps) will provide resources for the welfare state.
- Granting Greek citizenship on favourable terms to second generation immigrants will encourage further immigration to Greece.
- Multiculturalism in Greece is a positive phenomenon.

EU Dimension (0 anti European 2 pro European)

- Greece's exit from the euro zone would help address the economic crisis.
- Greece should leave the European Union.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Mean	St. deviation	Min	Max
Left-right self-placement	61140	0.91	0.50	0	2
Bailout self-placement	61140	0.64	0.58	0	2
Socio-economic dimension	71687	0.81	0.46	0	2
Socio-cultural dimension	71644	0.99	0.55	0	2
EU issues	72608	0.46	0.65	0	2
Age	65626	0.57	0.65	0	2
Education	62156	2.05	0.75	0	3
Gender (male)	68342	0.59	0.49	0	1