

Bes, Bart Joachim; Schoonvelde, Martijn; Rauh, Christian

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Undermining, defusing or defending European integration? Assessing public communication of European executives in times of EU politicisation

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APPENDIX A: *Justification and validation of the complexity measure*

The technocratic resilience scenario and the derived defusion strategy require us to measure the degree to which an executive actor tries to conceal her/his stance on European integration in public communication. As described in the main text, we measure this via language complexity as captured in the inverted Flesh reading ease score. This appendix aims to justify the validity of this particular indicator in greater detail.

A first assumption underlying this indicator is that more complex language leads to less understandability of the message on part of the constituency. With reference to common complaints about technocratic language in public and academic discourse, we consider this assumption highly plausible. More importantly, the reading ease measure that we use has been explicitly designed to measure the cognitive mobilization needed to decipher a given text.

A second assumption is that the usage of longer sentences and longer terms (the two main ingredients of the Flesh Reading Ease Score) is a strategic rhetorical choice of the communicating actors. We consider this assumption highly plausible as well, since we analyse crafted speeches rather than spontaneous utterances. When experienced political actors such as national leaders or Commissioners (or their PR staff) draft a speech, they can choose to express a given political stance in long sentences with complicated terms, or they can try to send a clear message by separating this into several easy-to-digest sentences with more simple terminology.

These two assumptions are empirically bolstered by recent research on the political communication of domestic parties. Bischof and Senninger (2017) analyse manifestos with a complexity measure that also rests on sentence and term length. On the one hand, their work supports the strategic choice assumption: language complexity varies systematically between established and challenger parties. On the other hand, their work supports the understandability assumption: language complexity of a manifesto is systematically related to how well voters can pinpoint the political position of a given party. Additional evidence on the strategic choice assumption comes from Lin and Osnabrügge (2018) who show that German Members of Parliament use less complex language in their speeches when their ‘constituents are relatively poor, less educated, and come from an immigration background’ (p. 1). As further support for the understandability assumption, we note work that shows that if survey questions are formulated using more complex language, this increases the number of ‘don’t know’ responses (Harmon, 2001).

Furthermore, one may argue that language complexity is driven by other factors, such as the respective audience of individual speeches or the topics the speaker covers. Since this information is not available, we cannot rule this out and have to assume that such effects cancel out over time and actors. But in this regard, it is important to note that we do not draw inferences on absolute levels of language complexity. Rather, we focus exclusively on relative changes in language complexity in relation to varying EU politicization and find robust statistical results. We do not see how these results could be confounded systematically by variation in audience or sub-topics in European integration references.

Finally, we try to empirically cross-validate the link between a defusion strategy and our language complexity measure. Admittedly, finding objective measures of vagueness or ambiguity are a long discussed problem in the philosophy of language (as nicely captured in Chomsky’s ‘flying planes’ example or Orwell’s ‘Politics and the English language’). But along the idea of convergent validity,

we use three independent indicators that tap into possibly defusing language from different perspectives.

First, following Spirling, Munger and Benoit (2018) we looked into the *familiarity of the words used*. To measure this we cleaned the uni-gram data from the Google books corpus (English, 1999-2008)¹ and calculated the relative frequency of more than 1.8 million words therein. We then used these relative frequencies to score the average familiarity of words in our texts around European integration references.

Second, we build on psycho-linguistic efforts to place individual terms on *concreteness vs. abstractness scales*. Concrete terms refer to objects that can be experienced by human senses or maybe described by doing something. Abstract terms, in contrast, refer to objects that can be solely described by using additional language. We score our European integration messages by using the list of 40 thousand human-scored English lemmas provided by Brysbaert and colleagues (2014).

Thirdly, we resort to the idea of *signal consistency* in information theory and calculate the word entropy measure originally proposed by Shannon (1948). Expressed most simply, entropy captures the degree to which the overall message can be inferred from parts of the message (here along the repetition of words). Higher entropy indicates less consistency.

Table A1 correlates these three measures with our original language complexity measure across all European integration references in the covered speeches. Neither of these measures is perfect in itself (not the least as all of them ignore sentence length component of our original measure). Still, the patterns bolster our confidence that the complexity indicator taps into technocratic defusion best. Initially, we see that the three different perspectives on defusing language are only very weakly correlated among each other. Their individual correlations with the complexity measure are substantially higher and statistically more robust. Most importantly, the direction of these correlations conforms to our expectations. Substantially, we find that more complex messages on average also imply less consistent, less concrete and less familiar communication signals. In sum, thus, all indicators converge on more or less understandable language while the complexity indicator seems to be the most encompassing measure.

	Complexity	Entropy	Concreteness
Entropy	0.28****		
Concreteness	-0.15****	0.03**	
Familiarity	-0.51****	-0.03**	0.08****

**** p < 0.0001; ** p < 0.01

Table A1: Assessing convergent validity of the complexity measure

¹ Raw data downloaded from <http://storage.googleapis.com/books/ngrams/books/datasetsv2.html> (Version 20090715, accessed: 20.112018).

APPENDIX B: *Descriptive statistics*

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Median	Max
Sentiment	2,989	0.036	0.035	-0.163	0.036	0.238
Complexity	2,989	52.167	15.393	0.397	51.964	98.591
Euroscepticism	2,989	-11.697	21.530	-58.400	-10.520	37.700
PartyChallengers	2,987	11.994	15.031	0.000	2.770	52.840
PartyEUpos	2,811	0.809	0.371	-0.781	1.000	1.000
TradeDependence	2,989	0.623	0.086	0.435	0.629	0.852
NetContr	2,987	1,129.741	5,975.848	13,748.000	1,181.700	15,501.600
EZBondSpread	2,987	9.526	5.826	0.780	8.540	27.390

Table A1: Descriptive statistics for the variables in the models for national leaders

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Median	Max
Sentiment	5,842	0.048	0.029	-0.114	0.048	0.203
Complexity	5,842	55.118	11.355	6.145	55.671	99.959
Euroscepticism	5,831	-15.257	22.510	66.570	-15.500	42.980
PartyChallengers	5,831	16.351	15.489	0.000	13.070	69.400
PartyEUpos	5,084	0.880	0.263	-0.781	1.000	1.000
TradeDependence	5,831	0.686	0.105	0.391	0.707	0.885
NetContr	5,831	-706.176	3,139.987	13,748.000	566.100	15,501.600
EZBondSpread	5,842	9.234	6.316	0.780	8.260	27.390

Table A2: Descriptive statistics for the variables in the models for European Commissioners

APPENDIX C: Robustness to an alternative specification of party-based Euroscepticism

The models presented in the main text capture party-based Euroscepticism by resorting to the electoral share of Eurosceptic parties in the most recent domestic election. This indicator is arguably slow-moving and involves the risk that our estimations miss relevant variation in between elections. Unfortunately, though, consistent information on the electoral support for Eurosceptic parties at smaller time intervals is not readily available – neither for the 28-country sample of European Commissioners nor for the 10-country sample of national leaders for which we have information on the dependent variable.

To nevertheless assess whether findings with regard to national leaders holds against a more fine-grained measure of party-based Euroscepticism, we collected all polling data for Eurosceptic parties in the 10-country sample that we could find and aggregated these polls to the quarterly level. For this we started from the Jennings and Wlezien (2018) data and filled the gaps in their coverage by scraping all polling data that is reported on Wikipedia pages devoted to specific national parliamentary elections during our investigation period. This approach yields complete coverage for Germany, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and the UK, and partial coverage for the Czech Republic, the Netherlands and Poland (Figure C1, in Spain no Eurosceptic party entered parliament during the covered period).

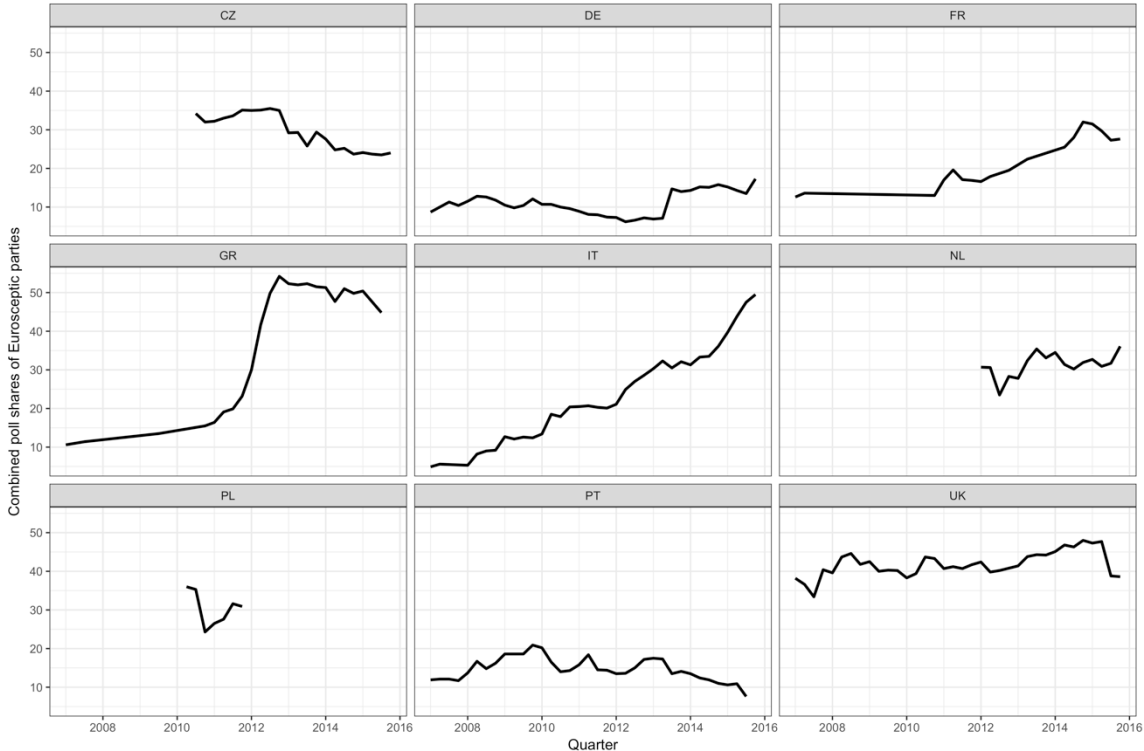


Figure C1: Quarterly aggregated polling data of party-based Euroscepticism

We then re-estimated our models for national leaders with these quarterly aggregated opinion poll data as our measure of party-based Euroscepticism.² The results (presented in Table C1 and Figure C2) indeed lead to identical substantive conclusions: partisan Euroscepticism alone does not systematically influence sentiment of EU integration references, nor their complexity. Rather it is the interaction between partisan Euroscepticism and public Euroscepticism that influences EU integration sentiment and EU integration complexity the most. Furthermore, the results for public Euroscepticism do not change either.

	<u>Sentiment of integration references</u>			<u>Complexity of integration references</u>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Public Euroscepticism	-0.080*** (0.024)	-0.077** (0.024)	-0.034 (0.031)	-0.170*** (0.025)	-0.172*** (0.025)	-0.033 (0.035)
Eurosceptic party poll rating	-0.009 (0.026)	-0.010 (0.026)	-0.043 (0.032)	-0.044 (0.029)	-0.051 (0.030)	-0.157*** (0.036)
Public Euroscepticism (exp)		-0.161* (0.074)	-0.228** (0.080)		0.164* (0.080)	-0.050 (0.087)
Eurosceptic party poll rating (exp)		0.430 (0.936)	0.179 (0.933)		0.588 (0.592)	-0.219 (0.603)
Public x Partisan Euroscept.			0.061* (0.029)			0.197*** (0.032)
Party EU position	-0.095*** (0.026)	-0.105*** (0.026)	-0.076** (0.028)	0.002 (0.032)	0.010 (0.033)	0.104** (0.036)
EU trade dependence	0.141*** (0.025)	0.142*** (0.025)	0.161*** (0.026)	0.104** (0.032)	0.106** (0.032)	0.167*** (0.034)
Net Contribution	0.074** (0.024)	0.072** (0.024)	0.104*** (0.028)	-0.202*** (0.029)	-0.196*** (0.029)	-0.091** (0.034)
Eurozone Bond Spread	0.039* (0.019)	0.044* (0.019)	0.048* (0.019)	-0.027 (0.023)	-0.034 (0.024)	-0.023 (0.024)
CONSTANT	0.012 (0.019)	0.031 (0.072)	-0.024 (0.075)	0.045* (0.020)	0.100* (0.046)	-0.077 (0.055)
<i>Observations</i>	2,411	2,411	2,411	2,411	2,411	2,411
<i>R-squared</i>	0.027	0.029	0.030	0.174	0.175	0.188
<i>Adjusted R-squared</i>	0.025	0.025	0.026	0.171	0.173	0.185
<i>Residual standard error</i>	0.953 (df = 2404)	0.952 (df = 2402)	0.952 (df = 2401)	0.878 (df = 2404)	0.878 (df = 2402)	0.871 (df = 2401)
<i>F statistic</i>	11.146*** (df = 6; 2404)	8.873*** (df = 8; 2402)	8.230*** (df = 9; 2401)	84.122*** (df = 6; 2404)	63.804*** (df = 8; 2402)	61.744*** (df = 9; 2401)
<i>Notes:</i>	Standardized coefficients, robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p<0.05					

² The Commissioner models are based on data from all 28 EU Member States. Finding, let alone collecting these polling data for all of these countries would come down to a Herculean task far beyond the scope of a robustness check.

Table C1: Robustness check for national leaders using opinion poll data.

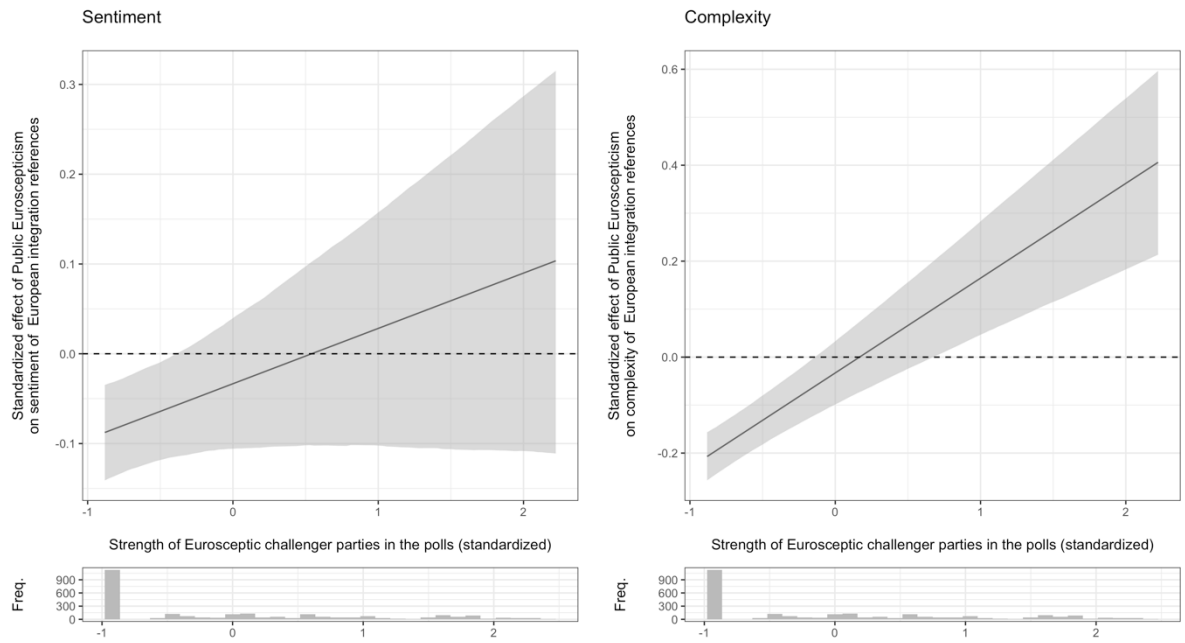


Figure C2: Robustness check for national leaders' responses to different politicization configurations using opinion polling data

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