



EUReACT

Representation in the EU: ACTing Multilevel Democracy



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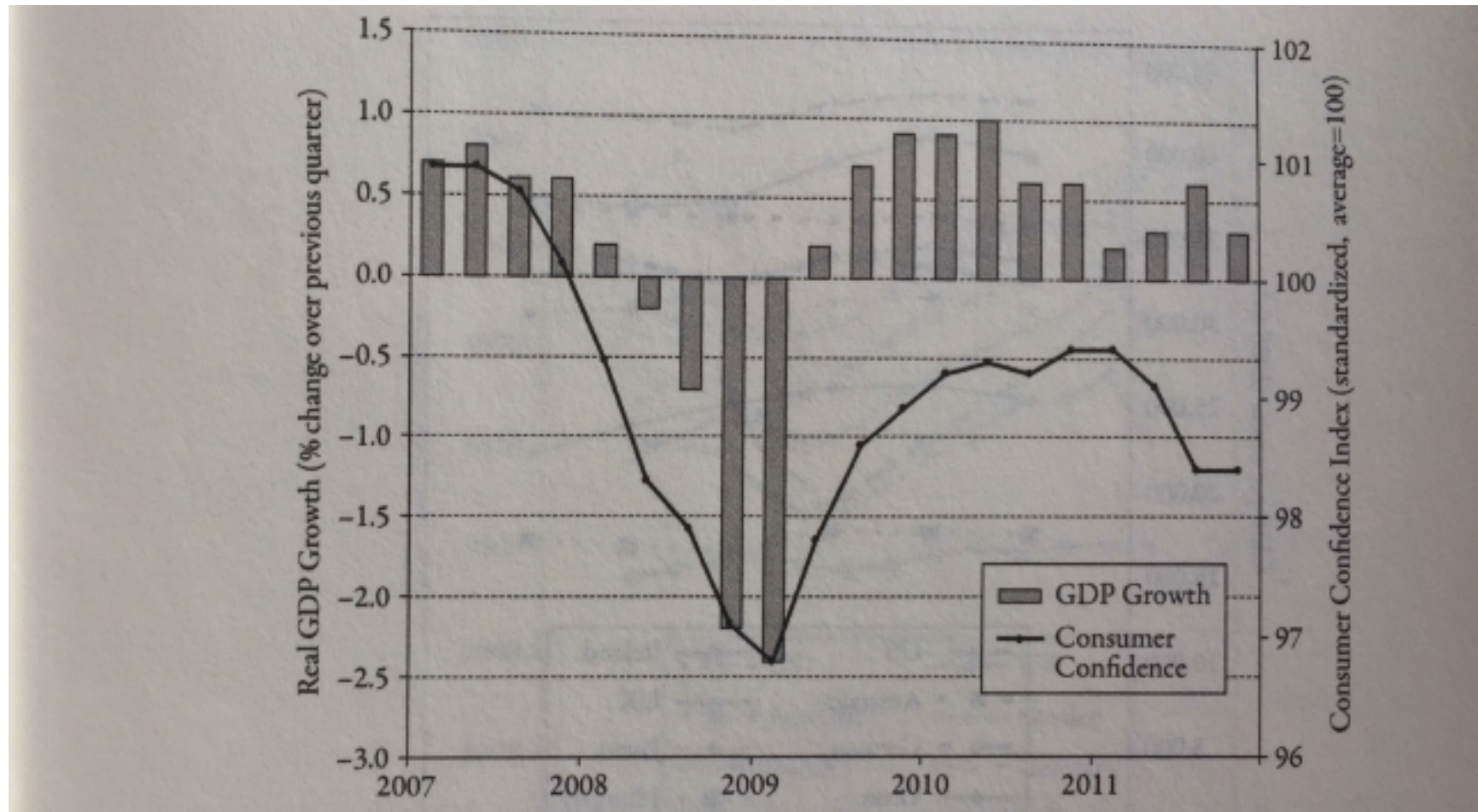
Blaming the EU? Images of the EU among mass publics in the Great Recession

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Thematic Area 4. Mass publics' conceptions of the
EU and European citizenship

Presidio Mattioli – Siena

The Great Recession



Blaming the EU?

- Research up to the 2000s found the European issue largely irrelevant for both EP elections (2nd order model) and national legislative elections (Europe an issue not salient in domestic party competition)
- Referendums on European integration (Denmark and Ireland on the Treaty of Amsterdam; France and Netherlands on EU Constitution) showed some change, with more relevant role played by European attitudes, although voters still greatly relied on attitudes toward the current (national) government (Sara Binzer Hobolt, *Europe in Question. Referendums on European Integration*. Oxford University Press, 2009)

Blaming the EU?

- Great Recession enhanced EU visibility for voters
- At the 2014 EP elections a paradox emerged: mass public found EU responsible for the crisis, but they faced the fact that EU was not accountable. This produces a *growing distrust* of EU institutions
- In post-crisis national elections EU was highly visible and salient, and for the first time there was partisan contestation over it. The structure of blame attribution for the crisis (domestic or supranational) become a key issue for democratic accountability

The Political Consequences of the Economic Crisis in Europe: Electoral Punishment and Popular Protest (Kriesi, 2014)

- Social movement literature shows that political mobilisation depends on a combination of three sets of factors:
- Grievances: an exogenous shock (economic crisis) creates popular discontent expressed by either raising their voices or by exiting
- Organization: people raise their voice to the extent they are organised;
- Opportunity to do so, in the electoral arena as well as in the direct-democratic and protest arenas

The Political Consequences of the Economic Crisis in Europe: Electoral Punishment and Popular Protest (Kriesi, 2014)

- Incumbent governments lost consensus in the post-crisis elections (economic voting) but also direct democracy and protests complemented people's reaction to the crisis
- Governments found themselves between a rock (international pressures to implement austerity measures by the EU) and a hard place (domestic expectations)
- EU is fostering a gap between government responsiveness (to the people) and responsibility (to the supranational arena) (Mair, 2009)

Outcomes

- So, after winning a post-crisis election, the opposition is forced to adopt the very policies of the previous government, given the economic constraints imposed by the legacy of the former government, and conditions imposed by rescuers - IMF and EU- and markets.
- Then voters punish all mainstream parties in the following elections by turning to new populist challengers, or by exiting from the established electoral channel altogether

What is accountability?

(Sara B. Hobolt & James Tilley, *Blaming Europe? Responsibility Without Accountability in the European Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014)

- How people form judgements about responsibility in multi-level systems? 3 mechanisms of assigning responsibility, based on: institutions, information, individual biases
- Attribution of responsibility is the act of deciding which factors give rise to what outcome (Shaver, 1985). Social psychology argues that individuals assign responsibility instinctively. Two components:
 - functional (or role) responsibility: obligations that people or institutions are expected to fulfil;
 - causal responsibility: governments are blamed or credited for events that are thought to be caused by action or inaction.

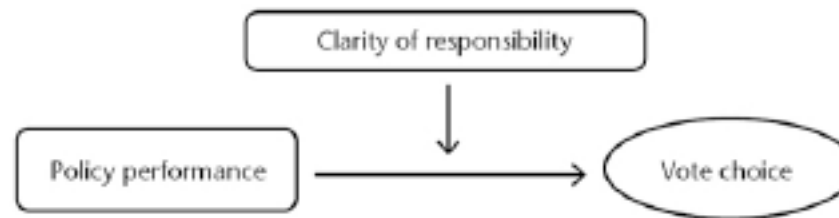
What is accountability?

Attribution of responsibility for political outcomes is a core component of the study of representative democracy. Classical tradition of democratic accountability: elections as a sanctioning device in which voters reward or punish incumbents. 3 models:

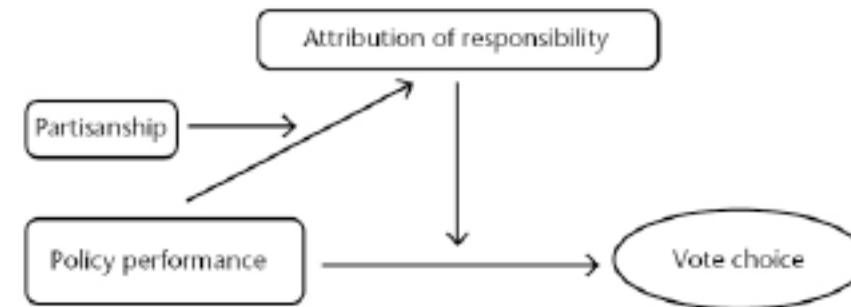
(a) *Reward-punishment model*



(b) *Clarity of responsibility model*



(c) *Selective attribution model*



Responsibility attribution for the economic crisis in Italy

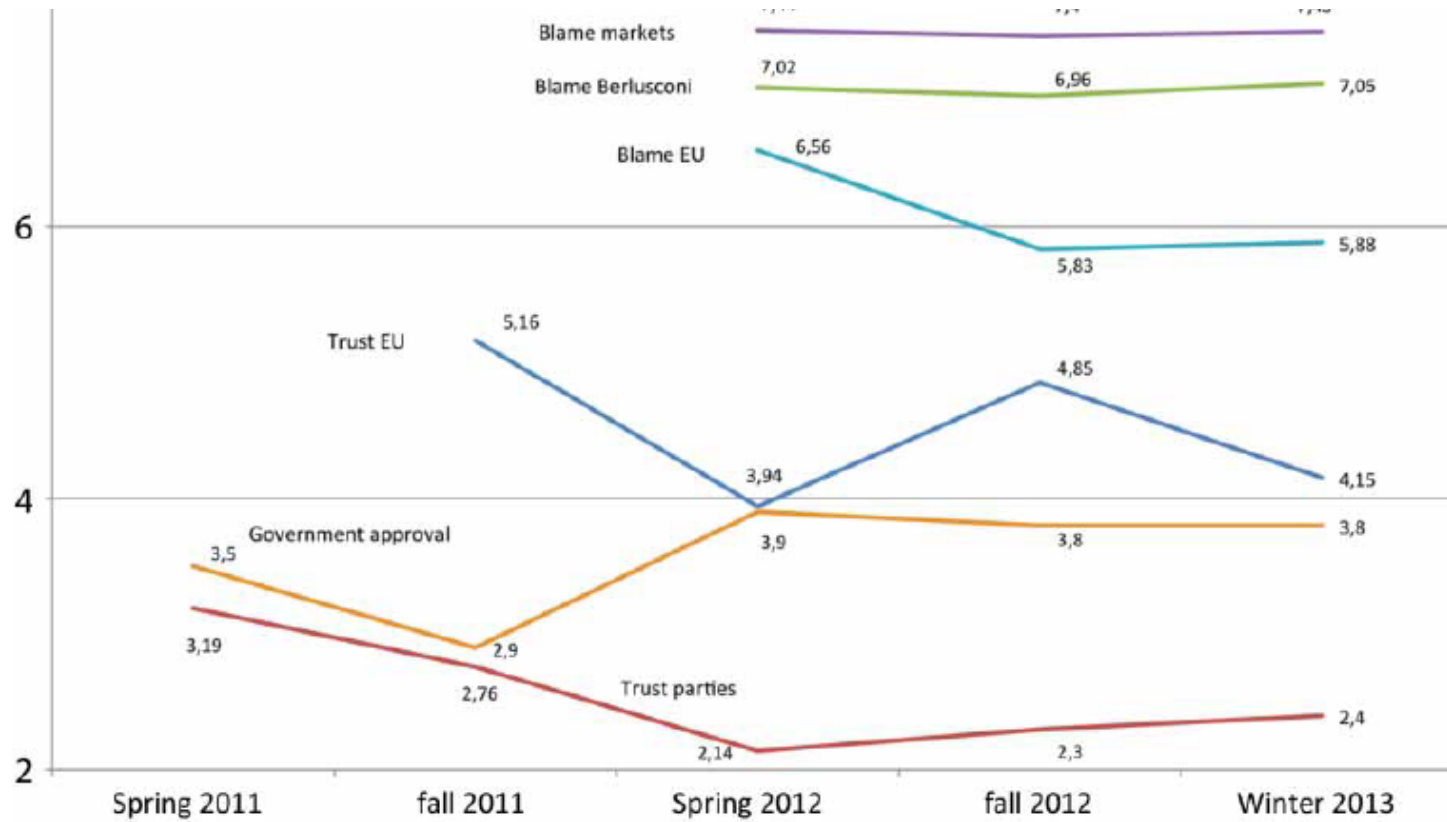


Figure 1. Trend of Italian political attitudes in 2011–2013 (ITANES 2011–2013 Panel)