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Introduction

Political cynicism reappeared on the agenda in the 1990s when declining levels of political trust were noticed in several advanced democracies. One of the fears was that political cynicism might lead to less social cohesion. If people are convinced that politics is a dirty business, there are no incentives to invest in participation and to trust other people (Rothstein 2003). Social cohesion also regained attention when problems regarding a shift in economic and social policy towards neo-liberalism became highly visible (Jenson 1998).

In this paper we first explore the question of whether political cynicism leads to less social cohesion, using individual-level data for three European countries and the United States. We selected the Netherlands as an example of a Western European country, and Poland and Slovenia as Eastern European countries. Second we examine whether the relationship between cynicism and cohesion is different in the four countries.

Literature on the relationship between political cynicism and social cohesion

Most studies in the field focus either on the relationship between political distrust and political participation or on the relationship between a trustworthy government and social trust. Norris (1999) found a modest relationship between trust in government and protest potential. According to Citrin and Luks (2001) there is no relationship between trust and voter turnout. Newton (1999) reported that social and political trust were not strongly associated; Rothstein (2003) found

weak positive correlations between generalised trust and trust in institutions. In their review study Levi and Stoker (2000: 493) concluded: „it is an empirical question whether a trustworthy government helps promote social trust and the cooperative behaviors that support democracy, or whether social trust is a necessary condition for democracy”.

Few studies empirically address the relationship between both components of social cohesion and political cynicism. Brehm and Rahn (1997) analyzed the relationship between civic engagement, interpersonal trust and confidence in government. They found that the effect of confidence in government on civic engagement was small and the effect of confidence in institutions on interpersonal trust was rather strong. Also, interpersonal trust positively influenced confidence in government, but civic engagement did so negatively. They concluded that the relationship between civic engagement and interpersonal trust is reciprocal with counteracting effects on trust in government. Kaase (1999) studied the relationship between interpersonal trust, political trust and non-institutionalised political participation and found that the correlation between interpersonal trust and political trust is weak but positive. The relationship between interpersonal trust and participation is negative: lower trust concurs with a higher probability of engaging in political action.

Since political cynicism is an individual's attribute and social cohesion a group's attribute, focusing on the relationship leads to a 'multilevel' problem. We chose to look at the relationship from the individual level perspective. We investigate individual political cynicism and relate this to the individual degree of social cohesive attitudes and actions; we treat social cohesion as a group characteristic attributed to an individual.

Following Rothstein's (2003) and Della Porta's (2000) lines of arguing, our hypothesis is that political cynicism causes a decline in social cohesion. The reasoning is that citizens who are cynical about politics have no incentive to be politically and socially active and have low general trust towards other people.

The concepts of political cynicism and social cohesion

Political cynicism

Following Kanter and Mirvis (1989) we state that cynicism entails more than skepticism, since a skeptic can be convinced of the good

intentions of politicians whereas a cynic cannot. We also think that cynicism is more than political distrust. The latter is a negative basic evaluative orientation and may be healthy for the system, since democracies may not want naïve citizens (cf. Hardin 1999). Cynicism entails intense, antagonistic distrust of or contempt for humanity. Anger and hostility is endemic to cynicism, and selfishness and hostility are core elements (Eisinger 2000). These characteristics are not beneficial for society. The difference between alienation and cynicism is that cynicism is usually seen as a dimension of the former (cf. Finifter 1970). We also argue that political cynicism does not have a one-on-one relationship with estrangement as political alienation has. Cynics may be involved in politics, whereas estranged people are, by definition, not. In sum, cynicism is different from related concepts because of its acid-like and intense temperament. In addition, it may have negative consequences for society.

We distinguish three elements of political cynicism: (1) its subject; (2) its object, and (3) its orientation. The subject of political cynicism is the individual. The objects are politicians, political institutions and the political system as a whole. We also distinguish between two characteristics these objects have: (in)competence and (im)morality. Finally, cynicism is an attitude, i.e., a mixture of cognitive and affective evaluations. In sum, we define political cynicism as an individual's attitude, consisting of a conviction of the incompetence and immorality of politicians, political institutions and/or the political system as a whole.

Social cohesion

According to Maxwell social cohesion „involves building shared values and communities of interpretation, reducing disparities in wealth and income, and generally enabling people to have a sense that they are engaged in common enterprise, facing shared challengers, and that they are members of the same community” (cited in Jenson 1998: 3). Dekker defines social cohesion as „the reciprocal relationship of citizens, their networks and their actual and normative integration into society” (Dekker 2003: 10). Chan et al. (2006: 290) introduce as their definition: „Social cohesion is a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and the horizontal interactions among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioral manifestations”. Certain elements can be discerned from these and

other definitions: social cohesion has to do with organised, voluntary interrelationships between citizens, which are 'good' for society, and is based on a feeling of trust and belonging.

We used Hirschman's terminology of Exit, Voice and Loyalty to operationalise social cohesion at the individual level (Hirschman 1970). Exit is difficult in political systems, since it would imply leaving one's country, so we excluded Exit from our operationalisation. Voice and Loyalty correspond to the participation and trust elements of social cohesion definitions. Voice refers to public debate, discussion and dialogue (Hemerijck 2002) and includes various political and social activities. Loyalty refers to a mixture of attitudes of interpersonal trust, solidarity, and pride in one's nation. We propose as our definition of social cohesion the amount of Voice and Loyalty an individual expresses. The more one participates and feels involved in society, the more 'social cohesive' an individual is.

Data, indicators and method

At the moment we are testing new items to measure political cynicism, since the existing scales are not fully appropriate to meet our definition (cf. Schyns, Nuus and Dekker 2005). However, for the time being we (have to) work with available measures, knowing it to be a suboptimal solution. In this paper we used the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies (DPES) for the Netherlands, the European Social Survey (ESS) for Poland and Slovenia, and the National Election Studies (NES) for the US.

Concerning political cynicism we used the following items to measure political cynicism in the DPES data: (1) Although they know better, politicians promise more than they can deliver (Fully agree/Agree/Disagree/Fully disagree), (2) Ministers and state secretaries are primarily concerned about their personal interests, and (3) One is more likely to become a member of parliament because of one's political friends than because of one's abilities'. We constructed an index running from 3 to 12 (highest level of political cynicism).

From the ESS survey the following cynicism items were taken: Please tell me on a score of 0–10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out (0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust): (1) [country's] parliament, and (2) politicians. An index was constructed running from 0 to 10.

Four cynicism items were taken from the NES: (1) How much of the time do you think can you trust the government in Washington to do what is right? (Just about always/Most of the time/Only some of the time), (2) Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it? (Waste a lot/Waste some/Don't waste very much), (3) Would you say that the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all people? (Government run by a few big interests/Government run for the benefit of all), and (4) Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are a little crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked? (Quite a few are crooked/Not very many are crooked/Hardly any are crooked). Again we constructed an index ranging from 4 to 11.

Concerning social cohesion, we included for the Voice component indicators of social and political participation. The Loyalty component was subdivided into a patriotism/xenophobia/ citizenship dimension and a general trust in people dimension. Since the DPES 2002 did not contain questions concerning this dimension, we used the DPES 1998 data. For an overview of the Voice and Loyalty indicators of the four countries see Tables 1 to 3. Social cohesion indicators were coded from less to more social cohesive.

Since most variables were ordinal, we computed Spearman's rho and Somers' d for the bivariate relationships. Spearman's rho is a symmetrical measure, whereas Somers' d is a non-symmetrical one. This last measure can be used to see whether political cynicism influences social cohesion, and/or whether social cohesion influences political cynicism.

Results

Trends in political cynicism and social cohesion based on World Values Survey data 1981–1999 showed a declining pattern of people with no confidence at all in the parliament in the Netherlands and an increasing lack of confidence in Slovenia, the USA and especially Poland. In terms of absolute level of social cohesion, Adam (2005) found that the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries have the highest social cohesion, Anglo-Saxon and Continental Western European countries come second, Slovenia third, and Poland belongs to the last group.

If we focus on the relationship between cynicism and cohesion and look at the Voice component for the Netherlands (Table 1), we see that cynicism weakly correlates with being a member or supporter of civic organisations and being active in these organisations. Political cynicism is weakly negatively related to being a member of a party and voting. The same holds for other political participation variables. When we look at the Somers' d coefficients, we can see that Voice has a stronger effect on cynicism, than vice versa.

The strongest associations are found for the Loyalty indicators. All items of the patriotism/xenophobia dimensions show weak to moderate associations with cynicism. An interesting finding is that political cynicism is positively related to patriotism: the more cynical about politics a Dutch citizen is, the more patriotic. The xenophobia indicators show the strongest associations. Cynical people are less loyal to foreigners than are non-cynical people. Finally, political cynicism is negatively associated with general trust. We can see that the effect of general trust on political cynicism is stronger than the opposite effect.

Table 1. The relationship between political cynicism (PC) and social cohesion (SC) in the Netherlands

| Component | Dependent variable social cohesion | Correlation with political cynicism Spearman's rho | Correlation with political cynicism Somers' d Dep. SC (Dep. PC) |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| <i>Voice/ Participation</i> | <i>Membership organisations/Vol. work</i> | | |
| | Member or supporter of organisations | -.109** | -.090** (-.084**) |
| | Intensity of activism for organisations | -.075** | -.047** (-.090**) |
| | Active role in issue related to (part of) municipality or neighbourhood | -.034 | -.015 (-.034) |
| | Active role in issue related to national interest or world problems | -.068* | -.030* (-.130*) |
| | <i>Member political party and voting</i> | | |
| Membership political party | -.068** | -.029** (-.161**) | |
| Voted | -.109** | -.025** (-.315**) | |

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|----------------|---|----------------|--------------------------|
| | <i>Political participation</i> | | |
| | Get radio, television or newspaper involved | .027 | .006 (.022) |
| | Get political party or organisation involved | .011 | .001 (.003) |
| | Participated in organised meeting/debate by the government | -.063* | -.029* (-.089*) |
| | Contacted a politician or civil servant | -.039 | -.020 (-.065) |
| | Joined a civic action group | -.029 | -.013 (-.078) |
| | Joined a demonstration | -.068** | -.037** (-.169**) |
| | Used the Internet/email/SMS for pol action | -.018 | -.009 (-.040) |
| | Display window poster/campaign board | .010 | -.011 (-.040) |
| | Try to convince others | -.022 | |
| | Contribute money | -.077** | -.021** (-.260**) |
| | Attend rallies | -.029 | -.008 (-.152) |
| <i>Loyalty</i> | <i>Patriotism/Xenophobia 1998</i> | | |
| | An important job is to teach children patriotism | .165** | .145** (.153**) |
| | Every Dutchman should observe our national symbols | .098** | .099** (.116**) |
| | Our social provisions are not meant for foreigners | -.260** | -.178** (-.220**) |
| | Foreigners are a threat to our culture | -.303** | -.235** (-.243**) |
| | Youngsters should learn self-control and determination | -.177* | -.135** (-.164**) |
| | Foreigners abuse social provisions more than Dutchmen | -.286** | -.218** (-.225**) |
| | Children should learn obedience and respect for authorities | -.203** | -.166** (-.181**) |
| | Differences between ethnic groups are natural | -.144** | -.107** (-.116**) |
| | <i>General trust in people</i> | | |
| | You can't be too careful/People can be trusted | -.257** | -.173** (-.303**) |

Source: DPES data, 2002 and 1998; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01 bold.

Table 2. The relationship between political cynicism (PC) and social cohesion (SC) in Poland and Slovenia

| Components | Dependent variable social cohesion | Poland | | Slovenia | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|
| | | Correlation with political cynicism Spearman's rho | 3 | Correlation with political cynicism Somers' d Dep. SC (Dep. PC) | 4 | Correlation with political cynicism Spearman's rho | 5 | Correlation with political cynicism Somers' d Dep. SC (Dep. PC) | 6 |
| 1 | 2 | | | | | | | | |
| <i>Voice/ Participation</i> | <i>Membership organisations/Vol. work</i> | | | | | | | | |
| | Member of organisations | -0.47* | | -0.23* (-0.073 [§]) | | -0.73** | | -0.49** (-0.076 [§]) | |
| | Participated in organisations | -0.36 | | -0.13 (-0.075) | | -0.99** | | -0.54** (-0.130 [§]) | |
| | Donated money to organisations | -0.30 | | -0.11 (-0.063) | | -0.78** | | -0.47** (-0.093 [§]) | |
| | Did volunteer work in organisations | -0.43 | | -0.11 (-0.130) | | -0.43 | | -0.21 (-0.063) | |
| | Could take active role in pol group | -0.172** | | -0.127** (-0.154 [§]) | | -0.169** | | -0.125** (-0.150 [§]) | |
| | Help others (not work/vol org) | -0.38 | | -0.29 (-0.031) | | -0.20 | | -0.19 (-0.020) | |
| | <i>Member political party and voting</i> | | | | | | | | |
| | Member political party | -0.41 | | -0.007 (-0.176) | | -0.096** | | -0.28** (-0.246 [§]) | |
| | Voted | -0.074** | | -0.049** (-0.082 [§]) | | -0.133** | | -0.076** (-0.167 [§]) | |
| | Display Campaign Button/Sticker | -0.052* | | -0.012* (-0.171 [§]) | | -0.07 | | -0.02 (-0.032) | |
| | Contacted politician/government official | -0.056* | | .023* (-0.107 [§]) | | .063* | | .028* (-0.109 [§]) | |
| | Worked in political party or act group | .059** | | -0.013** (-0.195 [§]) | | .065* | | -0.016* (-0.197 [§]) | |
| | Given money to party org or group | -0.080** | | -0.031** (-0.155 [§]) | | -0.060* | | -0.019* (-0.138 [§]) | |
| | Taken part in lawful demonstration | .006 | | .001 (.031) | | -0.15 | | -0.03 (-0.052) | |
| | Signed petition | .011 | | .004 (.025) | | -0.08 | | -0.04 (-0.014) | |
| | Boycotted certain products | .017 | | .005 (.052) | | -0.16 | | -0.05 (-0.042) | |
| | Participated in illegal protest act | -0.19 | | -0.001 (-0.221) | | -0.38 | | -0.05 (-0.237) | |

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|----------------|---|--|---|--|--|
| <i>Loyalty</i> | <i>Patriotism/Xenophobia/Citizenship</i> Allow few/many immigrants to live here Immigrants take/don't take jobs away in country Immigration is bad/good for the econ Cult life is/is not undermined by immigrants To be good citizen: important vote To be good citizen: important act in pol | -0.099** -0.169** -0.129** -0.097** -0.143** -0.176** | -0.071** (.094*) -0.129** (-.131*) -0.098** (-.101*) -0.074** (-.075*) -0.110** (-.114*) -0.137** (-.132*) | -0.141** -0.191** -0.211** -0.170** -0.123** -0.181** | -0.100** (-.135*) -0.145** (-.156*) -0.163** (-.168*) -0.128** (-.136*) -0.095** (-.095*) -0.139** (-.137*) |
| | <i>General Trust in people</i> You can't be too careful/People can be trusted People take advantage/are fair Most people selfish/helpful | -0.221** -0.238** -0.218** | -0.174** (-.171*) -0.186** (-.182*) -0.171** (-.168*) | -0.293** -0.287** -0.278** | -0.228** (-.226*) -0.225** (-.223*) -0.216** (-.214*) |

Source: ESS 2002 Data on Poland and Slovenia; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01 bold.

Table 3. The relationship between political cynicism (PC) and social cohesion (SC) in the United States, 2002

| Component | Dependent variable social cohesion | Correlation with political cynicism Spearman's rho | Correlation with political cynicism Somers'd Dep. SC (Dep. PC) |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|
| <i>Voice/ Participation</i> | <i>Membership organisations/Volunteer work</i> | | |
| | Member of any organisation | -.095** | -.064** (-.109**) |
| | Attend School/Comm Issue meeting | -.011 | -.007 (-.013) |
| | Worked with others on Comm Issue | -.035 | -.023 (-.042) |
| | Worked with neighbours on Issue | -.043 | -.027 (-.052) |
| | Volunteer work in last year | -.078** | -.052** (-.090**) |
| | <i>Member political party and voting</i> | | |
| | Member political party | – | – |
| | Voting | -.057* | -.035* (-.072*) |
| | <i>Political participation</i> | | |
| | Try to influence vote of others | .013 | .008 (.016) |
| | Display Campaign Button/Sticker | -.067* | -.027* (-.125*) |
| | Attend candidate meetings/rallies | -.028 | -.009 (-.066) |
| | Other work for party/candidates | -.046 | -.012 (-.132) |
| | Give money to candidate | -.035 | -.012 (-.079) |
| | Give money to party | -.043 | -.017 (-.086) |
| | Taken part in protest | .026 | .006 (.083) |
| <i>Loyalty</i> | <i>Patriotism</i> | | |
| | How does US flag make resp feel | -.186** | -.131** (-.182**) |
| | How strong is resp love for country | -.136** | -.093** (-.141**) |
| | <i>Interpersonal Trust</i> | | |
| | You can't be too careful/People can be trusted | -.180** | -.120** (-.207**) |
| | People take advantage/are fair | -.130** | -.075** (-.172**) |
| | Most people selfish/helpful | -.238** | -.143** (-.303**) |

Source: NES data, 2002; * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01 bold.

For Slovenia and Poland we get a similar picture. If we look at the Voice component of social cohesion (Table 2), we find a weak negative association between being a member of several organisations, voting, and several forms of conventional political participation and political cynicism. Moreover, in Slovenia, having participated in and donated money to organizations appears to be negatively correlated to cynicism. In Poland these correlations are not significant. Social and political activity has a stronger negative influence on political cynicism, than vice versa. For the Loyalty component we find stronger relationships with cynicism than for Voice. Xenophobia and citizenship show so-

mewhat stronger negative correlations with political cynicism, whereas indicators of general trust in people have the highest coefficients.

For the USA the overall picture is that coefficients are low compared to European countries (Table 3). Concerning the Voice component of social cohesion, membership of an organization and having done volunteer work is negatively correlated with cynicism. Voting is only very weakly related to political cynicism as is the displaying of campaign buttons or stickers. Also in the USA, the strongest coefficients are found in the Loyalty component of social cohesion. Contrary to the findings for the Netherlands, cynicism and patriotism are negatively related in the USA: the more cynical one is, the less patriotic. Concerning interpersonal trust we see a negative relationship with political cynicism. Two of the three coefficients on interpersonal trust are lower in the United States than in the European countries; still, they are higher than the participation coefficients. Contrary to the findings in the former three countries, Somers' d is telling us for all significant coefficients that the direction of influence is stronger going from social cohesion to political cynicism than vice versa.

Conclusion

It is a common fear that people who are cynical about politics tend to withdraw themselves from politics and society, and to develop lower trust towards other people. Empirical proof, however, is scarce. We therefore put the hypothesis that cynicism lowers social cohesion at the individual level to the test and found several significant negative relationships. In general, people who are cynical towards politics participate less in politics and volunteer work, are more distrusting towards other people, are more xenophobic and portray negative values of citizenship. Moreover, political cynicism was more strongly related to Loyalty than to Voice variables. This may indicate that political cynicism is mediated through attitudes such as interpersonal trust, pride in one's nation and xenophobia, which in turn affect levels of participation. In addition, we found that the negative effect of the Voice/Participation component on cynicism was in all countries stronger than the hypothesised negative effect of cynicism on cohesive behaviour.

What about differences between countries? Given the divergent levels of cohesion and cynicism for each country and the different data we used, it was surprising to find no major differences. More or less the

same patterns emerged in each country. However, we also found some deviations from this pattern. For example, in the United States relatively few indicators of social and political activity correlated with cynicism. Also in the USA effects of cohesion on cynicism were stronger than vice versa, which is in line with Putnam's theory of social capital influencing cynicism. Second, in Slovenia more conventional political participation variables were significantly related to political cynicism than in Poland. Furthermore, compared to the other two countries, the Netherlands and the United States showed stronger effects of interpersonal trust on cynicism than the reverse effect of cynicism on trust. Finally, cynicism was positively associated with patriotism in the Netherlands, whereas it was negatively related to patriotism in the United States.

In conclusion, the hypothesis that political cynicism leads to less social cohesion cannot be refuted by the evidence found in the countries we looked at, although coefficients were weak. However, claiming that cynicism *causes* social cohesive behaviour and attitudes would be one step too far. For such a claim at least stronger coefficients are required. Moreover, since we found evidence of stronger effects of cohesion on cynicism than vice versa the theoretical causal order as proclaimed by Rothstein (2003) and Della Porta (2000) remains in need of further scrutiny.

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