

Documentation of the second revision process //
Argued Rebuttal

Manuscript: From ‘one right way’ to ‘one ruinous way’?

Discursive shifts in ‘There is no alternative’

Manuscript ID EPSR-2014-0079.R1

In my re-revised manuscript I sought to integrate the proposals and suggestions by the two remaining reviewers and to incorporate substantial amendments, changes and more precision into the manuscript. Once again, I would like to thank the reviewers for their helpful comments and their constructive criticism. Yet, I see two *conflicting*, if not contradicting positions in the previous process of revision and recent comments by Reviewer 1 and 2 that I find challenging to respond to. This concerns specifically the concept of neoliberalism as a linking concept between the discourses under scrutiny.

I tried to reconcile the Reviewers’ positions the best I could and tried to find common ground between the Reviewers by a) enquiring the notion of neoliberalism and the equation of TINA rhetoric with neoliberalism in my own introduction and in the course of the paper, b) elucidating the ambiguities of the label ‘neoliberal’ for every case and including new literature, and c) by moving over to a more general assessment of the phenomenon in my exposition and conclusion, hereby taking up Reviewer 2’s comments.

In the following, I document the revisions undertaken:

Reviewer 1

This is already much better but it could be improved through three minor revisions: (1) the author implies that TINA is a discursive trope or rhetorical strategy used to manage crises - but surely it is one of a set of tactics that is available and not the only tactic - it can be combined with others; (2) as Scharpf, quoted in this article implies, politics is a multi-level game with many constituencies -- the limits of TINA a la Merkel became evident in the last set of negotiations over Greece - TINA could no longer be used to justify a third bailout - domestic, EU, and global politics pointed in different directions; (3) more could be made of the variety of uses of TINA - I liked the three cases -- but they should be presented more clearly as alternative uses of TINA - there is a slight impression of sequencing, especially in the Thatcher-Blair comparison.

Thank you very much for this comment and the suggestions to clarify. Following previous comments by Reviewer 1, I decided to concentrate on my three cases linking TINA rhetoric and *neoliberalism* while examining their differences. I have responded to the three minor revisions solicited here and reworked my paper:

Ad 1)

Previously only implicit in my article, I now flesh out that TINA can, at the *discursive* level, serve as *one* shielding mechanism and as *one* tactic out of several crisis management tactics. In the relevant contexts, I have added that it is often combined with procedures of technocratization, institutional arrangements that lie beyond majoritarian mechanisms, with initiatives of supranational governance, with forming pro-Euro coalitions, avoiding referenda etc. – or, in Thatcher’s case, with power politics that link themselves to common sense and thus claim legitimacy beyond mere political partisanship.

As 2)

The previous omission was due to the fact that I have submitted this paper in 2014. In the updated version of my article, I now take up your excellent point and argue that, while Merkel initially managed to succeed, negotiations on a third bailout for Greece have become so controversial and politicized that TINA is no longer plausible. Alternatives like neo-Keynesian stimuli are now considered and discussed. Consequently, domestic, European and global politics can no longer merge into one plausible TINA discourse.

Ad 3)

Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I have further highlighted my cases as *alternative* uses of TINA, still calling them varieties of TINA and putting more emphasis on the differences between those discourses. Taking up your point in the case for Thatcherism and Third Way, I now state that, beyond the outward *sequential* order of these cases, New Labour’s discourse differs from Thatcher’s and subsequently, I elaborate on these differences (e.g. conflict ⇔ inclusion; political steering optimism ⇔ ideas of adaptation etc.). Accordingly, I also ultimately flesh out the differences between all three cases despite their chronological order.

Reviewer 2

I think this version of the paper is pointing in two different directions.

Having started with a focus on TINA and neoliberalism, the paper actually wants to talk about the discourses of power and the mechanisms through which political challenges or alternatives are disabled or ruled to be illegitimate.

I think there is something interesting going on here on that front. But I don't think 'TINA' means the same thing in every instance in which it is quoted, and I don't think trying to tie it all into a single conception of neoliberal priorities is helpful.

Thank you very much for this comment, which helped me to clarify. In the previous revision process and following the detailed comments by Reviewer 1, I reworked my argument in the context of a gradual normalization, depoliticization, and reworking of neoliberal priorities. For instance, I took up Reviewer 1's point to mention that international organizations served as ideological entrepreneurs and Reviewer 2's comment on depoliticization.

Nevertheless, I still do not intend to reassess debates on the undeniably controversial concept of neoliberalism or rewrite a political-economic history. Instead, I want to track the rhetoric of TINA as one possible symptom of neoliberal thinking (as defined in my introduction) – while at the very same time, showing the *variations* and different *facets* of 'neoliberal' TINA over time and in different contexts. Therefore, my paper focuses on three cases that are publicly and scholarly debated as showing a correlation between neoliberalism and TINA rhetoric (I now refer to other authors for making this claim). Thanks to your comment, I have decided to state right from the beginning that these cases display *more* than the linkage between TINA rhetoric and neoliberal priorities. They also reveal *discourses of power* and *mechanisms* through which political alternatives are disabled or portrayed to be illegitimate. Therefore, I think that they help us to examine the *nexus* between the so-called 'neoliberal project' and *practices* of governance that authors such as Gamble (1998, 2009), Mair (2013), or Foster, Kerr, and Byrne (2014) have examined. These authors have shed light on several ambiguities, contradictions and paradoxes of 'neoliberal governance' – I now refer to these authors in order to make my claim more plausible and to underline that bringing together neoliberalism as a conceptual term and a perspective on governance can both be part of one analytical focus. Therefore, you were right to see the broader perspective of this paper, which seeks to link the discussion about a 'neoliberal' TINA mantra to a perspective on *governance* and *images of political steering*.

It is not clear to me whether or to what extent the rhetoric identified here as TINA is really the same phenomenon in each of the case studies considered.

Thank you for this point. In the re-revised paper, I explain that the criteria to identify TINA are the overt use of the trope ‘There is no alternative’ and the explicit invocation of constraints, necessity, inevitability or irrefutability. While we do find this in all of the cases, I move over to scrutinizing the differences between those discourses, not only calling them cases of alternative uses and varieties of TINA but also elaborating on distinct motivations, contexts and effects of the very same trope. Therefore, I do not claim that Thatcher, Blair or Merkel are politically or economically interchangeable, nor that their rhetoric is. Instead, I seek to reveal the *different* implications and inconsistencies of TINA rhetoric.

Conservatives had introduced, but Labour did commit to policies that different in important ways from the Tories. It would be a mistake to conflate everything into a uniform ‘neoliberalism’. In the German case, I think Schröder or Merkel’s uses of TINA mean something really quite different. The problems they were each addressing, on which they have each taken a strong stand, are not the same as Thatcher’s.

As stated above, I seek to focus on the varieties of a supposedly identical discursive trope that is often linked to neoliberalism. I hopefully do no longer give the impression to conflate the policies pursued by those governments into a one-label-fits-all comprehension. To avoid this misunderstanding, I have therefore further added several remarks, both at the very beginning of the paper and in the course of the argument:

- I now gave my paper an argumentative twist by raising myself the issue that several authors (e.g. Mouffe, 2005; Harvey, 2005; Ramonet, 1995) consider that TINA rhetoric is closely linked to policies of liberalization and marketization – in the end, to neoliberalism, since recent TINA rhetoric *seems* to be linked to economic policies of fiscal conservatism, liberalization, and austerity.
- I added a sentence and a footnote saying that the term ‘neoliberalism’ is a helpful *conceptual* one but it remains difficult to label any government’s set of policies as unambiguously ‘neoliberal’ as we will always find heterogeneous, adaptive and even conflicting positions. I also refer to Gamble’s seminal work (1988) to make clear that we should not take ‘neoliberal governance’ as tantamount to a policy of ‘rolling back the state’. In my article, I want to make a case for the ‘neoliberal’ TINA rhetoric, also

showing its ambiguities and dissimilarities.

- For all of my cases, I sought to elucidate the gap between the label ‘neoliberal’ and TINA discourses. That means:

In the case of Thatcherism, for instance, I highlight a *discrepancy* between neoliberal rhetoric and policy implementation (referring to literature). Thus I say that this implies a caveat when taking Thatcher’s sermons as accurate policy descriptions. ‘Neoliberal’ TINA discourse obscured a rather adaptive and pragmatic policy approach. I also emphasize the combination of Thatcherite policies with neoconservative and authoritative populism, thus stressing its heterogeneity as a project.

In the case of Third Way I argue that its rhetoric made use of constraints as a strategy of inclusive politics, whilst employing a strategy of disciplinary governance that at the very least *conflicted* with a neoliberal understanding of politics (Here, I refer to Andersson, 2010). Thus I conclude that the Third Way’s TINA *rhetoric* transcends mere neoliberal priorities; it involves an *eclectic* ideological discourse to disable political alternatives. I also reinforced my argument on the differences between New Labour and Thatcherism concerning TINA rhetoric.

In the case of the Eurozone crisis, I argue that the simple labeling of ‘neoliberal’ crisis management does not fit either. For instance, I write that the ECB *transcends* the orthodox recipes of European economic policies. It has gained importance as an institutional counterforce (Lefkofridi and Schmitter, 2015), *in contrast* to the neoliberal TINA rhetoric, adding a different approach to the policies of fiscal retrenchment and austerity. If one wants to adhere to the concept of ‘neoliberalism’, I argue that the corresponding political priorities have been *de-normalized* to a large extent, resulting in political experiments and power plays – which ultimately means that there is no conceptual clarity we can presuppose.

Moreover, management of the Eurozone crisis owes a great deal to the relative power of different institutions, and to the set of feasible policy options (governed to a considerable degree by the extraordinarily weak fiscal capacity underlying Eurozone governance), as much as and perhaps even more than to anyone’s depoliticizing political rhetoric.

I think the paper is trying to articulate something important about the terms on which the very specific issues to do with the current Eurozone crisis are being managed. But it is not really about a neoliberal articulation of TINA. [...] But what is really going on here is a power play

about the terms on which the wider European financial crisis is to be managed, constrained and shaped by the newly resurgent intergovernmental nature of EU governance.

[...] The real problem in the EU is that, as Peter Mair argued, it is built upon a technocratic foundation in which there is in fact very little space for political contestation at all.

Please see above. I fully endorse your comments on the Eurozone crisis. My focus is not a detailed analysis of the institutional dimension but the concurrent discursive resurgence of TINA as an argument in politics. Thanks to your remark, I now underline the scope of my argument and the focus on TINA, for instance, as *one* discursive shielding mechanism amidst policy making and bargaining processes. For recent analyses of the institutional dimension of the crisis management and/or the issue of fiscal capacity, my paper refers to literature. Thanks to your helpful comment, I took up your reference to Peter Mair and integrated the idea of the EU's technocratic foundation.

'Stratagem' is not the same as 'strategy': it implies that some duplicity is involved. [...]

Thank you very much for bringing this imprecision to my attention. I checked the usage of the term in my paper and corrected it to 'strategy' whenever I needed to avoid the duplicity and its consequences that you helpfully mention.

[...] And neoliberalism is not the same thing as ordoliberalism either, though the paper treats them as virtually synonyms.

Thank you once more for this point. I deleted any quick conflation of the terms 'neoliberalism' and 'ordoliberalism'. In the case of Merkel's policies, I argue that she managed to shape a *blend* of neoliberal and ordoliberal policies during the Eurozone crisis.

p.9, 2nd par, 'Thatcher's election appeared to be the solution for the absolute majority of voters'. This is not correct. The Conservatives won just under 44% of the votes cast, on a turnout of 76%.

p.27, 'dilemmatic' is not a word in English.

Thank you for these remarks; I corrected both mistakes.