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Revisiting the politicization of the EU.

A three-dimensional approach

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INTRODUCTION

Fifty years after the signing of the Treaty of Rome, fifteen years after the entry in circulation of the Euro, and after the recent Eurozone crisis – it has become common wisdom that “something like politicization” has been occurring with regard to the EU (Schmitter 2009). The phenomenon has been measured in its essence, its magnitude, in the factors driving it, and in the contexts that facilitate its emergence (Hooghe and Marks 2009; de Wilde 2011; de Wilde and Zürn 2012). At the same time, however, the literature is far from having reached an agreement on how and at what pace politicization has occurred, or on the consequences it may have had on citizens’ vote calculus in national elections. With the current chapter we aim to step into the debate on precisely these two points, with a particular focus on the latter.

From the literature on EU-politicization, we can identify two important processes through which the issue of European integration may be changing the dynamics of national politics. The first is that of the formation of a new cleavage between the “winners” and the “losers” of the opening-up of national borders, which cuts across the traditional left-right divides (Hutter and Grande 2014; Kriesi et al. 2012). The second regards how the gradual supranational transfers of political authority are likely to be reducing the scope for economic voting, whereby citizens reward or punish incumbent parties on the basis of their economic performance (Lobo and Lewis-Beck 2012). Our argument is that the extent to which these two processes will further unfold depends on (1) *how* the EU is being politicized and (2) on how *citizens* react to this politicization.

The aim of this chapter is to present a framework for creating an Index of Politicization of the EU (IPEU) that can subsequently be used for developing a survey aimed at understanding the ways in which the issue of Europe is affecting voting today. In this way, we try to build a bridge between what is currently known about EU-politicization and its impact on citizens’ political attitudes and voting behaviour. The literature has so far largely neglected citizens’ attitudes. Consequently, a number of important developments remain unaccounted for, such as how the new conflicts between the “winners” and “losers” translate into electoral behaviour and thereby tap into the process of European integration. We aim to fill this gap by first exploring the *frames* by which the EU has been politicized in different countries and then by grasping how these different frames are linked to different *political attitudes* and *electoral behaviour*.

The chapter is structured as follows. We first sketch an overview of the state of the art of the research on EU-politicization, highlighting the unexplored questions that we propose to investigate. Secondly, we illustrate how the recent Eurozone crisis has opened an important chapter in the 60-year long history of European integration, thereby affecting politicization as well. Thirdly, we make the case that in order to understand how contestation over EU-matters will play out further, it is crucial to understand how it affects citizens' political attitudes and voting behaviour. Finally, we will set out a research agenda for a multidimensional study that will significantly advance our knowledge regarding how different frames of the EU may generate different outcomes in terms of political attitudes and voting behaviour.

EU POLITICIZATION: WHAT IS IT, WHAT DO WE KNOW, AND WHAT DO WE NOT KNOW ABOUT IT?

Politicization refers to a process whereby a collective decision generates disputes, and wherein the audiences of those disputes gradually expand (Schmitter 1969). To speak in more technical terms, politicization refers to “an increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation” (de Wilde, 2011, 559). When studying the politicization of the EU, scholars have focused on how contestation over regional integration connects to domestic conflict, and on how this contestation influences the speed and direction of regional integration (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Within the broader field of EU studies, thus, the analysis of politicization has always had the purpose to understand the way it relates to – and helps to shape – the speed and direction of European integration.

THE THEORETICAL STARTING POINT

The most important contribution in this regard – by Hooghe and Marks (2009) – proposes a post-functionalist theory, according to which the final outcome of the process of European integration will not be defined solely by jurisdictional design (as argued by neo-functionalist theorists) but also – and largely – by the increased contestation at the party and mass level. According to this view, since the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 the politicization

of the EU has not only increased, but has also become inevitable. The gradual transfers of authority to the supranational level increasingly pushed Europe into political discussions, making European issues more salient and raising awareness amongst citizens about the implications of decisions taken at the supranational level. Consequently, Hooghe and Marks (2009) argue that from the Maastricht Treaty on citizens' relationship to Europe has increasingly shifted from a "permissive consensus to a constraining dissensus".

Hooghe and Marks (2012) combine these insights with their previous research on parties' positions, and find that pro- and anti-EU stances do not overlap with the traditional left-right axis, but are rather orthogonal to it, with the Green-Alternative-Libertarian (GAL) parties on one pole, and Traditional-Authority-Nationalist parties (TAN) on the opposite pole (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002, 970). The Eurosceptic views, besides being more associated with the TAN pole, appear to be strongly rooted in an identitarian, "pre-material" perspective. This leads to another important proposition, namely that each country's nature of *identity* – and especially "the mobilization of exclusive national identity among mass publics" (Hooghe and Marks 2009, 22) – is an important determinant for how politicization will occur.

As a consequence, considering also that the process of European integration is traditionally based on bargaining and compromises, Hooghe and Marks take a relatively negative view of the consequences of its politicization. In countries where Europe has become politicized, it is likely that politicians' room for manoeuvre decreases, as Euroscepticism increases, and resistance to further transfers of authority rise among citizens. In addition, as mainstream parties tend to support European integration, the salience of the issue is largely given by parties on the extremes of the party-system who – especially on the right – tend to be strongly Eurosceptic and therefore to frame the EU in a highly negative way.

These various propositions constitute the basis of an important research agenda on EU-politicization. The *magnitude of politicization*, in fact, has been the focus of several studies looking into whether politicization has become inevitable, whether Maastricht was a turning point, and whether integration is proceeding at an ever increasing pace following successive transfers of authority to the EU. These attempts at measuring politicization do not, however, share the same measures of the phenomenon, which naturally is problematic for comparison purposes (Kriesi et al. 2012; Hutter and Grande 2014; Statham and Trezz, 2013; de Wilde and Zürn, 2012; Green-Pedersen, 2012). Table 2.1

Table 2.1 *The evolution of the study of EU-politicization – An overview*

SOURCE	POLITICIZATION	EU/NATIONAL FOCUS	COUNTRIES ANALYSED	YEARS COVERED	MEDIA	SAMPLE DATA	PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
Hooghe and Marks (2009)	The extent to which the EU is a contested issue in public debates	Theoretical discussion					
Stratham and Trenz (2013)	Claims-making and how it incorporates views from others, and non-party actors	European Constitution	France, Germany, and UK	2000-2005	Two quality newspapers one from left and one from right	Keyword searches in large dataset, factiva, etc. then code every second article. Analysis of claim-making	
Hutter and Grande (2014)	Saliency, polarization, actors	Domestic level/ /National election	Austria, Britain, France, Germany, and Switzerland	1970-2010	One leading quality newspaper in each country	Selection of all articles 2 months before the national election. Core sentence analysis	
Hutter, Grande, and Kriesi (2016)	Saliency, polarization, actors	Domestic level	Austria, Britain, France, Germany, and Switzerland	1970-2012	One leading quality newspaper in each country	Selection of articles with keywords during key periods. Analysis through relational content analysis, core sentence analysis.	
Hoegliger (2016)	Saliency, polarization, and framing	Domestic level	UK, Germany, France, Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland	1970s-2002 and 2004-2006 for media analysis	One leading newspaper in each country	Random sample of relevant articles-qualitative analysis. Nuclear sentence coding	
Rath and De Wilde (2018)	Saliency of EU governance in national parliaments	Domestic level	UK, Germany, Netherlands, and Spain	1991-2015			Automated content analysis of over 2.5 million plenary speeches, text-mining and web-scraping tools

provides an overview of different attempts to study the politicization of the EU, starting from Hooghe and Marks' (2009) theoretical discussion. In the next sub-section, in turn, we illustrate in more detail the findings that have emerged from the field.

EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENTS OF EU POLITICIZATION

Although they do not carry out a longitudinal study that can seriously test politicization, Statham and Trezn (2013, 169) conclude that politicization has increased greatly in recent times, as do other authors, and that it will not be reversed (de Wilde and Zürn 2012; Risse 2015). Yet, in what is perhaps the most wide-ranging study of politicization, Hutter et al., find that there is “neither a uniform process of politicisation, nor is there a clear trend over time” (Hutter, Grande and Kriesi 2016, 279), and it is not a “post-Maastricht phenomenon” (p. 281). Thus, the authors speak of “punctuated politicisation” (p. 280) which varies over time, across contexts, and countries. Even more sceptical concerning Hooghe and Marks' theory of post-functional growth in politicization, Green-Pedersen (2012, 126) shows through an analysis of media and party programmes that in Denmark, despite the existence of a radical right party, European integration remains a lowly politicized issue due to lack of incentives for mainstream parties. Hutter, Grande and Kriesi (2016, 281), in turn, state that they are not as sceptical as Green-Pedersen concerning the importance of politicization, but they concur that seldom has Europe been important at the national electoral level. Hoeglinger (2016, 146) also provides a sobering picture of the degree of politicization: “Europe is being politicised on a regular basis, yet within clear limits [...] the answer to the ongoing debate on whether the sleeping giant has awakened or whether it is fast asleep lies somewhere in between those two stances”.

Going beyond the magnitude of politicization, the second most important proposition is *whether this effect is driven by identity politics*, in an orthogonal way, rather than following the left-right axis. Kriesi (2007) had already gone beyond the “politics of opposition” theory espoused in most literature on Euroscepticism to add another proposition, namely that the politicization of Europe is itself embedded in a “globalization cleavage” opposing winner and losers of the growing interdependence and openness between states. He suggested that instead of Euroscepticism being simply part and parcel of the “politics of opposition”, it may constitute a new cleavage, in which “mobilization

for and against European integration is part of a new structural conflict that is fundamentally transforming West European party systems altogether". This structural conflict is to a large extent identitarian, and therefore Kriesi reinforces Hooghe and Marks' (2009) proposition that identity politics drives politicization.

The idea that "identity"-matters shape politicization, however, is also the cause of various controversies among scholars. Statham and Trez (2013), for instance, argue that the separation between (bad) identity politics and (good) interest politics is overly rigid and a false dualism (p. 157). Hoeglinger (2016, 77) finds that being on the TAN side of the cultural/identity axis has a strong effect on European integration orientations. Yet, he also emphasizes that elite (party) attitudes toward European integration are not orthogonal to the left-right axis. When economic issues are at stake within the European integration umbrella, the left-right position correlates well with party-positions on the EU: those parties on the right are more supportive of the EU than the left. Indeed, the author insists that this multifaceted nature leads to "multiple linkages with the political space creating opposition which is scattered across the political spectrum, rather than belonging solely to the TAN positioned parties (Hoeglinger 2016, 138). Recent research on the salience of EU governance in national parliamentary debates, however, strongly suggests that the politicization of the EU is driven almost exclusively by governing parties, from both the left and the right (Rauh and De Wilde 2018). Opposition parties, and especially when elections draw near, tend to avoid discussing EU matters. From this perspective, thus, the politicization of the EU seems not to be related to left-right affiliations, but EU matters seem rather to be the prerogative of governments, toward which opposition parties structurally fail to express alternative views.

In relation to the various insights regarding how the EU can be politicized, Hoeglinger (2016, 21) subdivides the issue of European integration into four categories that get at its multidimensional nature: two economic dimensions (market making and social regulation) and two political dimensions (enlargement and deepening). Indeed, whereas all authors have to contend with the fact that the EU is multidimensional, not all incorporate this into their own research methodology. According to Hutter et al. (2016), the EU can be conceptualized in terms of constitutive issues – on the scope of policy, membership, and institutional design that Europe has been taking over the years. These constitutive issues are decided at the supranational level over time, and subsequently get translated into issues of sovereignty, identity,

and solidarity within and across member states (Hutter et al. 2016, 12-14). According to Hutter et al., issues of sovereignty, or considering the EU a political issue, have been the most common way in which the EU has been politicized, namely whenever there has been a transfer of political decision-making to Brussels. Issues of identity have increasingly been identified as the main source of political opposition to the EU amongst extreme right wing parties, and as the more important way in which Europe has become politicized (Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012). Third are issues of interest or solidarity resulting from problems of redistribution of financial resources between states. As the authors explain, the EU has the potential to become more politicized to the extent that it combines several of these dimensions. Also, rather than positing a duality between identity and interest, Hoeglinger (2016) argues that they work in combined ways.

Taking into account these different dimensions on the basis of which the EU can be politicized, also the third proposition by Hooghe and Marks (2009) – namely that politicization would generate a “constraining dissensus” – is far from being fully agreed upon in the literature. Stratham and Trenz, for instance, are optimistic about the consequences of politicization. Despite the fact that they focus on the period of deliberation of the “Constitutional Treaty”, which itself was a failure, they find that these episodes contribute to the emergence of a transnational community built around common frames and similarities in political communication that are conducive to European political integration. Hutter et al. (2016, 295) are relatively ambivalent: politicization does not necessarily lead to negative decisions or failure: what it does is to increase political uncertainty for elites. Yet, they argue that this uncertainty at the national level has been circumvented by political elites who have managed to avoid stalemate at the European level. With the recent Euro-crisis, the authors argue, this practice has come to the surface even more clearly, with governments having little room for manoeuvre at the domestic level shielding themselves from the constraining dissensus through depoliticization (Hutter et al. 2016, 297; see also Sanchez-Cuenca 2017). While recognizing that the negative effects of depoliticization and technocracy could fuel repoliticization and more constraining dissensus at the national level, the authors claim that this is “an open question”, which must be answered by looking at mostly Southern “debtor” countries (Hutter et al. 2016, 298). In fact, Hutter et al. believe that the effect of politicization on domestic politics has to be taken more seriously by regional integration theory, something that until now has not happened.

In sum, this review of the literature shows how far the field has matured, but also indicates a number of issues that remain unresolved. In terms of magnitude, while politicization is unequivocal, it has not increased systematically since 1990. In terms of the ways in which European integration is defined, there has been a move from a unitary to a multifaceted definition. While this has proven extremely useful, at the same time it also has made research less comparable.

Regarding the “identity” hypothesis, recent research has signalled that not only is it not necessarily the main driver, but that the left-right axis is still relevant to explain positioning. Mainstream parties, in turn, should also not be discounted in the politicization of the EU. Finally, concerning the consequences for the process of European integration, the full consequences of the Eurozone crisis have not yet unravelled to understand the effects of politicization. In addition, the major existing longitudinal studies often do not cover the whole crisis period, nor its aftermath; they often do not include the debtor countries; they do not take seriously the idea that domestic politics and citizen attitudes must be integrated into the post-functional theory of European integration.

The Eurocrisis, however, marks a milestone in the decade-long history of European integration, as the measures taken in its aftermath considerably widen the spheres of competence of European institutions (Laffan 2014), to the extent that citizens have now become more aware of how governments’ hands are now more tied than in the past (Ruiz-Rufino and Alonso 2017). This increased perception is very likely to affect the opinion that European citizens have about the process of regional integration and thereby, in turn, influence the further evolution of politicization. In the next section we discuss the Eurozone crisis and how the decisions taken at the supranational level between 2009 and 2013 may have served to change in fundamental ways the political game at the national level, as well as the process of European integration. Subsequently, we move our focus to how the developments surrounding Eurozone crises in debtor countries highlight why citizen attitudes must be incorporated into the study of politicization, namely to help to understand the concept as well as its long-term consequences.

THE EUROZONE CRISIS AND POLITICIZATION

The financial crisis, which had its origin in the US in 2008 with the rescue of Bear Stearns and the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, eventually led to a

European banking crisis that was accompanied by increased differentiation of countries within the Eurozone. Between 2010 and 2012, Greece, Ireland, and Portugal needed to be rescued by sovereign bailout programmes, delivered jointly by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Commission (EC), and the European Central Bank (ECB). Even though Greece, Ireland, and Portugal were the three countries officially bailed out by external institutions, Spain and Italy also had to impose severe austerity measures, with governments forced to implement unpopular economic measures.

Despite the fact that not all of these countries had identical economic weaknesses, nor did they all have to face similar external constraints, the policy mix that was administered by incumbent governments was similar. The austerity measures consisted of a mix of very unpopular policies such as decreases in state salaries and state pensions, which affected an important part of the population, decreases in state social spending such as education, health, and social security, and raises in indirect and direct taxes. In all debtor countries, we can expect that these measures contributed to the politicization of the EU from a “distributional perspective”.

Yet, politicization of the EU as a constitutive issue of “transfer of authority” also seemed to become painfully evident in debtor countries at this time. In 2012 the Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Paulo Portas, recognized that Portugal had “transitionally lost part of its sovereignty” when it asked for a bailout.¹ Perhaps the most evident sign of loss of sovereignty was witnessed in Greece though, in the summer of 2015. On 5 July a referendum was organized by the Tsipras government, which asked whether or not Greece should accept the bailout conditions that the troika was offering the country, and 61% of voters rejected the bailout agreement, which nevertheless went ahead shortly thereafter. Tsipras accepted cuts of 12 billion euros in return for a third bailout, amounting to a loan of 53.5 billion euros. In exchange, the Greeks were promised a formal restructuring of their debt, which until now has not materialized.

Writing in 2017, it could be argued that this discussion is no longer relevant, since the bailouts have all become history, with the notable exception of Greece. What was initiated as a shock to the political systems of the Southern European periphery of the Eurozone could simply be perceived as equivalent

1 Paulo Portas quoted in *Jornal de Negócios*, 11-07-2012. Accessed online at: http://www.jornaldenegocios.pt/economia/detalhe/portas_quotportugal_bem_mais_longe_do_precipiacutocioquot_devido_ao_quotnotaacutivel_esforccedilo_dos_portuguesesquot

to country bankruptcies which occurred previously in Latin America, in which, following external intervention by the IMF, the country returns to fiscal and monetary sovereignty. In the framework of the EU, however, rules and discretion have been structurally Europeanized in a post-bailout scenario, especially with the ongoing decisions to strengthen the Eurozone – such as the introduction of the Six Pack, the Fiscal Compact, and the Two Pack. In other words: “The increased gradualism of the sanctions and the broader monitoring toolkit that the Commission has at its disposal lend support to the view that the rules’ credibility has been strengthened” (Laffan and Schlosser 2016). Therefore, there is no likely return to a fiscal and monetary ex-ante sovereignty. In addition, austerity measures continue in many of the debtor countries, despite the end of the bailouts.

The Eurozone crisis in the periphery may therefore suggest that identifying “identity” as the main driver of politicization may not be too useful, as interests/distributional and constitutive issues seem to be highly crucial. The crisis, thereby, proves to be a very important episode to analyse, not only because it is likely to generate new important findings regarding the *magnitude* of politicization, but because we expect it to also to provide insights on the importance of the *interests vs. identity* issues, as well as on the consequences of politicization for quality of democracy.

To gain these insights, however, it is highly important to move beyond the study of politicization at the media or the institutional level, and to look into how citizens actually perceive the increased relevance of the EU and how this perception affects their voting considerations. Building upon the idea of the circularity of the democratic process (Kriesi et al. 2013), we expect the politicization occurring at the parliamentary and media levels to have their repercussions on how citizens construct their electoral choices. Mapping these repercussions is fundamental for getting a more encompassing view of how – and to what extent – the issue of the EU is altering the functioning of the democratic cycle.

TAKING THE IMPACT OF EUROPE ON CITIZENS’ ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOURS SERIOUSLY

All too often, studies have assumed that political parties are the sole drivers of politicization. However, studies of politicization show that parties are leaders

as much as followers in this domain. Cleavages form sociologically, and need of course to be activated, but citizens are also key in this interaction for the definition of politicization, whether it has positive or negative consequences for national and European democracy.

Just as Hooghe and Marks were criticized for ignoring political communication when considering how politicization occurred, it seems that the incorporation of citizen attitudes may be key to understanding politicization – both in terms of how it is constituted and what consequences it may have. Thus, we propose to incorporate the study of politicization within both the media and parliamentary debates in order to measure the changes in party dynamics, as well as at the level of citizen attitudes and behaviours, using an analytical framework that considers salience and polarization in each arena. The measurement of the politicization of the EU in the three arenas simultaneously will give a perception of the depth of politicization across society, rather than keeping it at the level of media and political parties. Zürn (2016) has made a similar case, that politicization must be studied not only in the media realm or parliamentary one, but also at the level of citizen attitudes. One recent example is Baglioni and Hurrelman (2016). Not only will the measurement of the importance of Europe for political attitudes and behaviours be important to understand politicization as a concept, it is important to understand changes in the dynamics of voting behaviour at the domestic level.

This leads us to the question of how the impact of the EU cleavage can be conceptualized in domestic electoral behaviour. One obvious avenue is to consider it as an alternative cleavage to the left-right one, and measure its comparative strength in explaining voting in national elections. Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004, 2007) find that there is no great relevance in this regard, although they do find that the potential is there for Europe to make a difference in national elections. Indeed, until recently, we also could agree that the “sleeping giant” thesis would be accurate. Research in Southern European countries, moreover, showed that attitudes toward the EU could be potentially divisive amongst the “winners and losers” of the process of integration, or between those parties that systematically voted for opposition; yet overall the EU issue barely received attention in legislative elections (Lobo and Magalhães 2011). This is in part due to the fact that mainstream parties and their electors share a largely pro-EU stance (Green and Pedersen 2012; Gramacho and Llamazares 2007). On the contrary, de Vries (2007) examines the “sleeping

giant” thesis and finds that the EU issue can have an impact on domestic politics when the extent of partisan conflict over European integration and its salience among voters are high.

A second way of investigating the importance of Europe in domestic elections is to consider it not as a proper cleavage, but as an issue, alongside others that gain salience in different contexts. In this respect it seems clear that the repercussions of EU salience in national elections have been conceived in different ways. The first is given by the approach taken by de Vries (2007), namely by measuring the impact of the EU issue *vis-à-vis* others. In that respect, several avenues can be pursued, namely to understand the extent to which attitudes toward the EU shape the vote for Eurosceptic parties in the countries under investigation; to what extent they shape the vote for anti-mainstream parties and in favour of populist parties; to understand whether the EU issue voting is stronger in contexts where the EU has gained media and parliamentary salience to a greater extent. In sum, to treat the European Union as an issue that has gained salience. The nature of this issue, as seen above, can be conceptualized differently, with different questions capturing different dimensions of the EU. The instruments being created by MAPLE within the online panel surveys will allow us to include such issues as well as more traditionally used factors of voting behaviour in order to analyse their relative impact in differentiated contexts.

The third way of investigating the impact of the EU in political behaviour would be to think of the EU as having an indirect effect on the vote through economic or leadership variables on the vote and more widely on political attitudes. There has been important research on the way in which globalization and the decline of the state have had an impact on economic voting (Hellwig and Samuels 2007). Hellwig has examined the role that global economic interdependence plays in constraining citizens’ responses to domestic economic performance, and shown that the economic vote is mitigated when, either objectively economic interdependence is higher, or it is perceived as being high by electors. In electors’ minds the progressive transfer of authority to the EU, which has been accelerating since Maastricht, and gained further ground in the Eurozone crisis, may be a symbol of the progressive decline of meaningful choices at the domestic level.

Following in that literature’s path, Lobo and Lewis-Beck (2012) used data from the 2009 European Election Survey to show that in Southern Europe (Spain, Italy, Greece, and Portugal) the national economic vote diminishes

to the extent the EU is held responsible for the economy. The more the EU is perceived as dominating in the government decision-making, the likelier it would be that short-term factors of voting behaviour may be mitigated. Just as finding the EU responsible for the Eurozone crisis may decrease the economic vote, leader effects may also be impaired during a severe economic crisis, and namely, when a country has endured successive bailouts that may lead to perceptions that the party leader and the Prime Minister are not such powerful figures. But also the mere fact that electors in all Eurozone member countries have become increasingly aware that all monetary decisions are taken in Brussels could be changing the vote calculus at home. In terms of the literature on leader effects, there is no research on the impact that global economic interdependence, and perceptions of a dislocation of political power to supranational bodies such as the EU, or even the troika, may have on leader effects (Lobo and Curtice 2014).

So, in classic economic voting terms, the EU's progressive importance at the domestic level would constitute an instance of structural "blurring of responsibility", which has been demonstrated to dampen the impact of economic voting in legislative elections. Similarly, it can be linked to citizens' dissatisfaction with national democracy, if it is equated with a decline in the meaningfulness of elections (Ruiz-Rufino and Alonso 2017; Sanchez-Cuenca 2017).

Finally, there is also an emerging literature that looks strictly at the impact of the Eurozone crisis on voting in member-states. Several scholars who are investigating this topic are doing so to understand whether the economic vote changes (considering both magnitude and clarity of responsibility) under economic crisis or not (Lewis-Beck and Lobo 2017), while others are seeking to understand the importance that the crisis had for party system change (Vidal 2017). This literature has important implications for the wider debate on the politicization of Europe, as it does for understanding how citizens may have changed their political behaviour.

Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck (2014) use aggregate data to investigate the question of whether macroeconomics influences overall electoral outcomes. They measure crisis in two ways: one is to split the sample, before and after 2008. The other is to code any year in which growth is negative as a crisis year. They use a very large dataset that includes 31 countries in Europe since 1950 or whenever the country had competitive elections. The final total of elections considered is 359. The authors find strong support for the positive

relationship between GDP growth and incumbent support. Concerning the crisis dummy variable, it does not reach significance in any model, which leads them to the following conclusion: “while the incumbents of Europe may have been punished by the post-2008 economic crisis, that punishment has been no greater than for economic downturns occurring in other periods.” The authors also find that negative growth hurts the government support more than positive growth helps it.

Similarly, Talving (2017), analyses the European Election Studies (EES) data for 12 Western European countries in 1989, 1994, 2004, 2009, and 2014 and finds that there is very little abrupt change in economic effects over time. The statistical relationship between the economy and voting remained remarkably constant and was not subject to short-term fluctuations in the period analysed. Nor did she find that the diminished clarity of responsibility may hamper the economic vote.

This finding is relatively different from others, such as Hernandez and Kriesi (2016) who, using party electoral performance data before and after the crisis in 30 countries determined that prime ministers’ parties are routinely damaged by the crisis, besides being harmed because they are in government. Giuliani and Massari (2017) also use aggregate data, namely the electoral performances of parties competing in 89 elections held in 28 EU member-states between 2003 and 2015. They find that all incumbent parties suffer similarly in the event of an economic crisis, while the PM’s party gains comparatively more when there is economic growth. They also find that Euroscepticism has become much more important. Eurosceptic parties’ success has been proportional to the depth of the recession. This latter finding corroborates the findings of Lobo and Lewis-Beck (2012).

Moving to the individual data level, Vidal (2017) analyses the change in voting behaviour in Spain before and after the Eurozone crisis. Looking at data collected in 2015 and 2016 the author finds that the change in voting behaviour, and especially the choice for the new parties that arise, is a combination of economic voting and dissatisfaction with the overall political system. Both factors in Spain reinforce the left-right cleavage. Thus, in terms of economic voting there seems to be disagreement, with investigators using different ways to measure electoral outcomes and reaching divergent conclusions on the importance of the Eurozone crisis for the economic vote.

One type of impact through the left-right cleavage may occur if the politicization of the EU is mainly about “distributional” issues. The other

type of impact – impacting on the strength of the economic or leaders’ vote – may happen if the EU is being politicized mainly as a “transfer of authority”. Whereas Zürn (2016) has recently put forward a framework within which the quality of politicization of the EU will depend on the nature of democratic national setting within which it happens. They envisage positive politicization only if the European cleavage reinforces the pre-existing national ones.

While it is reasonable to expect that these might indeed be the two main mechanisms through which EU-politicization is changing the vote calculus, the extent to which these are actually occurring is strongly dependent on how citizens react to EU-related issues. It is also necessary to distinguish between economic crisis effects and politicization of Europe effects, which are not necessarily the same. The main goal to be tested remains, however, the idea that the progressive importance of Europe for decision-making may lead to changes in the voting explanatory model.

The integration of citizen attitudes alongside the media and parliamentary debates not only helps to understand the depth of politicization that has occurred in Europe, it also makes it easier to understand the context within which these phenomena can take place

MOVING FORWARD: A MORE ENCOMPASSING STUDY OF EU POLITICIZATION

Following the idea that contestation over EU matters plays out in different dynamics in different countries, we expect it to have different sets of consequences for citizens’ vote calculus. Our aim is to make sense of both of these different sets of consequences, as well as to map the different modalities with which the EU has been politicized in different parts of Europe. As argued above, the link between modalities of politicization, political attitudes, and electoral behaviour constitutes the most important gap in the literature on EU-politicization, as it has so far been only (marginally) theorized and not been studied empirically (with a few rare exceptions, Baglioni and Hurrelman 2016). We aim to fill this gap with a three-dimensional study that first uncovers the magnitude and modalities of EU-politicization in the aftermath of the Eurocrisis at both media and parliamentary levels, and that subsequently creates a web-panel survey with questions about citizens’ perceptions of how the EU affects their electoral choices. The three dimensions – media, parliament,

and citizens – will provide indicators of EU politicization at different stages of the democratic cycle.

The main belief that guides our research is that the Eurocrisis has given a significant boost to the saliency and polarization of the EU. In turn, we expect this increased politicization to affect how citizens vote, and more specifically how at elections citizens reward or punish national incumbents (Lobo and Lewis-Beck 2012). The literature already suggests that the politicization of the EU is likely to be impacting voters' preferences on redistributive issues as well as their perception of who is in charge of the country's policies (Hutter and Kriesi 2016; Ruiz-Rufino and Alonso 2017). We expect that the Eurocrisis has accelerated this process particularly, as the events of the crisis may have raised citizens' awareness of the extent to which economic policies are coordinated at the supranational level.

Considering that the crisis hit some countries harder than others, the context of the Eurozone crisis allows us to map how the politicization of the EU's increasing involvement in national economic policy-making may affect voting behaviour. More specifically, we expect debtor and creditor countries to reveal different dynamics in this regard. Due to the different exposure to the EU-promoted austerity measures, it is for example expectable that the recent wave of political contestation over EU matters has played out in different ways in Northern and Southern Europe.

We also expect there to be country-specific factors in the ways in which the EU has been politicized. Taking these considerations into account, we focus our study on two creditor countries (Belgium and Germany) and four debtor countries (Ireland, Greece, Spain, and Portugal). With this relatively heterogeneous set of cases, we expect to gain insights into how EU contestation generates different patterns of electoral behaviour at different levels of EU intervention in national politics, as well as into how the EU is perceived in countries featuring different EU-related narratives.

To map the different modalities and magnitudes of EU-politicization, we analyse both print-media and parliamentary debates. Covering the time range between the introduction of the Euro (2002) and today (2017), we put our focus on election campaigns by analysing the newspaper editions of the 30 days preceding the national elections, and the plenary parliamentary sessions of the last 12 months of each legislature in the given time frame. The study consists of quantitative techniques of text analysis as well as of more qualitatively crafted investigations of the narratives surrounding the EU. In

this way we obtain comparative overviews of the frequencies with which the EU has been referred to in the media and in the parliament, and of the range of actors involved and the sentiment surrounding mentions or debates of the EU. These comparative overviews will therefore be informative about *the extent* to which the politicization of the EU has played a role in national elections before and after the crisis, as well of the different *narratives* in debtor and creditor countries.

Differently from existing media-based studies on salience and polarization (Kriesi et al. 2012), our measure of EU-salience will be weighted within the following sections: national politics, economics and international politics, opinion, first and last page. At the same time, we will control for the salience of a typically highly-contested issue, namely education, in order to check the extent to which the EU-salience may in some instances grow beyond average levels. The newspaper articles, moreover, will be organized according to section, theme, and article type (e.g. editorial, front page article, etc.). In this way we will gain insight into whether the salience of the EU varies only in specific parts of the newspaper or throughout the entire edition.

Similarly, the individual interventions in the plenary sessions will be organized according to the speaker, party affiliation (including government vs. opposition), legislative instrument, and theme. In this way we will not only obtain variations over time and across countries of EU salience, but we will also gain an insight into which parties drive more or less the politicization of the EU. In turn, by controlling for legislative instruments and themes, we will also be able to obtain insights into how the EU issue taps in to the legislative activities of parliaments, thereby providing valuable information about the modalities through which national legislatures are losing political authority to supranational institutions. The combined analysis with the media, in turn, will be informative about how and to what extent these losses of authority constitute part of the election campaign.

By bringing together the findings from newspapers and parliamentary debates we will thus be able to create a unique Index of Politicization of the EU (IPEU) on the basis of which it is possible to trace the magnitude, timing, and causes of politicization. It is on the basis of this Index that we will then be able to develop a web-panel survey that will enable us to move to the next and final stage of our endeavour, namely analysing the consequences for political attitudes and voting behaviour in the avenues outlined above; namely, the EU as a cleavage, as an issue, and as a moderator of short-term economic and leader

effects. The web-panel, in fact, will be built upon the insights generated by the IPEU, as it will formulate questions about how the patterns of politicization in the different countries affect the political attitudes and voting behaviour of respondents. Understanding how Europe affects the vote calculus will provide crucial insights about the future of democracy in the EU.

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