

Beyond Authority Transfer

Explaining the Politicisation of Europe

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Abstract

While there is increasing evidence that European integration has been politicised, knowledge on the driving forces of this process is still limited. In this article, we contribute to this research by examining the importance of authority transfers to the EU as drivers of politicisation. It innovates in two ways. First, we extend the authority transfer argument by highlighting the mobilising power of membership conflicts; second, we analyse the relevance of national opportunity structures, referenda in particular, and mobilising strategies for politicisation. Empirically, we trace politicisation in public debates on every integration step (treaty reforms and enlargement) from the 1970s to the late 2000s in six West European countries (France, Germany, Britain, Austria, Sweden, and Switzerland), based on a quantitative content analysis of newspaper coverage.

Published in West European Politics (2016) 39(1): 23-43

Keywords

Politicisation, European integration, authority transfer, political opportunity structures, direct democracy, populist radical right

Whereas scholars agree that ‘something like politicisation has happened since the mid-1980s’ (Schmitter 2009: 211f.) in Europe, there is still considerable controversy about the causes and consequences of this process. The present article focuses on the *causal factors* and seeks to *explain the level of politicisation in public debates over European integration*. We test the most prominent argument advanced in the scholarly literature, namely that politicisation is ultimately driven by the accumulated effects of authority transfers to the EU (see Hooghe and Marks 2009; de Wilde and Zürn 2012; Rauh 2014; Statham and Trezn 2013b; Zürn 2006; Zürn *et al.* 2012). De Wilde and Zürn (2012: 138) made this argument most strongly: ‘the politicisation of European integration is driven by its increasing authority indicated by the transformation from a traditional international organisation to a more encompassing “political system”’. Such transfers are expected to provoke resistance among European citizens and increase demands for public justifications because of the insufficient legitimacy of supranational authority. As a consequence, we should see rising politicisation over time with peaks around major treaty reforms when formal ‘deepening’ of the EU is at stake. In this context, the Maastricht Treaty and subsequent treaty reforms, in particular the failed Constitutional Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty, are considered watersheds in the integration process and its politicisation.

There is certainly empirical evidence for such a claim (e.g., de Wilde and Zürn 2012: 146-149; Rauh 2014; Statham and Trezn 2013b), but the argument has not yet been scrutinised in a larger comparative analysis. A closer inspection of politicisation of European integration, including national election campaigns and major integration debates, casts some doubts on its validity. The pattern of politicisation in national election campaigns does not show such a clear-cut increase in the 2000s and reveals remarkable cross-national variation (e.g., Green-Pedersen 2012; Hoeglinger, 2012; Hutter and Grande 2014; Hutter and Kerscher 2014; Kriesi 2007). Moreover, we find highly politicised integration debates in instances in which conflict was focused on the accession of new members or membership of one’s own

country rather than on further authority transfers to the supranational level. The French debate on Britain's membership in the EEC in the early 1970s, and the controversies on Turkey's EU membership in the mid-2000s are cases in point (see von Oppeln 2005).

These examples suggest that the authority transfer argument does not capture the politicisation of Europe in all its relevant manifestations. Therefore, this article explores the scope of the authority transfer argument in a larger comparative setting. It innovates in two ways. *First*, we distinguish between conflicts on 'authority transfer' and 'membership conflicts' in integration debates. By comparing debates that focus attention either on authority transfers ('deepening') or on membership issues ('widening'), we can qualify the mobilising power of authority transfers within the EU. *Second*, we examine the relevance of institutional and actor-centred factors that might condition the way political conflicts over Europe play out in public debates (see Hooghe and Marks 2009; 2012; Koopmans and Statham 2010; Kriesi 2007; Kriesi *et al.* 2012; Kriesi *et al.* 2008; Statham and Trezn 2013a; b). More precisely, this article examines the explanatory power of four variables: national referenda, the national electoral cycle, the strength of populist right-wing challengers, and cultural-identitarian framing strategies. All four factors are based on the assumption that politicisation may be triggered by the deepening and widening of the EU; however, its extent ultimately depends on the strategies of political actors and the institutional opportunities they face.

In the following, we test this argument by comparing eighty-six domestic public debates on the main steps of European integration in six West European countries: France, Germany, Britain, Austria, Sweden and Switzerland. In our analysis, we distinguish between public debates on (a) treaty reforms, (b) accession of third-party countries, and (c) accession of one's own country. This allows us to compare the importance of authority transfers and membership conflicts. While substantial authority transfers have been the object of treaty reforms such as the Maastricht Treaty, membership issues have led to sometimes protracted

negotiations between the EC/EU and the country seeking accession, embedded in complicated domestic political decision-making processes.

Public debates on major steps of integration seem to be perfect sites for both politicisation of European integration and for its empirical analysis. They are induced by critical institutional events in the integration process; they are open to participation by all kinds of actors beyond the narrow scope of governmental elites and political parties; and unlike national elections, their public visibility is not overshadowed by other domestic issues. Thus, they seem most likely cases for a politicisation of Europe. Most importantly for our argument, the selected debates focus public attention on *particular* aspects of European integration: either transfers of authority and changes in the institutional framework of the EU or membership questions. For this reasons, they offer ideal windows of opportunity to compare the mobilising power of different integration steps and for new insights on the driving forces of politicisation.

We conduct our analysis in five steps. First, we briefly sketch how we conceptualise politicisation as our dependent variable. Second, we detail the hypotheses on the driving forces of politicisation. Third, we introduce the research design and methods of our study; and, fourth, we present the empirical findings of our comparative analysis. Finally, we discuss the results in the context of current research on politicisation.

What Is to Be Explained? Conceptualising Politicisation

Our analysis is based on a multidimensional concept of politicisation that emphasises *political conflict*. Accordingly, politicisation can be seen as the ‘expansion of the scope of conflict’ (Schattschneider 1975 [1960]: 12) *within* a political system. More precisely, and in line with our previous suggestions (Hutter and Grande 2014), we characterise politicisation by three

inter-related dimensions: *issue salience*, *actor expansion*, and *polarisation* (for a more detailed discussion, see Hutter et al. 2016). Such a definition is open in view of the type of political actors involved in a given conflict, the means they use to advance their claims, the arenas in which they act, their relationships to each other, and the consequences of their activities.

The first dimension, *issue salience*, refers to the visibility of a given issue in public debates. Only topics frequently raised by political actors in public can be considered politicised. This mirrors recent proposals by Green-Pedersen (2012) and Guinaudeau and Persico (2013), who suggest looking at politicisation primarily through the lens of salience. The second dimension is the *expansion of the actors* involved in a public debate. Following Schattschneider (1975 [1960]: 2), we argue that the ‘number of people involved in any conflict determines what happens.’ If only a few (elite) actors publicly advance their positions, an issue is hardly politicised. More specifically, we focus on the degree to which other actors join the dominant executive actors in public debate (see Koopmans 2007; 2010; Statham and Trez 2013b: 79ff.). The third dimension of politicisation refers to *polarisation*, i.e., the intensity of conflict over the issue. To be polarised, actors need to put forward starkly differing positions and we must find strong opposing camps (see de Wilde 2011; Hoeglinger 2012). The most polarising constellation is when two camps advocate completely opposing issue positions with strong and similar intensity.

Recent literature on the politicisation of European integration has discussed all these dimensions, although sometimes with a different labelling and a slightly different meaning (see de Wilde et al. 2016). In our previous work (Hutter and Grande 2014: 1004f.), we introduced a combined *index of politicisation* to make this multidimensional concept of politicisation accessible for quantitative empirical analysis. Our index acknowledges the crucial role of salience by multiplying it by the sum of the other two dimensions:

politicisation = *salience* × (*actor expansion* + *polarisation*). More details on its calculation will be given in the methods section below.

Sources and Driving Forces of Politicisation: The Hypotheses

How can we explain the level and scope of politicisation of European integration? Why should Europe become a controversial issue? As argued in the introduction of this article, one key factor is the ever-increasing *authority transfer* to political institutions beyond the nation-state (see Hooghe and Marks 2009; de Wilde and Zürn 2012; Rauh 2014; Statham and Trezn 2013b; Zürn 2006; Zürn *et al.* 2012). Somewhat simplified, the proponents of this argument expect that the delegation and pooling of national competences at the EU level is the key force that triggers politicisation, because it increases demands for public justifications in general and provokes resistance from certain parts of the national population more specifically. As a consequence, political elites must take sides and discuss the issue of European integration publicly. In this context, treaty reforms which involve a significant transfer of authority, the Maastricht Treaty in particular, become watersheds in the integration process and its politicisation.

We explore the scope and validity of this argument by introducing two distinctions. First, we distinguish *two types of integration problems* which may cause political conflict, authority transfer and membership. Member states and their citizens have to decide on the size and composition of the ‘club’ to which they belong and on the scope of its authority. Both questions can be controversial between and within member states. While conflicts resulting from membership in the EU have not figured as prominently in the recent literature on politicisation, we assume widening the Community to include new members and one’s own country’s membership in the EU can be significant causes of domestic conflict as well. Therefore, analyzing debates on treaty reforms and enlargement rounds allows us to compare

the politicisation related to widening and deepening processes and to qualify the authority transfer argument.

Why should the ‘widening’ of the Community induce political conflict if it does not include a transfer of authority? Are membership conflicts not merely a variety of authority transfer conflict? To account for the independent politicising force of membership conflicts, we distinguish, second, between *three different sources of integration conflict*: loss of sovereignty, threats to national identity, and demands for transnational solidarity (Grande and Hutter 2016). Conflicts resulting from the loss of national sovereignty might have been most persistent in the history of European integration, but threats to national or European identity, or demands for transnational solidarity, in particular a redistribution of financial resources among member states, can also trigger conflicts. To put it differently, the loss of sovereignty, threats to identity, and demands for solidarity represent, at least in principle, independent sources of conflict that can be politicised on different occasions. Accordingly, we may speak of them as sovereignty conflicts, identity conflicts, and solidarity conflicts.

Considering these different sources of conflict, the authority transfer arguments’ focus on delegation and pooling of sovereignty represents a restricted view of the causes of politicisation. EU membership conflicts do include transfers of national sovereignty, and at advanced stages of integration such a transfer must be particularly consequential. However, membership in a larger community raises questions of national identity (‘who is us?’) and jeopardises national principles, norms, institutions, and political routines. Membership may also trigger demands for transnational solidarity, causing re-distributional conflicts. In affluent countries, net contribution to the EU’s budget may be the cause of domestic conflicts, as in the quarrels over Britain’s EC membership in the 1970s and 1980s; while less developed countries’ participation in supranational funds and the access of their citizens and companies

to the markets of other member states may lead to controversies over the desirability of membership.

These examples illustrate that the sources of conflict induced by European integration may not only coexist but amplify each other. As Lipset (1960: 77) does, we assume the mobilising power of a given conflict is strongest when it taps into several sources. Accordingly, we expect that politicisation (the public articulation and mobilisation of these conflicts) is most intense if the three sources of integration conflict play a role simultaneously. More precisely, we assume an intensification of conflict is most likely if the accession of one's country is at stake. According to this argument, membership in European Communities should not just be seen as 'the mother of all authority transfers', it may raise all sorts of identitarian and re-distributional problems too. For this reason, we assume that the level of politicisation is not highest in debates on authority transfer but in debates on a country's own accession. We call this *membership conflict hypothesis*.

Against this background, our expectations of the politicising force of enlargement are mixed. Admitting new members implies sharing sovereignty with a larger number of member states, but does not include an immediate transfer of authority to the EU. Therefore, widening the Community should not cause significant sovereignty conflicts. However, it may result in identity conflicts if a potential new member is perceived as not sharing the basic values of the Community. It may also provoke fears of a re-distribution of resources when countries seeking admission are economically less developed (Schneider 2009). In both instances, enlargement may increase politicisation. In sum, however, we expect the aggregate level of politicisation in enlargement conflicts to be moderate only (*enlargement conflict hypothesis*).

Authority transfers and unresolved membership questions might trigger politicisation, but we do not expect them to fully explain the level of politicisation in public debates over Europe. These processes rather induce political potentials into West European societies which

might be articulated by political actors. That is why another strand of politicisation literature emphasises additional institutional and actor-centred factors that might affect the intensity of public conflict on European integration (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2009; 2012; Hutter and Grande 2014; Koopmans and Statham 2010; Kriesi 2007; Kriesi *et al.* 2012; Kriesi *et al.* 2008; Statham and Trezn 2013a; b). While proponents of the authority transfer argument (see de Wilde and Zürn 2012: 143) also acknowledge these factors, they are hardly ever tested together in a systematic way (but see Rauh 2014).

It is beyond the scope of this article to examine the entirety of institutional and actor-centred factors emphasised in the literature. We will concentrate on four factors which seem particularly relevant to the politicisation in public debates on integration steps. Two (national referendum and electoral cycle) refer to institutional features, whereas the other two (strength of populist right challengers and cultural-identitarian framing) emphasise the role of political actors and their mobilising strategies for the politicisation of Europe.

The first factor is the holding of a *national referendum* in an integration debate. National referenda are certainly ‘elite-initiated events’ (Marks and Hooghe 2009: 20), but have ‘introduced a popular element into the process of European integration that is at least partly out of the control of the elected and appointed representatives in Brussels and the national capitals’ (Hobolt 2009: 8). More specifically, a national referendum is expected to increase the salience and visibility of an integration debate; it provides participatory opportunities to a broader range of actors beyond governmental elites; and may intensify conflict by increasing polarisation among these actors. Therefore, we expect that politicisation of integration debates is higher if a national referendum is being held (*national referendum hypothesis*).

A second factor which may play a role is the *national election cycle*. Proximity to national elections may have a politicising effect in an integration debate. The closer a debate

gets to a national election campaign, a moment of heightened conflict, the more the agenda of electoral conflicts may affect the debate (for its effect on parliamentary debates, see Rauh 2014). The impact of national elections on politicisation depends on certain conditions, however. It will increase the politicisation of an integration debate if, and only if, European issues play a significant role in the election campaign. If political parties de-emphasise those issues in an election campaign, proximity to elections will actually dampen political conflict. We thus expect national election cycles' aggregate effect on the politicisation of integration debates to be positive but of moderate size (*national election cycle hypothesis*).

Our discussion of the effects of national election cycles on politicisation suggests that in addition to institutional opportunity structures, political actors, actor constellations, and mobilisation strategies are important. Literature on politicisation and European integration assumes politicisation is driven by *radical populist right parties and Eurosceptic parties* (e.g., de Vries and Hobolt 2015; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Kriesi 2007). These parties are particularly sensitive to losses of national sovereignty and threats to national identity, and seem to have formulated a very successful strategy for mobilising those who feel negatively affected by these processes. Since European issues often cut across mainstream parties, who often hold more integrationist positions than their electorates (e.g., Green-Pedersen 2012; van der Eijk and Franklin 2004; Tzelgov 2014), these parties are expected to de-emphasise debates on Europe to keep levels of intra-party conflict low and avoid alienating their voters. For this reason, the scholarly literature assumes that an intensification of integration debates is more likely if new challengers from the right enter the scene, due to their strategic incentives to raise European issues (*populist radical right hypothesis*).

Finally, we are interested in the importance of *framing strategies* as a crucial element of actor strategies to politicise European integration (Diez Medrano 2003; Helbling *et al.* 2010). By strategically *framing* a given issue, actors attempt to shift the central logic of

conflict. More specifically, they try to frame it in line with their general ideological predisposition, on the one hand, and with regard to strategic factors in party competition, on the other. In this context, it is important to highlight that ‘Europe’ is a complex issue with economic-distributional and cultural-identitarian dimensions. The literature assumes that the politicisation of European integration is the product of increasing emphasis on cultural and identity-related frames (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Kriesi *et al.* 2008). The argument states that by framing Europe as a cultural-identitarian issue, opponents of the EU could highlight its perceived negative consequences for national identity and sovereignty, thereby politicising it. Empirical analysis of the politicisation of European integration in national elections campaigns confirmed this assumption (Hutter and Grande 2014). We expect that an identitarian framing is particularly conducive to membership conflicts because problems of national or European identity may be particularly relevant in such conflicts (*identitarian framing hypothesis*).

Design and Methods

In this article, we analyse public debates on major integration steps comprehensively from the early 1970s to the late 2000s in six West European countries: Austria, Britain, France, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland. These countries differ in important context factors that might shape the levels of politicisation and help us test and qualify the general hypotheses introduced before. Most important are differences with respect to the duration and scope of EU integration. France and Germany were founding members of the European Communities; the UK was in the first group of accession countries (joining the EC in 1973); and Austria and Sweden were in the third group of new members entering the EU in 1995. Since we are particularly interested in the level of politicisation across different types of integration steps, we included Switzerland, in which accession failed after intense domestic debates. Studying

public debates and national referenda on Europe in Switzerland might provide valuable additional insights into the politicisation of membership issues.

Our study covers debates on every successful or failed major treaty reform after the decision on the Treaty of Rome in 1957: the Single European Act and the Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, European Constitutional, and Lisbon Treaties. It also covers every enlargement decision since the early 1970s (Northern Enlargement, Southern Enlargement I & II, EFTA Enlargement, Eastern Enlargement I & II).¹ Furthermore, we included the membership debate on Turkey's EU accession and eight country-specific debates from Austria, Sweden, and Switzerland to our sample. The country-specific debates centred on critical decisions regarding those countries' relation to the EC/EU in general and their integration into the Single European Market and the Economic and Monetary Union more specifically: the Free Trade Agreement in the early 1970s involving Austria and Switzerland; membership in the European Economic Area for all three countries; the two Bilateral Treaties between Switzerland and the EU; and the Swedish debate about joining the Eurozone. In sum, the analysis is based on 86 domestic public debates on 18 different integration steps (a list of all steps and descriptive statistics can be found in the Online Appendix).

Since the unit of analysis, an integration step, is not a singular event but extends over a longer period, we subdivided each integration step into a set of major formal sub-decisions and collected data on the public debate on each of these sub-decisions. These 'critical dates' are (a) the initiation of the project (e.g., formal membership application or a European Summit), (b) the European Commission's reaction (to enlargement rounds only), (c) the beginning of negotiations, (d) the paraphrasing and signing of a treaty, and (e) the national adoption (either by the national parliament or by a referendum). For every 'critical date', we looked at the time periods two weeks before and one week after the date.

Our study is based on original data collected from newspaper reports. For the study of politicisation in *public* debates on European integration, mass media are an indispensable source. We can retrieve very rich information on conflicts among various types of actors from media reports such as newspaper articles. These allow us to examine all three dimensions of politicisation introduced before (issue salience, actor expansion, and polarisation), as well as the specific issues being addressed and the way actors justify their positions.

We selected articles on the integration steps from one national quality newspaper per country: *Die Presse* (Austria), *The Times* (Britain), *Le Monde* (France), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany), *Svenska Dagbladet* (Sweden), and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Switzerland). The articles were coded with core sentence analysis, a method originally developed by Kleinnijenhuis *et al.* (1997) and successfully applied to the study of political conflict by Kriesi *et al.* (2012; 2008). In this method, the unit of analysis is neither a single keyword nor the whole article, but a ‘core sentence’ which consists of a relation between a subject and an object. More precisely, we focus on relations between an actor and a European issue (actor-issue sentences), as well as relations between two actors with a thematic reference to a European issue (actor-actor sentences). That means that both types of core sentences are only coded if they are *thematically* related to European integration. The direction of the relationship between the two objects is quantified using a scale from -1 to +1 with three intermediary positions. -1 indicates a critique or rejection of the actor or issue and +1 an affirmative evaluation (for more details on the coding, see Online Appendix). As we are interested in *domestic* public debates in this article, we limited our sample to statements with domestic subject actors. In the end, the empirical analysis of this article is based on roughly 17,000 core sentences and 10,000 frames.

How do we measure politicisation? For each dimension, we rely on one indicator. Salience is measured by the average number of articles coded per selected day. For the

expansion of actors, we take the share of non-governmental actor statements (e.g., by opposition leaders, parliamentary spokespersons, civil society actors) as a percentage of all coded statements. Our indicator for polarisation is based on Taylor and Hermann's (1971) measure of ideological polarisation and ranges from 0 (no polarisation) to 1 (see Kriesi *et al.* 2008: 364) (for a detailed discussion of it, see again Online Appendix). Empirically, the three indicators are significantly related to each other, but the correlation is far from perfect: ranging from $r = 0.37$ (salience and polarisation) and 0.42 (salience and actor expansion) to 0.64 (polarisation and actor expansion) ($N = 86$). For calculation of the index, both expansion of actors and polarisation are based on a scale from 0 to 1, whereas salience is the absolute number of coded articles per day. In the end, the average index is 0.26 (std. dev. = 0.36) and ranges from a minimum of 0 to the observed maximum of 1.87 .

Empirical Findings

The empirical findings are presented in two steps: At first, we compare levels of politicisation across types of integration steps and discuss cross-national variations. Thereafter, we examine the relevance of institutional and actor-centred explanatory factors.

Figure 1 shows the average politicisation index for the three types of integration steps: treaty reforms, EU accession of third-party countries, and the country's own accession to the EU or the Single European Market. The aggregate values for all 86 domestic debates bring to light the highly politicising character of the decision of countries to join the EU. The average index for this type of debate is more than 2.5 times higher than for those on major European treaty reforms, and about 7 times greater than for those on another country's EU membership. At an aggregate level, conflicts over treaty reforms certainly do lead to politicisation but the level of politicisation in such debates is dwarfed by the intensity of membership conflicts

within countries seeking accession. This finding supports our first hypothesis on the mobilising power of a country's own accession (membership conflict hypothesis).

[Figure 1]

This is not to say that the authority transfer hypothesis must be completely rejected. If we distinguish between debates in member states of the EU and those in non-EU member states, we get a more nuanced picture. The results in Figure 1 highlight that within EU members, conflicts over treaty reforms—not enlargement—cause the greatest politicisation in most cases. In a nutshell, it is 'deepening' rather than 'widening', authority transfer rather than geographical enlargement, which politicises EU member states.

Since the countries in our sample are distinct in their duration and scope of EU membership, we expect some cross-national variation in our findings, too. In Table 1, we present average values of politicisation for the different types of integration steps for each country separately. These values confirm the outstanding importance of conflicts over a country's accession, but also show remarkable differences between countries. Even in Sweden, where we find a very low level of politicisation in general, the membership debate was highly politicised. The average index value in Sweden (0.48) is about the same as the respective value in the UK (0.46). However, we observe the highest average values for debates on the country's decision to join the EU or the Single European Market in Austria (0.93) and Switzerland (0.80). Moreover, the findings in Table 1 indicate significant cross-national differences in politicisation in debates on treaty reforms. On average, conflicts were by far the most intense in France (0.62), followed by Austria after the country became an EU member (0.38) and by Britain (0.35). It also becomes evident that EU enlargement was only significantly politicising in France (0.34) and in Austria (0.37).

[Table 1]

While aggregate measures are instructive, Figure 2 presents a more detailed picture: the politicisation index for each step and country. For ease of interpretation, we added two horizontal lines to represent empirical benchmarks of politicisation. The lower horizontal line indicates the mean value based on all 86 domestic debates. The higher horizontal line shows that mean plus one standard deviation. We consider debates that pass the first threshold politicised and those crossing the second benchmark as exceptionally politicised.

Figure 2 brings out remarkable differences between integration steps and countries. Cross-national variation is most evident when we look at the two founding member states of the European Communities in our sample, *France* and *Germany*. In Germany, we find consistently low politicisation. Debates on most integration steps show values below average, and there is no debate in which politicisation is clearly above the second benchmark. Most remarkably, politicisation in the German debate on the Maastricht Treaty was significantly below the levels observed in France and Britain although the existence of the German ‘D-Mark’ was at stake. In relative terms, treaty reforms were more politicised in Germany than enlargement rounds. However, as shown in Figure 2, it was EU membership of Turkey that resulted in the most politicised conflict among German actors (see Leggewie 2004; von Oppeln 2005). In France, by contrast, we observe extremely high values in two debates, on the first enlargement round in the early 1970s (including Britain, Denmark, Ireland, and Norway) and on the Maastricht Treaty. The French debate on Northern Enlargement defies conventional expectations in two ways. It was not on authority transfer, and it took place at a time when politicisation was supposed to be still limited. The debate on Maastricht was exceptional too, as we recorded by far the highest politicisation index of all debates covered

by our data. Moreover, we find very high values in the French debates on the Constitutional Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty. In sum, European integration was highly politicised in French public debates during the entire period. However, except for Northern Enlargement, it centred on the transfer of authority to the EU.

[Figure 2]

In *Britain*, we observe consistent but not exceptional politicisation in public debates. Unlike politicisation in electoral campaigns with clear peaks in the 1970s and 1990s (see Hutter and Grande 2014), debates on major integration steps do not exceed our second benchmark. In general, it is conflict over treaty reforms, not over the accession of third-party countries, that leads to politicisation in Britain. Except for Britain's own EC membership, enlargement of the EC/EU was not an issue at all until the late 2000s. By contrast, Figure 2 shows that the values for each treaty reform, from the Single European Act to the Lisbon Treaty, are slightly above average. They peak in the debate on the Maastricht Treaty, although they never came close to France's level at that time.

In *Austria*, we find distinct patterns of politicisation before and after it joined the EU (see Figure 2). In the early 1990s, politicisation was very high in debates on the European Economic Area and Austria's EU membership. After EU accession, the public conflicts over Europe did not end, and many subsequent debates in Austria also show high levels of politicisation. Compared to the other EU member states, the Austrian pattern is exceptional since both 'widening' and 'deepening' produced high levels of politicisation once the country had joined the EU. More precisely, Figure 2 highlights the crucial role of the debates on

Eastern enlargement, Turkey's EU membership, the Constitutional Treaty, and the Lisbon Treaty.

Finally, *Sweden* and *Switzerland* show a pattern of politicisation caused by conflicts over the country's own EU accession. In Sweden, politicisation was only high in the 1990s and early 2000s due to conflicts over the country's EU membership. This politicisation of membership issues also affected subsequent debates on the Amsterdam Treaty and membership in the Eurozone. The level of politicisation of integration steps in the 2000s, including the Constitutional Treaty, was very limited, however. Unlike in Austria, overall politicisation in Sweden seems practically unaffected by EU membership apart from the accession period itself. In Switzerland, we also find a distinct politicisation profile that reflects the country's outsider status. European integration is highly politicising whenever Switzerland is directly involved. This caused peaks of politicisation in the debates on the European Economic Area and Swiss EU membership in the early 1990s and on the second set of Bilateral Treaties in the early 2000s. Besides these cases, the European integration process did not resonate in public debates in Switzerland.

Taken together, our findings qualify the authority transfer argument in several respects. First, authority transfers—and not enlargement decisions—have in fact been the most politicising integration steps within EU member states. However, comparison with accession debates reveals that the transfer of authority to the EC/EU has only been politicising in a few cases, such as the Maastricht Treaty in France. Second, these authority transfer conflicts are dwarfed by unresolved membership conflicts in accession countries. Third, integration debates in some countries (Austria, France, and Germany) indicate that enlargement issues can be very politicising, too. Finally, our data point to remarkable cross-national differences in the level of politicisation that cannot solely be explained by the type of integration step at stake.

Therefore, we now turn to other factors that might condition the extent to which actors contest European integration. More precisely, we focus on institutional opportunities provided by national referenda and elections, the strength of radical right challengers, and the importance of cultural-identitarian framing strategies. To do so, we constructed indicators for (a) whether a national referendum was held or not;² (b) proximity of integration debates to the next national election (in months);³ (c) the percentage of statements by radical right populist parties relative to all statements in a debate;⁴ and (d) the percentage of cultural-identitarian frames relative to all frames used to justify positions on European integration.

Figure 3 presents the average index of politicisation for different values of the four independent variables. First, and most importantly, the findings indicate that a national referendum boosts politicisation. In domestic debates with a referendum, the average index is 1.01; without one, it is 0.16. Second, while politicisation tends to be highest in domestic debates closest to the next national election, there are no substantial and systematic differences across the four categories. Third, the presence of radical populist right actors increases politicisation. As shown in Figure 3, the average index for a debate without any actor from the radical right is 0.18, which increases to 0.64 with a strong presence of the radical right. Finally, we observe no strong relationship between the share of cultural frames and politicisation. Politicisation tends to be lowest in debates with a very small share of cultural frames but does not systematically increase the higher the proportion of such justifications gets.

[Figure 3]

In the final step of the analysis, we assess the relevance of the four variables and the type of integration step with the help of regression analysis. We calculated simple OLS

regressions with the level of politicisation of the debate as our dependent variable (including and excluding country dummies to account for variations across and within countries). Given the few cases and the panel structure of the data, we also cross-checked our results by identifying high-leverage observations and estimating different types of regression models. This did not affect the main findings reported below (for details, see Online Appendix).

In general, the results in Table 2 confirm the descriptive findings. First of all, debates on the country's own accession are significantly more likely to be politicised than discussions about further authority transfers to the supranational level. Enlargement debates are far less politicised. However, the effect of these variables is far exceeded by that of a direct-democratic vote. The existence or absence of a referendum explains more than fifty percent of the overall variance. The full model with all independent variables shows that a country's accession is no longer significant when including the referendum dummy. The other political context factor, national elections, is less relevant. The proximity of national elections does only affect politicisation significantly if we control for other variables, but if we do, we find European integration gets more politicised the closer Election Day gets.

[Table 2]

Regarding the two actor-centred variables, our results support the radical right hypothesis only. The findings in Table 2 indicate a significant link that holds when we include country dummies to control for the fact that in some countries, radical right parties have been irrelevant at the national level in the period of study. The more visible the radical right becomes in a debate, the more Europe gets politicised. At the same time, the results reveal that the literature has tended to overstate the role of radical right parties. Their presence only adds about 6% to the overall explanatory power of the model (results not shown). Political

and institutional factors, national referenda in particular, seem to play much more important roles in politicising national integration debates than the sheer presence of challengers from the radical right. Finally, our results indicate no systematic link between share of cultural frames and level of politicisation either across or within countries. This result is remarkable since our comparative analysis of national elections has shown a clear positive relationship between high politicisation and cultural-identitarian framing strategies (see Hutter and Grande 2014).⁵

Conclusions: Extending the Authority Transfer Argument

Our empirical findings reveal a pattern of politicisation, characterised by three features. First of all, they provide clear support for an extension of the authority transfer argument and a stronger consideration of membership conflicts in the analysis of politicisation. In general, conflicts on one's own country's membership in the EC/EU show the highest level of politicisation. However, this does not invalidate the authority transfer hypothesis. Rather, it confirms our expectation that *different sources of political conflict* can lead to a politicisation of European integration. With the exception of the debate on the Maastricht Treaty in France, the politicising effect of authority transfers within the EU has been limited thus far. Second, there is *no clear temporal trend*. There were already highly politicised integration debates in the early 1970s; and politicisation did not rise significantly in the 2000s. This is consistent with the first finding, since—except for France and Germany—accession of the countries in our sample was decided in the 1970s and the 1990s. Third, we observe remarkable *variations across countries* that cannot be explained by duration of membership or the amount of authority transferred to the EU. For example, politicisation in Germany, a fully integrated founding member of the European Communities, is still rather low, whereas it is remarkably high in Austria, despite the country's late accession.

Our results also confirm the importance of institutional and actor-centred explanatory variables. Two of these factors turned out to be most relevant in our comparative analysis: national referenda and the strength of radical populist right parties. The most important factor clearly is the holding of a national referendum in an integration debate. Compared to the effects of national referendums, radical populist right parties only had a moderate effect on politicisation of integration debates, and proximity to national elections and parties' framing strategies seem irrelevant to it. Actually, our sample of countries provides only mixed evidence for the 'radical right hypothesis'. While there is some politicisation in Britain, where there was no strong populist radical right challenger in our research period, we find high politicisation in Austria and Switzerland, where these parties have been very strong in the last two decades. Germany, as a counterfactual case, confirms the importance of both variables. Given its absence of national referenda and the weakness of its radical populist right parties, its level of politicisation is consistently low.

Against the background of our discussion of different sources of conflict leading to a politicisation of European integration, it seems as if variation in the level of conflict depends not so much on the source of conflict—loss of sovereignty, threat to identity, demand for solidarity—but on different political opportunity structures and actor constellations. While treaty reforms so far have rarely been the object of a national referendum in the countries covered by our study,⁶ they were mandatory on accession decisions. The high level of politicisation in accession debates can to a large extent be explained by the accompanying national referenda. The French referenda on the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and on the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 indicate that politicisation significantly increases if controversies on authority transfers are put to a national referendum (see Statham and Trenz 2012). It seems as if this is the most promising—though highly risky—way to politicise the European integration process.

How can we account for this strong effect of national referenda compared to national elections and proximity to a national election? In our view, it is limitations of the strategic behaviour of political parties, which are responsible for the high levels of politicisation in national referenda. While political parties can influence election campaigns to a considerable extent, national referendum campaigns and their outcome are at least partly beyond their control. This has been most evident when the major political parties and interest groups have fully supported a decision and were voted down nevertheless, as in the Swiss referendum on the European Economic Area in 1992. Unlike national elections, in which mainstream parties can de-emphasize European issues if they are internally divided, they are forced to take positions in a referendum. This provides all kinds of political actors an opportunity to step in and articulate their opposition; and gives particular weight to 'campaign dynamics' (Hobolt 2009: Ch. 8). These context factors also accentuate the importance of challenger parties. While they seem to be crucial when mainstream parties try to avoid politicising an issue, they seem less important in national referenda.

In sum, these findings suggest the authority transfer hypothesis, which thus far has dominated analysis of politicisation in Europe, needs to be extended and integrated into a broader framework of political conflict which takes into account different sources, institutional opportunity structures, actor constellations and actor strategies. Authority transfers to the EU undoubtedly play an important role in politicising European integration debates, but they have been neither the only source of conflict nor dominant in political controversies on European integration.

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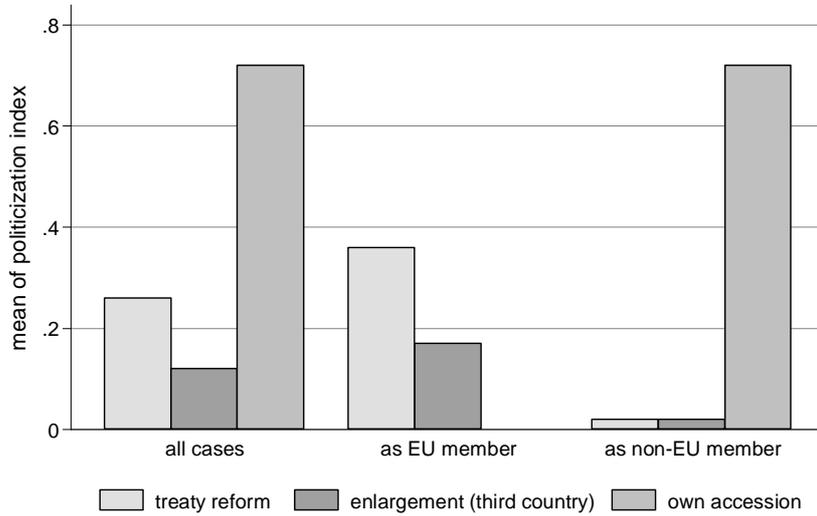
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Figures and tables

FIGURE 1

THE AVERAGE LEVEL OF POLITICISATION BY TYPE OF INTEGRATION STEP AND EU MEMBERSHIP



Note: The figure shows the average index of politicisation for the three types of integration steps. The index is calculated as salience x (actor expansion + polarisation) and the values range from 0 to 1.87 (N=86 domestic debates). More specifically, we present values for all cases and for public debates taking place in EU and non-EU member states, respectively.

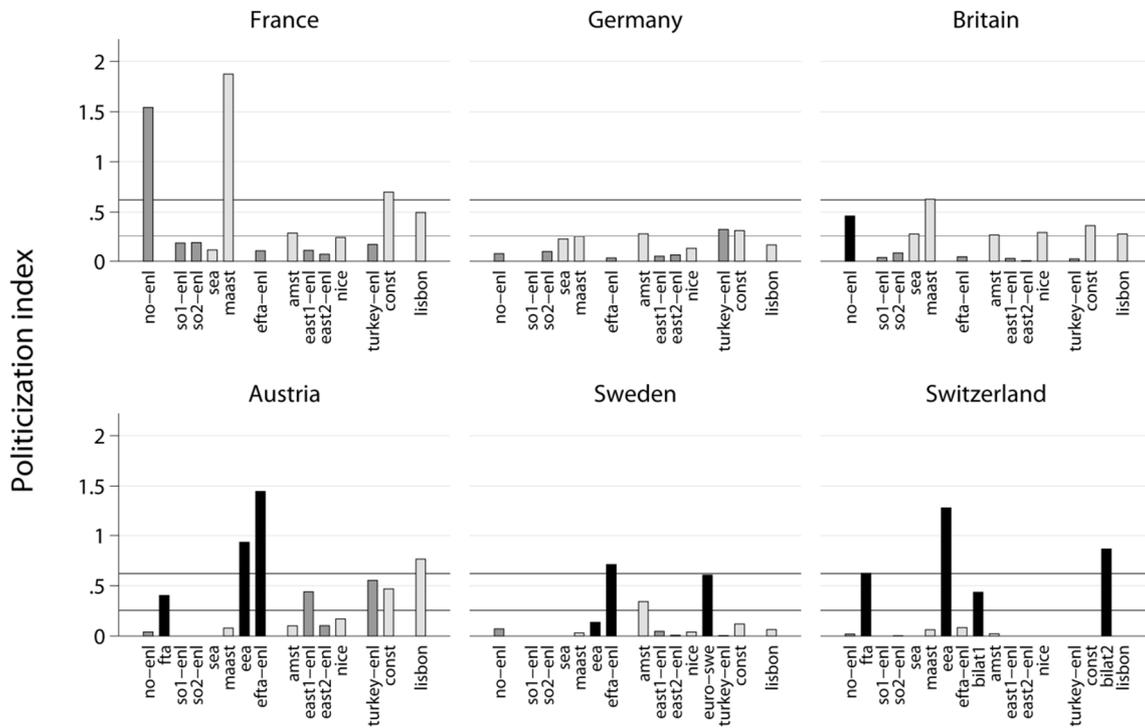
TABLE 1
THE AVERAGE LEVEL OF POLITICISATION BY TYPE OF INTEGRATION STEP AND
COUNTRY

		Treaty reform	Enlargement (third country)	Own accession	N
France		0.62	0.34	-	(13)
Britain		0.35	0.04	0.46	(13)
Germany		0.23	0.09	-	(13)
Austria	non-EU member	0.04	0.01	0.93	(8)
	<i>EU member</i>	<i>0.38</i>	<i>0.37</i>	-	<i>(7)</i>
Sweden	non-EU member	0.02	0.02	0.48	(8)
	<i>EU member</i>	<i>0.14</i>	<i>0.02</i>	-	<i>(7)</i>
Switzerland		0.01	0.02	0.80	(17)

Note: The table shows the average index of politicisation for the three types of integration steps by country. The index is calculated as salience x (actor expansion + polarisation) and the values range from 0 to 1.87 (N=86 domestic debates).

FIGURE 2

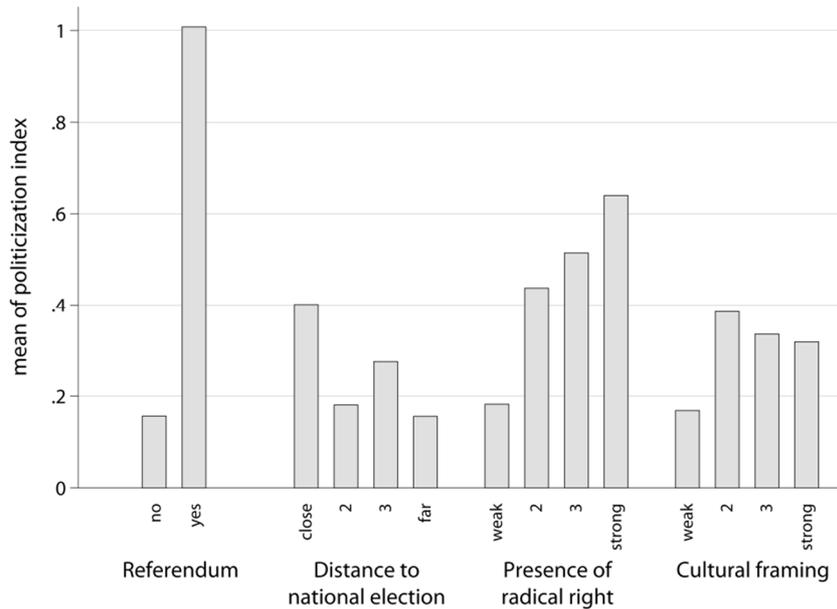
THE LEVEL OF POLITICISATION BY INTEGRATION STEP AND COUNTRY



Note: The figure shows the index of politicisation by integration step and country for the domestic debate. The steps were arranged according to the temporal distribution of the public debates. Debates on a country's own accession are highlighted with black bars, debates on enlargement toward third countries with grey bars, and debates around treaty reforms with white bars. The horizontal lines indicate the mean value (plus one standard deviation) based on all 86 integration debates.

FIGURE 3

THE AVERAGE LEVEL OF POLITICISATION BY POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY AND ACTOR-SPECIFIC FACTORS



Note: The figure shows the average index of politicisation. The categories for distance to national election and cultural framing are based on the mean value plus/minus a standard deviation. For example, “far” means that the weighted distance to the next national election for this debate is above the mean value plus one standard deviation. Due to the high number of zeros, the categories for the radical right indicate the following: 1 “weak” = no radical right party reported (0%); 2 = share of radical right is below average (<3.8%); 3 = above average (>3.8%); 4 “strong” = above average plus one std. deviation (>10.8%). The shares of actors and frames were only calculated for debates with at least 20 core sentences by domestic actors (N=68).

TABLE 2

IMPACT OF TYPE OF STEP, POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND ACTORS-ORIENTED VARIABLES ON THE POLITICISATION IN PUBLIC DEBATES (OLS REGRESSIONS)

	Type of step		Referendum		National elections		Presence of radical right		Cultural framing		Full model	
Step (ref.=treaty reform)												
Enlargement (third country)	-0.14*	-0.15**									-0.14**	-0.15***
	(0.07)	(0.07)									(0.06)	(0.06)
Own accession	0.46***	0.53***									-0.11	-0.01
	(0.11)	(0.10)									(0.10)	(0.10)
Referendum (yes=1)			0.85***	0.90***							0.76***	0.79***
			(0.08)	(0.08)							(0.10)	(0.10)
Distance to next national election (in months)					-0.00	-0.00					-0.01**	-0.01**
					(0.00)	(0.00)					(0.00)	(0.00)
Presence of radical right (in percent)							0.02***	0.03***			0.01***	0.02***
							(0.01)	(0.01)			(0.00)	(0.01)
Cultural framing (in percent)									0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
									(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Constant	0.26***	0.55***	0.16***	0.16***	0.36***	0.57***	0.24***	0.43***	0.27**	0.34**	0.38***	0.50***
	(0.05)	(0.09)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.11)	(0.14)	(0.05)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.16)	(0.11)	(0.12)
Country dummies	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	86	86	86	86	86	86	68	68	68	68	68	68
Adj. R	0.26	0.37	0.56	0.65	0.00	0.05	0.14	0.16	0.00	0.06	0.65	0.71

Standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Note: The dependent variable is the index of politicisation. The relative presence of actors and frames in a public debate was only calculated for debates with at least 20 core sentences by domestic actors.

¹ We excluded the debate on the fusion of the three Communities in 1967 because it did not imply a substantial transfer of authority and the debate on Croatia's membership because it was not a major integration step.

² Our sample covers ten integration debates in which a national referendum was held: EFTA Enlargement in Austria, Northern Enlargement, Maastricht and Constitution in France, EFTA Enlargement and Eurozone in Sweden, as well as Free Trade Agreement, EEA, Bilateral I & II in Switzerland (see Hobolt 2009: 9).

³ We calculated a weighted average for the different critical events around which we studied national debates.

⁴ We opted for this measure for the strength of the radical right because it indicates the actual presence of the actors in the public debate on Europe, which due to their strategic decisions or environmental constraints might not correspond to their overall presence in the party system. However, we cross-checked our results by accounting for vote share in the previous national elections. The results are not affected by this decision.

⁵ We also tested for an interaction effect between the presence of radical right parties and the share of cultural frames. However, we found no statistically significant effect: the two variables are not positively related to each other as the scholarly literature often assumes. By contrast, we observe a correlation coefficient of $r = -0.12$.

⁶ In contrast, Denmark and Ireland have a national referendum on every major treaty reform.