Politicizing Europe in the national electoral arena:

A comparative analysis of five West European countries, 1970-2010

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Abstract

Although politicization has become a key concept in European integration studies, it is still contested whether, when, and to what extent European issues have become politicized in domestic political arenas. In this article, we contribute to this discussion both in conceptual and empirical terms. We are using a new multi-dimensional index of politicization to systematically trace the development of politicization in national election campaigns in five West European countries (Austria, Britain, France, Germany, and Switzerland) from the 1970s to 2010. Our findings provide clear evidence that Europe has indeed been politicized in the past decades. Moreover, we identified two different paths towards such a politicization. One of these paths is dominated by populist radical parties from the right, while the other path is shaped by the conflict between mainstream parties in government and opposition. On both paths, conflicts over membership play an important role and cultural-identitarian framing strategies are used.

Politicization has become a key concept in European integration studies. Since the mid-2000s, it has been the object of an intense and controversial scholarly debate (for reviews, see de Wilde, 2011; Hooghe and Marks, 2012). There seems to be general agreement "that something like politicization has happened since the mid-1980s" (Schmitter, 2009, p. 211f.). However, the assessments of this phenomenon differ widely. Most recent contributions have been inspired by the work of Hooghe and Marks (2009), who put the politicization concept at the centre of a new "postfunctionalist theory of European integration". More specifically, Hooghe and Marks advance the argument that the European integration process has become politicized in the post-Maastricht period. As the consequence of a substantial transfer of political authority from member states to supranational institutions, European integration has become the object of intensified conflicts over national sovereignty, political identity, and financial redistribution. European integration, Hooghe and Marks argue, is no longer the exclusive domain of political elites; rather, it has become a highly controversial issue in the electoral arena and the protest arena. Politicization, they conclude, has far-reaching negative consequences for the European integration process because it is constraining political elites in European decision making. This argument not only takes issue with scholars who argue that the "giant" of European politics is "sleeping" (van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004; 2007; Green-Pedersen, 2012), it also challenges positions, which pretend that politicization is a necessary precondition for the advancement of the European integration process (e.g., Habermas, 2012; Hix, 2008).

In our view, these controversies suffer from at least three shortcomings. First of all, our empirical knowledge on the *level* of politicization, its *timing,* and of its *driving forces* is still insufficient. Empirical accounts mostly focus on limited periods of time between the Maastricht Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty, or on debates over single events, such as the Constitutional Treaty (e.g. Statham and Trenz, 2012; 2013). Moreover, controversies are due to different conceptualizations and measures of politicization (see also de Wilde, 2011; de

Wilde and Zürn, 2012). Finally, an interpretation of findings is hampered by the lack of empirical benchmarks. Even if scholars find differences in the level and scope of politicization of European integration, it is difficult to assess whether and how these differences actually matter. The interpretation of findings then often depends on the author's (implicit) normative position.

In this article, we aim to clarify some of these controversies by addressing three questions: (a) Has the European integration process actually been politicized in the electoral arena in the last four decades? (b) When did this politicization process start and what is its typical pattern? (c) What are the driving forces of this process in the electoral arena? We take an innovative stance in answering these questions in three ways. *First*, we propose a new index of politicization that takes into account its multi-dimensional character. *Second*, we analyse the scope of politicization, the framing of European issues, and the positioning of actors across countries over a long period of time. By using a relational content analysis, we present new and original data on the politicization of Europe in national election campaigns in five West European countries (Austria, Britain, France, Germany, and Switzerland) from 1970 to 2010. *Third*, we provide an empirical benchmark to evaluate the degree to which the European integration issue has become politicized by systematically comparing politicization (and its sub-dimensions) across a broader set of political issues in election campaigns.

Conceptualizing politicization in the European context

In the political science literature, the concept of politicization can be found in various contexts and with rather different meanings. Scholars use it both to analyse the relationship of the political system to other societal systems (e.g. the economy) or sub-systems (e.g. the administrative system), and to investigate processes within the political system. In this article, we apply the second meaning. Following Schattschneider (1975 [1960]) our concept of

politicization emphasizes the importance of *political conflict*. For Schattschneider, political conflict is the key ingredient of politics. Politicization then can be defined as the "expansion of the scope of conflict" *within* the political system. Moreover, by identifying the "intensity, visibility, direction and scope" of conflict as the key dimensions of politics, Schattschneider (1957) conceptualizes politicization as a multi-faceted process. Accordingly, we suggest focusing on *issue salience* (visibility), *actor expansion* (scope), and *actor polarization* (intensity and direction), as the three main conceptual dimensions of politicization.

All three dimensions figure prominently in the recent literature on the politicization of Europe (see de Wilde, 2011; de Wilde and Zürn, 2012). However, current research lacks a *composite measure* that integrates the three components. In the following, we propose an index that combines the three dimensions in a specific way. The construction of our index is based on three considerations.

First, we assume that only topics that are frequently raised by political actors in public debates can be considered politicized. If an issue is not debated in public, it can be politicized only to a very limited extent, if at all. We agree with Green-Pedersen (2012, p. 117) that *salience* is the most basic dimension of politicization. At the same time, we do not share Green-Pedersen's narrow definition of "politicization as a matter of salience" only. While salience might be correlated with the scope of actors and politicization, these variables are at least partly independent and, as we show in the following, their values may deviate significantly from respective values on salience.

Second, we assume that the *expansion of the actors* involved in a public debate is another key dimension of politicization. If only very few, and a restricted set, of (elite) actors participate in public debates on European integration, this would indicate that the scope of conflict is still limited. Considering the fact that the European integration process was dominated by executive elites in its formative phase, we focus on the degree to which actors

without any executive and governmental functions have become key actors in public debates over Europe.

In this context, we can distinguish actor expansion *across* political arenas and *within* a given arena, such as the electoral arena. The former type, for example, refers to the visibility of actors from civil society in public debates (e.g. della Porta and Caiani, 2009; Koopmans, 2010). Since empirical research by Kriesi et al. (2012) revealed that the national electoral arena is still the most relevant political arena to articulate political conflicts on issues related to "de-nationalization", such as European integration, we focus on actor expansion within the electoral arena in this article. In this arena, where political parties compete for votes, expansion of the scope of actors means that not only party-affiliated actors *in government* address European integration but also party actors that are not represented in government (e.g. actors from opposition parties). However, we should keep in mind that political controversy in the electoral arena necessarily has an elitist bias and may not represent the full scope of political conflict on an issue which may include the activities of interest groups, social movement organizations and the wider citizenry (see, e.g., Hurrelmann, et al., forthcoming).

A *third* key aspect of politicization is *polarization* of conflict among political actors. We agree with de Wilde (2011) and Hoeglinger (2012) that a highly salient public debate among a broad range of actors does not exploit the full potential of politicization. In addition, actors need to put forward differing positions, and we must find opposing camps. More precisely, we define polarization as the intensity of conflict related to an issue among the different actors. The most polarizing constellation can be found when two camps advocate completely opposing issue positions with about the same intensity.

How can we combine these dimensions in such a way that we can measure politicization comprehensively? In the following, we propose an *index of politicization*, which takes all three dimensions into account and relates them in a specific way. As in any index,

this composite measure should produce an instructive synthesis of the data on the three

specific dimensions. As stated before, we regard salience as a necessary, although not

sufficient, condition for politicization. Thus, we put salience at the core of our index. Salience

cannot be substituted by the other two dimensions, i.e. by actor expansion and polarization. Its

relation to these variables cannot be additive. At the same time, we do not propose a purely

multiplicative combination of the three dimensions but multiply salience with the sum of actor

expansion and polarization:[1]

$$politicization = salience \times (actor\ expansion\ +\ polarization)$$

On the basis of this conceptualization, we can formulate a number of hypotheses on

the politicization of European integration and its driving forces, which will be tested in the

empirical analysis. Our general argument can be formulated as follows:

- *Politicization hypothesis:* the European integration process has been politicized

    significantly in the past decades. Therefore, we expect an increase in our politicization

    index in all EU member countries (H 1).

This general argument comprises three hypotheses on the salience of issues, the

expansion of actors, and the polarization of actors. We formulate these hypotheses separately,

although we assume that they must all be confirmed for the general argument to hold.

However, our multi-dimensional conceptualization allows the possibility that the

politicization hypothesis must be rejected, although our expectations on some of the

individual dimensions are met. The three hypotheses are:

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[1] In contrast to a multiplicative index, the proposed index leads to a higher politicization score for a salient
public debate, with only a few dissenting voices, as compared to a debate that gets only little attention, although
the actors differ widely in their opinions. However, note that the most politicized constellation occurs if an issue
is salient, and we find a polarized debate among a broad range of government and opposition parties.

- *Visibility hypothesis:* European integration has led to an increasing visibility of European issues in public debates and, most importantly, to increasingly salient public contestation among political actors (H 2).

- *Actor expansion hypothesis:* European integration has expanded the scope of actors involved in political debates on European issues; in particular, it has reduced the importance of governmental actors in these debates (H 3).

- *Polarization hypothesis:* European integration has replaced "elite consensus" by a strong polarization of actors in public debates (H 4).

What are the driving forces of politicization?

In addition to the description of the development of politicization with the help of a new politicization index, we aim to examine its main driving forces in the European context. It is certainly beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive explanation of politicization. Rather, we provide a first cut at this complex and unsolved question by focusing on key factors emphasized in the scholarly literature, in particular by Hooghe and Marks (2009) and by de Wilde and Zürn (2012).

The first factor is *historical events and critical thresholds* in the integration process. According to de Wilde and Zürn (2012, p. 140), "the rising politicization of European integration is primarily a reaction to the increasing authority of the EU over time". In this context, major integration steps, but also national decisions on EU membership, may serve as triggers or focal points of political controversies. Such events represent milestones in the transfer of political authority to supranational institutions and in the territorial expansion of the EU. In the course of such key events, public attention paid to European issues is particularly high and there is discussion of major political alternatives on the future direction of European integration. In the literature on European integration, there is broad agreement

that the Maastricht Treaty represents such a critical threshold, as it led to a strong increase in the level and scope of integration (e.g., Hooghe and Marks, 2009, p. 21). Of course, there are other critical events that may serve as foci of political contestation, such as the debate on British membership to the EC in the early 1970s, the controversies on EU membership in Switzerland, or the conflicts over Turkey's EU membership in the mid-2000s. Statham and Trenz (2012), for example, argue that national debates on the Constitutional Treaty and the Euro crisis represent additional milestones in the politicization of the integration process. Applying a longer historical perspective, out data is sensitive to such critical events and thresholds. To sum up, we formulate an additional hypothesis on the relevance of critical thresholds in the integration process for its politicization:

- *Authority transfer hypothesis:* The politicization of European integration is driven by transfers of authority from the national to the European level. Because the Maastricht Treaty represents a very critical event in this process, we expect a significant and lasting increase of politicization in the period after the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (H 5).

The second factor discussed in the scholarly literature is the role of *political actors and their mobilization strategies*. Critical events may trigger political controversies; however, these conflicts only become relevant if political actors and organizations articulate them in public debates. In the electoral arena, political parties are the most relevant actors and the key question then is which parties are most conducive to a politicization of the integration process. More precisely, we ask what kind of positional and framing strategies by political parties are most conducive to politicization.

With respect to the politicization of Europe, the role of radical parties, in particular those on the right, is emphasized (e.g., Kriesi, 2007). According to Hooghe and Marks (2009, p. 14ff.), it is radical right parties which (a) emphasize European integration issues, (b) take a Eurosceptic or Euro-critical position, and (c) justify their criticism by referring to cultural

motives (e.g., the loss of national identity). Thus, by challenging the pro-European consensus and by framing Europe in a cultural-identitarian way, radical right-wing parties have been portrayed as the main drivers of the politicization of Europe. Empirical research by Kriesi et al. (2012; 2008) supports this claim as radical right-wing parties have been most successful in mobilizing on "nationalist" issues, such as immigration and European integration, in the electoral arena in Western Europe. Moreover, this research has shown that the restructuring of West European politics is the product of specific issues and thematic frames. By focusing on its cultural-identitarian consequences, conflicts over European integration reinforce a second, non-economic conflict dimension. This dimension cross-cuts the economic left-right dimension and introduces demands that can no longer be as easily accommodated by mainstream political parties. As Hooghe and Marks (2009) argue, the shift from an economic to a cultural or identity-related conflict might be the key factor driving the changes "from permissive consensus to constraining dissensus". We can summarize these arguments in two hypotheses:

- *Radical right hypothesis:* radical right-wing and Eurosceptic parties are the most important actors driving the politicization of Europe (H 6).

- *Cultural shift hypothesis:* The politicization of European integration is the product of the increasing importance of cultural and identity-related frames (H 7).

Design and methods

This article is based on original data that covers the full period from the early 1970s to the year 2010. This allows us to trace systematically the politicization of European integration since the years that Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) characterized as the period of "permissive consensus". We focus on national elections as they offer "windows of opportunity", where political conflict among political parties can be observed in its most intense form. Moreover, studying politicization in the *national* electoral arena sets very high stakes, as the European issues have to compete with other domestic political issues and events during the election campaign.

The present study covers five West European countries: Austria, Britain, France, Germany, and Switzerland.[2] In our selection strategy, we deliberately excluded East European countries because of their late membership to the EU. The countries selected differ with regard to important context factors that might shape the level and timing of politicization and that may help us to qualify the general hypotheses introduced earlier. Most importantly, the countries vary with respect to the duration and scope of their EU membership. While France and Germany are among the founding members of the European Communities, the UK was in the first group of accession countries (joining the EC in 1973); and Austria was in the third group of new members entering the EU in 1995. Among the four EU member states, there are also differences with regard to the scope of authority transferred to the EU; most significantly, because the UK is not a member of the "Euro zone" and the "Schengen area". Finally, Switzerland is not an EU member state but it is connected to the EU by means of Bilateral Treaties and EU membership was a major domestic issue in the past.

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[2] We focus on national parliamentary elections in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and the UK. In the French case, we decided to analyse the first round of presidential elections, because there they are considered to be more important.

There are various approaches for measuring issue positions and salience in party competition. For the topic of this article, we argue that it is most appropriate to look at national *public debates* in the *mass media* as they unfold during *election campaigns*. Media content reflects directly the *public* contestation related to European integration. It allows us to study systematically how the various parties compete with each other, how their competition resonates with the wider public, who is actually speaking as a party representative (e.g., executive politicians or parliamentarians), as well as which sub-issues related to European integration are actually debated.

Our content analysis rests on one national quality newspaper per country. We selected articles from *Die Presse* (Austria), *The Times (*Britain), *Le Monde* (France), *Süddeutsche* Zeitung (Germany) and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Switzerland). From these papers, we selected all articles that were published within two months before the relevant national Election Day and report on the electoral contest and national politics more generally. We then coded the selected articles with the help of a core sentence analysis (CSA) (e.g., Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings, 2001; Kriesi et al., 2008). A more detailed description of the strategy of data collection and descriptive statistics can be found in the Online Appendix to this article.

Following this type of relational content analysis, each grammatical sentence of an article is reduced to its most basic 'core sentence(s)', which contain(s) only the subject (the actor), the object (another object or a political issue) and the direction of the relationship between the two. The direction between subject and object is quantified using a scale ranging from -1 to +1, with three intermediary positions. CSA allows us to measure both the positions actors take on given issues and the salience they attribute to them. In this way we can determine how issue salience and actor polarization have developed over time. Thus, core sentences are an inductive means for capturing the full complexity of political statements without imposing strong theoretical expectations, such as *a priori* categories.

The three components of the concept of politicization have been operationalized as follows: *salience* is measured by the share of core sentences on European integration in per cent of all (potentially) coded core sentences related to any political issue. For the *expansion of actors* involved, we look at the share of non-governmental actors in per cent of all coded statements related to European integration. Note that this indicator is calculated on the basis of specific roles and functions of the actors and not on the party that the actors belong to. In other words, the measure indicates whether and to what extent actors in government (e.g., the agricultural minister or the prime minister) are joined by actors without governmental functions (e.g., politicians from the opposition, as well as parliamentarians or general secretaries from the governing parties). The indicator for *polarization* of party positions is based on Taylor and Hermann's (1971) index, which was originally designed to measure the degree of left-right polarization in a party system. To study positions towards European integration, we identified six categories of European issues based on the work of Bartolini (2005, p. 310) and Kriesi et al. (2012, p. 235ff.): general orientations, widening (enlargement), economic deepening, non-economic deepening, economic intervention, and non-economic intervention (for details, see Appendix). Our measure of polarization shows how strongly the actors' positions differ from one another on this set of six issues, weighting the issue-specific differences by the relative importance of each actor for the issue in question, and also weighting the relative importance of the different issues.[3] Since actor positions are always measured on scales ranging from -1 to +1, the distance to the average (and our measure of polarization) can range between 0 and 1. Empirically, the three indicators are clearly related to each other, but the correlation is far from perfect, ranging from 0.41

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[3] With respect to t*he polarization dimension,* the weights refer to the share of core sentences by one party in percent of all core sentence related to this issue, as well as to the share of one of the six European issue categories in percent of all core sentences related to *European* issues. By contrast, the measure used for the *salience dimension* refers to the share of core sentences related to all six European issues in percent of all core sentences relate to all kinds of political issues.

(salience and polarization) and 0.56 (salience and actor expansion) to 0.72 (polarization and actor expansion) (for details, see Online Appendix).

In a final step, we combine the different indicators in a single politicization index. For the calculation of the index, the salience measure runs from 0 to 100 (per cent), whereas both expansion of actors and polarization are based on a scale which ranges from 0 to 1. As a result, the final politicization index runs from 0 to 200.

Such an index (as well as the single indicators) immediately raises the question of how to interpret values. Recent controversies on the salience of European issues (e.g., de Vries 2007 and Green-Pedersen 2012) are partly due to missing benchmarks and low thresholds. Since any benchmark has a crucial impact on the interpretation, we constructed an *empirical benchmark* by using the data set of the Kriesi et al. project (2008, 2012). This data is based on the same coding strategy as the one employed in this article, but it covers information on all issues in an election campaign, which were aggregated into twelve issue categories (e.g. welfare, cultural liberalism, immigration or Europe). Thus, our benchmark allows us to compare European integration with other issues being debated during national election campaigns. Apart from the decision to compare Europe with other issues, we had to decide on a reasonable empirical cutting point. We opted for the *mean* value of the politicization index and its three sub-dimensions as our benchmark.[4] This allows us to distinguish the important from the less important issues in a given campaign (on average, five of the twelve issues covered by Kriesi et al. cross this threshold) (for more details on the calculation and examples, see Online Appendix).

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[4] In our opinion, a benchmark that takes into account only the top-issues sets the barrier too high. For example, this would be the case had we taken the mean plus a standard deviation as our benchmark (on average, only 1.5 issues cross this threshold in an election campaign). However, we discuss in the text when European integration issues would have also met this benchmark.

Empirical findings

Tracing politicization over time and across countries

The results of our *politicization index* for the individual countries and over time are highly instructive. They provide clear evidence that the European integration process has in fact been politicized. Thus, the findings support our politicization hypothesis (H 1), although with some major qualifications.

To begin with, the intensification of the European integration process in the 1980s was accompanied by a *significant increase of politicization in EU member states* (as well as in Switzerland until the 2000s), except the UK. We calculated three yardsticks to assess general trends: (a) the values for individual years over time (black curve in Figure 1), (b) linear trend lines (fitted values in Figure 1), and (c) average values for the pre- and post-Maastricht period respectively (Table 1). The fitted trend lines allow observing average increases over time in four of the five countries. The curves for Austria, France, and Germany show more or less steady increases since the mid-1980s. The UK represents the opposite case. For the UK, we observe declining average values; politicization peaked in the UK in 1997, and subsequently declined below the benchmark. In Switzerland, we also observe an increase over time. However, the trend line is somewhat misleading since there is a sharp decline of the politicization index in the 2000s after the latest and decisive national referendums on the issue.

[FIGURE 1]

Second, in most countries politicization is a rather *new phenomenon*. We observe some politicization in the early 1970s, but its level is way below the benchmark of other political issues. In the three continental EU member states, the level of politicization was only above our benchmark in the 2000s. More specifically, European integration became a relatively

(although not highly) politicized issue in the Austrian elections in 2002 and 2008, the French election in 2007, as well as in the German elections in 2005 and 2009. The exception is the UK, where controversies on membership in the EC made Europe a main issue in domestic politics in the early 1970s; and values for the two elections in 1974 are higher than for the most recent ones.

Third, we can observe a remarkable *divergence across countries*. In the years after 1992, the UK and Switzerland show the highest levels of politicization; followed by France and Austria. In Germany, by contrast, we observe the lowest average level of politicization in the post-Maastricht period (see Table 1). Again, this indicates that Europe has been politicized by political parties in all countries at some point in the 1990s and 2000s. However, the UK and Switzerland differ from the three continental EU member states with regard to the overall level of politicization.[5]

[TABLE 1]

A look at the *individual politicization dimensions* allows differentiating this general picture further. The average values are presented in Table 1, whereas graphs for the individual dimensions can be found in the Online Appendix to this article. Values for the *salience* indicator confirm the basic trend indicated by our combined index, although with some interesting qualifications. Except for the UK, the salience of European integration has been increasing on average in all countries. As a result, Europe is now a salient issue in all five countries. Moreover, post-Maastricht averages are clearly above the benchmark of national issues. This holds even for Germany, where politicization is comparatively low. The data on individual indicators also allows qualifying the development in some countries. In France, in

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[5] The British election in 1997 and the Swiss election campaigns in 1991 and 1999 are the only campaigns in which the values of our index indicate that Europe was clearly a *dominant* issue.

contrast to the trend of the politicization index, salience peaked in the mid-1990s and declined subsequently. Switzerland and the UK stand out because of extremely high salience values in the late 1990s. Summing up, the "salience hypothesis" (H 2) is confirmed for all countries, although with some qualifications.

Our indicator on the *expansion of actors* also confirms the politicization argument. Average values show an increase in all countries (with some qualifications for the UK and Switzerland) (see Table 1). This trend started in the 1980s, reflecting transfers of authority by the Single European Act and the establishment of a Single European Market. As expected, we find a stronger participation of non-governmental actors in the UK as early as the 1970s. If we take a look at pre-and post-Maastricht averages, the UK and Switzerland stand out because of their high values for the post-1992 period, which come close to the benchmark. In comparison, post-1992 values for Austria, France and Germany are significantly lower. However, we observe a strong increase in the post-Maastricht period in these countries; and in the late 2000s, values for the participation of non-governmental partisan actors hit the benchmark. Summing up, the "actor expansion hypothesis" (H 3) can be confirmed.

Finally, our *polarization* index shows that the politicization of Europe is accompanied by an increase in polarization on European issues in all countries. Except for the UK, where the 1970s were characterized by a strong polarization of the two major parties on issues of EC membership, the level of polarization was very low in that decade. Until the mid-1980s, we find clear evidence for the existence of an "elite consensus" among the major political parties. Post-1992 averages show that the intensification of the European integration process has produced an increasing polarization in each of our four EU member states (again, see Table 1). A look at individual countries reveals a very disparate picture, however. In France, polarization started in the 1980s; in Austria, it was a consequence of domestic controversies on the country's EU accession; in Switzerland, it was the result of fierce conflicts on EU

membership; in Germany, polarization was limited to the debate on Turkey's EU membership in the mid-2000s; and in the UK, we observe a sharp increase in polarization since the mid-2000s. Summing up, the "polarization hypothesis" (H 4) can be confirmed, although with major qualifications.

Taken together, our empirical analysis confirms most of our theoretical expectations. We not only find support for the general politicization hypothesis, but also for the hypotheses on individual dimensions. At the same time, the individual indicators provide additional insights into the structure of politicization, its timing and on country-specific variations. A comparison of individual indicators and our combined index confirms that the index should not be replaced by any individual indicator. Moreover, it apparently synthesizes the various indicators in a meaningful way, i.e., it reproduces the general pattern, which becomes visible when analysing each of these indicators separately; and at the same time it sensibly corrects for their idiosyncrasies.

Driving forces of change: critical events, radical right-wing parties, and cultural-identitarian frames

Having assessed the development of politicization of European integration, we now test our hypotheses on the driving forces of this process. We start with an analysis of critical events. At first sight, the general trend of politicization seems to confirm our authority transfer hypothesis. Except for the UK, the increase of politicization is more or less in line with the intensification of the transfer of political authority, which started in the mid-1980s and peaked in the 1990s with the Maastricht Treaty and subsequent treaty reforms. A comparison of average values for the *pre- and post-Maastricht* period reveals an increase of politicization in every country (see Table 1). The increase in politicization was not only a product of the Maastricht Treaty, however. Contrary to the expectations of the "political authority

hypothesis", the Maastricht Treaty was neither the starting point of politicization, nor its first peak. In three of the four EU member states, the politicization of the European integration process is a phenomenon of the 2000s rather than of the 1990s. In these countries, politicization peaked in the mid-2000s as the combined result of Eastern Enlargement, debates on the Constitutional Treaty, and of controversies surrounding Turkey's EU membership.

Since we observed remarkable cross-national variation, we went one step further and analysed the major events and issues that triggered the highest levels of politicization. For this purpose, we focused on the fourteen elections for which we observed a politicization index above the benchmark: Six of these elections were observed for the United Kingdom (02/1974, 10/1974, 1983, 1992, 1997, 2001), three for Switzerland (1991, 1995, 1999), two for Austria (2002, 2008) and Germany (2005, 2009), and one for France (2007) (again, see Figure 1). We find that six of these fourteen elections are more or less directly related to transfers of authority, the Maastricht Treaty and the Constitutional process in particular. These are the British campaigns in 1992, 1997, and 2001, in which the Maastricht Treaty and its main provisions, such as the Economic and Monetary Union and the Social Protocol, were highly controversial issues. The other three cases (i.e., France 2007, Austria 2008, and Germany 2009) were related to the failed Constitutional process and the subsequent debate over the Lisbon Treaty. But note that especially the polarization in the French 2007 and Austrian 2008 campaigns were also boosted by conflicts over Turkey's EU membership. The importance of membership conflicts becomes fully apparent in the other politicized elections. In the two UK elections in 1974, it was domestic conflicts on British EC membership; in the Swiss elections in the 1990s, Swiss membership of the EU and the country's Bilateral Treaties with the EU were the key issues in the campaigns. In Germany in 2005, the relatively high politicization of Europe was mostly due to conflicts over Turkey's EU membership. The Austrian election in 2002 does not represent a "post-Maastricht" effect either. In this case, high politicization resulted from debates about both Eastern enlargement and dissatisfaction with the EU caused

by the sanctions imposed on the country as a response to the inclusion of the radical right FPÖ in government in 2000.

In sum, our findings suggest a major qualification of the authority transfer hypothesis (H 5). The highest levels of politicization in the national electoral arena are not produced by the accumulated effects of authority transfers; rather they result from conflicts on membership. As we can see in the British case, these conflicts are not settled with a country's accession to the EU, they can be resuscitated at later stages of the integration process. Moreover, as the controversies on Turkey's EU membership in the mid-2000s demonstrate, membership conflicts can also be triggered by another country seeking membership in the EU. In this case, it is not national sovereignty in the first place, but national and European identity which is the cause of controversies.

Critical events alone do not produce politicization, they need actors who articulate and mobilize political conflicts. To see whether the presence of strong *radical right-wing challengers* boosts politicization, as suggested by our "radical right hypothesis" (H 6), we plotted their vote share against our politicization index.[6] As shown in graph 1 in Figure 2, our results do not indicate that the presence of strong populist radical challengers from the right necessarily increases the politicization of European integration. We find no strong linear effect between the vote share of populist radical right parties and the degree of politicization. This is in line with other research indicating that, in contrast to immigration issues, European integration has only been a salient issue for some of the populist radical right-wing parties (e.g., Bornschier, 2010; Ivarsflaten, 2008).

[FIGURE 2]

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[6] The vote share of radical right parties is taken as a proxy for their overall strength in the national party system.

Rather than attributing the politicization of European integration exclusively to new radical challengers, our data suggest that there are two different political mechanisms at work, which are based on different actor constellations. The first constellation is the one assumed by the "radical right hypothesis", i.e., a strong populist radical party mobilizes on European issues by advocating Eurosceptic positions. The politicized elections in Austria, Switzerland, and France are cases in point. However, our findings reveal a second actor constellation that contradicts the "radical right hypothesis". Politicization of Europe in national elections can also be high if major mainstream parties in the party system disagree with each other on the issue, and not just when major parties are opposed by fringe parties. This happened in the UK in the 1970s and the 1990s, where Europe became a main object of inter-party competition between the Conservatives and Labour. The German elections in 2005 and 2009 provide additional evidence in support of this second mechanism.

Finally, we examined whether politicization is driven by economic or cultural-identitarian political framing strategies. The results can be found in the second graph in Figure 2, which plots the share of cultural frames in per cent of all frames against the politicization index. Our results show a positive correlation (r=0.45) between the share of cultural framing strategies and the degree of politicization. In thirteen out of the fourteen campaigns in which Europe was relatively politicized, we observe an above-average share of cultural frames used by the parties to justify their positions towards European integration. This finding clearly supports the "cultural shift hypothesis" (H 7). While different actor constellations may be responsible for the politicization of Europe, the importance of cultural and identity-related justifications seems to play a role in both.

Conclusions

The results of our empirical analysis provide strong evidence that European integration has in fact been politicized, as argued in the scholarly literature (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Statham and Trenz, 2012, 2013; de Wilde and Zürn, 2012). Our main politicization hypothesis (H 1), and subsequent hypotheses on salience (H 2), expansion of actors (H3), and polarization (H4), are all supported, although with some qualifications. These results are particularly important for the current debate on the politicization of Europe, because we were able to observe this process systematically over a long period of time, in the most relevant political arena, and with a differentiated multi-dimensional concept. Moreover, we assessed the visibility, scope and intensity of this process with the help of an empirical benchmark related to domestic issues in national elections.

As a result, we get a nuanced picture of the politicization of Europe in the electoral arena. We found remarkable differences in the level, timing and patterns of politicization across countries which reflect different national histories with regard to European integration, and different positions in the integration process. This holds in particular for the UK and Switzerland, where EU membership was, for decades, a major issue of domestic political conflict and polarization. In these countries, European issues are fully integrated into the agenda of domestic politics, and in times when Europe is on the national political agenda, we observe very high levels of politicization. The three continental European EU member states are clearly distinct. In these countries, Europe has become a salient issue in the last two decades, too; however, politicization is significantly lower. These results are clear proof that it is necessary to differentiate between salience and politicization. While Europe has become a salient issue in all five countries, it has become highly politicized only in the UK and Switzerland in national elections. In France and Germany, but also in Austria, the degree of politicization was much lower on average. Moreover, politicization has developed differently

in the five countries under observation. While it has been increasing steadily in Austria, France and Germany in the 2000s, it sharply declined in the UK and Switzerland. This certainly indicates that, in all countries, political parties are no longer as reluctant to wake up the "sleeping giant" of European integration.

Our analysis of the driving forces of this politicization process provide mixed results for the hypotheses advanced in the scholarly literature. On average, politicization is higher in the post-Maastricht period, which supports the "authority transfer hypothesis" (H 5). However, it is only in the UK where we observe a clear-cut "Maastricht" effect in the 1990s. In the other countries, politicization in the last two decades has been linked rather to other events, such as the membership debates in Switzerland and Austria, or the controversies over Turkey's EU membership in France and Germany. Moreover, it seems as if the importance of new challengers, of populist radical right parties in particular, for the politicization of Europe has been overestimated in the literature (see Kriesi 2007; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012). In our data, the "radical right hypothesis" (H 6) finds only partial support. There is evidence for it in Switzerland (and to some extent, in Austria and France); however, we also observed very high levels of politicization if there is a conflict between major mainstream parties on European issues (see Green-Pedersen 2012). In both constellations, politicization is most likely if conflicts on European integration are framed in cultural terms by political parties. Thus, the "cultural shift hypothesis" (H 7) is supported.

In sum, our analysis suggests that there are two different political paths towards a politicization of Europe. One of these paths is dominated by populist radical parties from the right, while the other path is shaped by the conflict between mainstream parties in government and opposition. On both paths, membership conflicts play an important role and cultural-identitarian framing strategies are used. However, the two paths might nevertheless lead to quite different ends. The first path, dominated by Eurosceptic radical parties from the right,

most likely leads to ever tighter constraints on formal transfers of political authority to the EU and the inclusion of new member states. The political consequences of the second path are less clear. They may be both positive and negative, and the definitive outcome may depend on empirically contingent political actor constellations, actor strategies and the strength of political coalitions. For this reason, it would be important to examine these two paths in more detail in future research to better understand the political mechanisms that influence the politicization of European integration and its consequences. With respect to the causes and consequences of politicization, this article has made only a start for further in-depth studies, which, amongst others, should not look just at party contestation in the electoral arena but take into account the conflicts over European integration among different types of political actors and across various political arenas.

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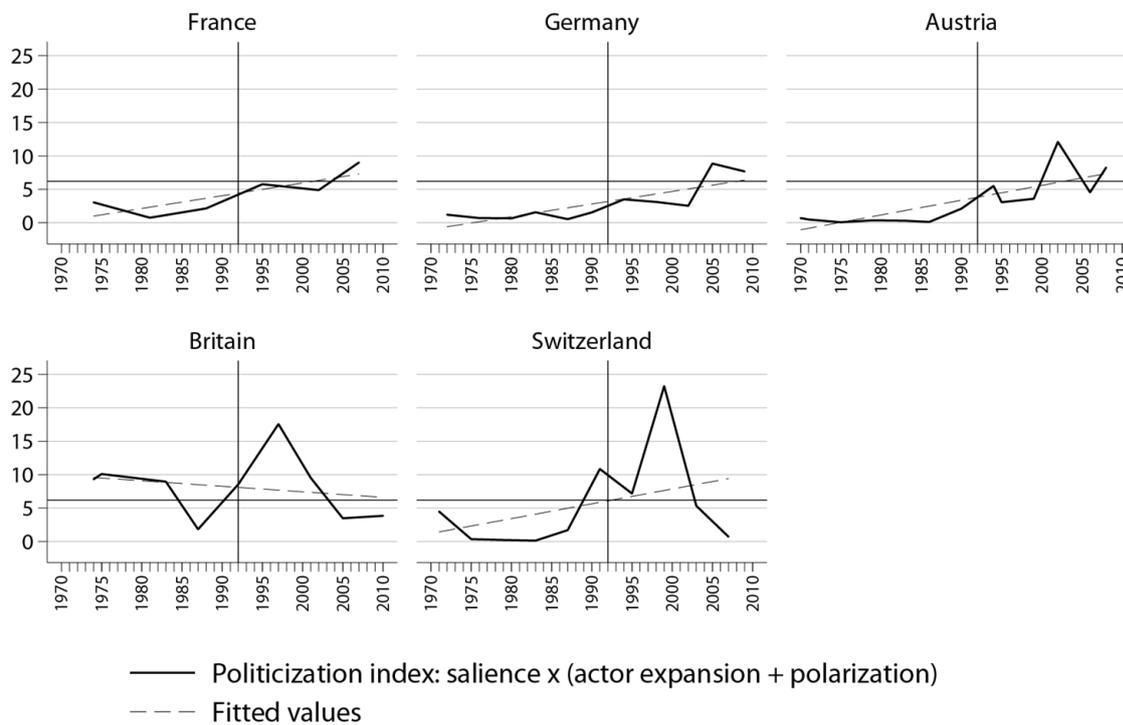
Acknowledgments

Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Politicization index by year and country

Politicization index: salience x (actor expansion + polarization)

- - - Fitted values

Notes: The figure shows the value of the politicization index by election. The dashed line shows the linear trend, while the black horizontal line at 6.24 indicates the benchmark for the politicization index. The black vertical line marks the enactment of the Maastricht Treaty.

Table 1: Average values for all years and post-Maastricht by country

	Politicization index			Salience			Expansion of actors			Polarization			Number of cases
	Range 0 to 200			Share of CS (%)			Share of non-exec. actors (%)			Range 0 to 1			CS /elections
	Pre-1992	Post-1992	All years	Pre-1992	Post-1992	All years	Pre-1992	Post-1992	All years	Pre-1992	Post-1992	All years	
UK	**7.8**	**8.6**	**8.1**	**11.5**	**11.1**	**11.3**	49.9	59.9	54.3	**0.14**	**0.23**	**0.18**	3,988 /9
Switzerland	3.0	**9.1**	5.4	4.6	**9.0**	6.4	38.2	59.4	46.7	0.05	**0.23**	0.12	1,973 /10
France	2.0	**6.6**	4.3	6.8	**9.8**	**8.3**	19.8	51.8	35.8	0.09	**0.17**	0.12	2,476 /6
Austria	0.6	**6.2**	3.2	3.3	**10.4**	6.4	22.7	47.7	34.3	0.00	0.12	0.06	2,872 /13
Germany	1.0	5.2	2.9	4.7	**8.4**	6.4	21.4	47.1	33.1	0.02	0.12	0.06	3,370 /11
Benchmark		6.2			8.2			60.0			0.13		

Notes: The values indicate averages per election campaign. Bold numbers indicate values above the benchmark. CS=core sentence

Figure 2: Driven by populist radical parties from the right or by cultural framing strategies?
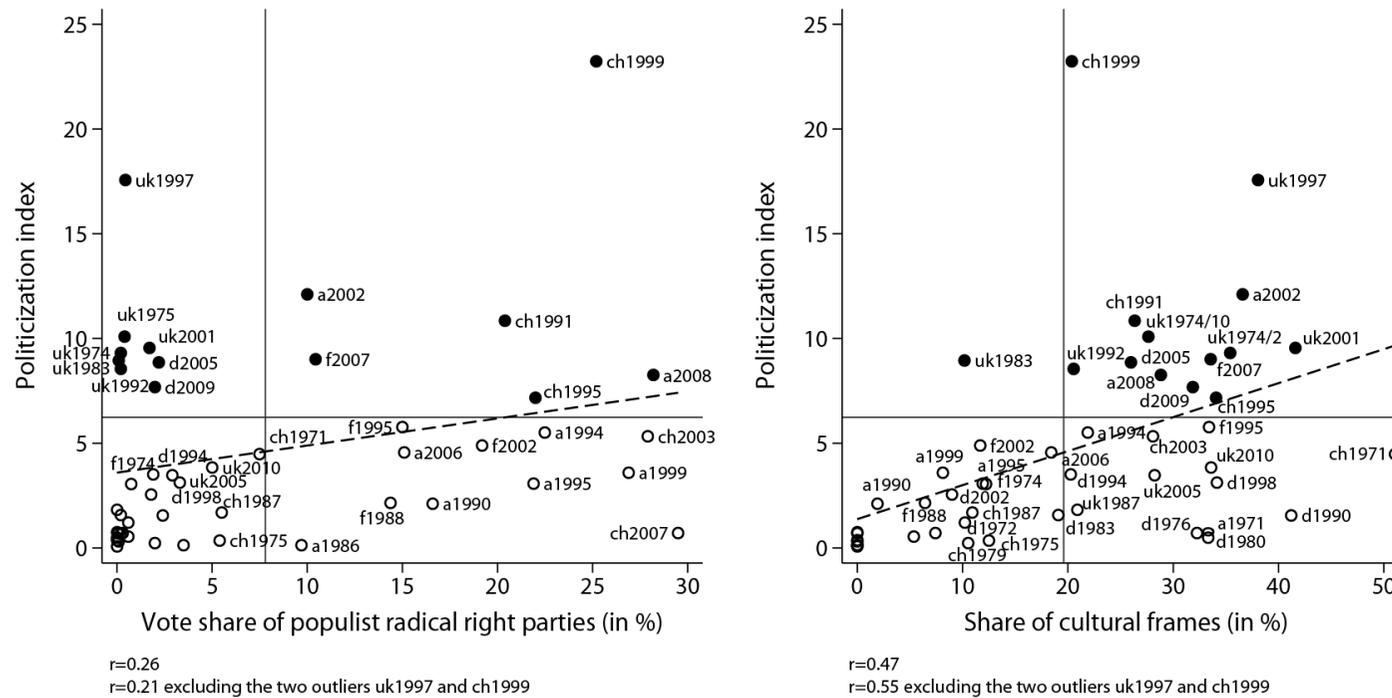
Notes: The horizontal solid line shows the average based on the benchmark data (6.24), and the vertical solid line the average vote share of populist radical right parties in the elections covered by the present dataset, and the average of cultural frames used to justify positions towards European integration (in percent of all frames coded). In this calculation, we did not consider the Austrian FPÖ before 1986 and the Swiss SVP before 1990 as populist radical right parties. However, this does not change the findings significantly.