cogitatio

ARTICLE

Game Changers: National Referendums and the Politicization of Europe

Swen Hutter [1,2]

[1] Department of Political and Social Sciences, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany
[2] Center for Civil Society Research, WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Germany

Correspondence: Swen Hutter (swen-hutter@fu-berlin.de)

Abstract

How do national referendums shape political contestation? This article explores this question by examining the politicization of European integration, a key "cleavage issue" restructuring political conflict across Europe. While national referendums are often assumed to intensify public contestation over European integration, systematic comparative evidence remains limited. This study contributes to the debate by analyzing 87 public debates on European integration across six Western European countries (Austria, Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland), including 12 debates with national referendums. The analysis draws on the PolDem dataset (Hutter et al., 2016), updated to include the Brexit referendum. Through comprehensive across-debate and within-debate analyses, the findings show that referendums are associated with heightened politicization, particularly by expanding actor participation and increasing issue salience. Civil society and other non-executive actors gain visibility in referendum contexts, reinforcing the view that referendums level the political playing field. Although referendums increase framing diversity, they do not consistently lead to more polarized or identity-focused debates involving radical parties, challenging the notion that referendums inherently drive cultural conflict. This study advances our understanding of how direct democracy shapes European integration debates and calls for further comparative research on institutional factors and endogenous conflict dynamics to better grasp the varied impacts of referendums on politicization.

Keywords

direct democracy; European integration; framing; post-functionalism; referendums

---

1. Introduction

This study examines how opening the direct-democratic arena—specifically through referendums—shapes the dynamics of political contestation over European integration, a critical "cleavage issue" alongside immigration that is restructuring the political space in Europe (e.g., Bornschier, 2010; de Vries, 2018; Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019a, 2019b; Kriesi et al., 2008). Ratification referendums "have been the paradigm examples of historical opportunities for publicly debating Europe. During referendum campaigns, the question of European integration is distinctly put on the political agenda, explicitly and deliberately opening the possibility for the politicization of Europe" (de Wilde & Zürn, 2012, p. 145). Referendums are seen as challenging the strategic control of mainstream party elites over the integration process; they "shift the initiative to citizens and single-issue groups, and disarm party elites" (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 20).

The literature reviewed in this article offers at least three reasons why referendums influence the "quantity" (i.e., the level) and "quality" (i.e., the type) of politicization. Specifically, referendums (a) direct public attention to European issues, (b) empower Eurosceptic challengers both within and outside the party system, and (c) reshape EU issue competition by imposing a binary choice and intensifying framing contests around a more restricted set of issues. Referendums are expected to create a distinct form of political conflict rather than simply amplifying existing debates on European integration. Following the failed Constitutional Process in the early 2000s, the avoidance of referendums has therefore been portrayed as a central strategy for restricting public contestation over Europe (see de Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Schimmelfennig, 2014; Statham & Trenz, 2013a, 2013b). Relatedly, the Brexit referendum has reinforced skeptical views of referendums among scholars (e.g., Offe, 2017) and citizens (e.g., Steiner & Landwehr, 2023).

Despite these expectations, we have limited comparative evidence on how referendums specifically impact the politicization of European integration. Most studies of European referendums are outcome-oriented, examining the referendum period to assess the stakes and explain voting results (see Atikcan, 2015; Franklin, 2002; Garry et al., 2005; Hobolt, 2006, 2009; Hug, 2002; Qvortrup, 2017; Svensson, 2002). Comparative efforts in the field have largely focused on why governments opt for non-mandatory referendums (e.g., Closa, 2007; Mendez et al., 2014; Oppermann, 2013; Posser, 2016), while studies adopting a politicization framework have tended to analyze electoral or parliamentary arenas. There have been few comparative analyses of referendum-driven politicization (see Fagan & van Kessel, 2023; Hoeglinger, 2016; Hurrelmann et al., 2013; Hutter et al., 2016; Statham & Trenz, 2013a, 2013b; Vetters et al., 2009). These studies have often focused on a limited number of prominent cases and have yielded inconclusive results, especially regarding the types of challengers and issue-framing contests magnified in direct democratic contexts. Statham and Trenz's (2013a, 2013b) analysis of the Constitutional Process, for instance, examines the effects of president Chirac's decision to hold a referendum by comparing public debates in France, Britain, and Germany and breaking these debates down into three phases (pre-constitution, drafting, and ratification).

This article's primary contribution is empirical, enhancing our understanding of how referendums affect the politicization of European integration by building on and expanding the work of Hutter et al. (2016). I reanalyze the PolDem dataset on European public debates from the early 1970s to the euro crisis—originally collected by Hutter et al. (2016) and publicly available (https://poldem.eui.eu)—and added the pivotal Brexit debate. The analysis covers 87 national public debates across six Western European countries—Austria, Britain, France,

Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland—including 12 debates involving a national referendum on membership, treaty reforms, or specific policy decisions related to European integration.

While Hutter et al. (2016) established a positive correlation between referendums and politicization, their approach was limited to what I term an across-debate analysis, focusing on general levels of politicization without differentiating among types of challengers or the specific nature of EU issue competition in referendum contexts. My study advances their findings by systematically examining a broader set of dependent variables and integrating both across-debate and within-debate comparisons, similar in concept to Statham and Trenz (2013a, 2013b) but encompassing a larger set of cases. In the across-debate analysis, I assess differences in the quantity and quality of debates over integration steps involving referendums compared to those without. By contrast, the within-debate comparisons track the progression of public debate over time within each of the 12 integration steps that included a referendum. By examining key stages, or *critical dates*, this approach clarifies how debates evolve, leading up to and during the referendum campaign itself. The added value of combining these approaches lies in their distinct perspectives: the across-debate comparison assesses referendums' broad impact on politicization across multiple cases, while the within-debate comparison isolates the unique dynamics a referendum introduces within a single integration step. This helps mitigate endogeneity concerns by showing whether politicization specifically spikes during referendum campaigns. Together, they offer a more nuanced understanding of both the structural and temporal influences of referendums on public debate.

Overall, the findings from the two types of comparisons confirm that referendums significantly heighten the politicization of European integration by expanding actor participation and elevating issue salience. However, the type or quality of politicization is not as uniformly affected by national referendums. Most importantly, claims that referendums uniformly lead to a more polarized or identity-focused debate find limited support. This nuanced outcome challenges the view that referendums inherently reinforce divisive cultural narratives within European integration debates.

This article is structured as follows: I start by presenting the arguments and previous findings on the effects of referendums on public debates. Next, I discuss the data and measurement issues. The empirical analysis is divided into two parts. The first part compares debates with and without referendums (the across-debate analysis), while the second part focuses on cases with referendums, tracing the evolution from the start of the integration step to the final weeks of the referendum campaign (the within-debate analysis). Finally, I summarize the main findings of the article and avenues for further research.

2. Why and How Should Referendums Affect the Politicization of Europe?

It is important to clarify what is meant by politicization, as the term is used in various contexts and carries different meanings. This article adopts an understanding of politicization based on Schattschneider's (1957, 1975/1960) seminal work, which views conflict as the core of politics. More specifically, it aligns with the emerging consensus in the study of EU politics that highlights three interrelated dimensions of politicization: issue salience, actor expansion, and polarization (see de Wilde, 2011; de Wilde et al., 2016; Hutter et al., 2016 for more extensive discussions).

The first dimension, *issue salience*, refers to the visibility of an issue in public debates; topics frequently highlighted by political actors are considered politicized. This approach follows Green-Pedersen (2012) and

Guinaudeau and Persico (2013), who argue that politicization is best examined through the lens of salience. The second dimension, *actor expansion*, concerns the range of participants in the debate. As Schattschneider (1975/1960, p. 2) notes: "the number of people involved in any conflict determines what happens." If only a narrow range of actors engage publicly, the issue remains weakly politicized. This analysis considers how far other actors join dominant executive figures in EU integration debates. The third dimension, *polarization*, relates to the intensity of conflict on the issue. For an issue to be polarized, actors must take starkly opposing positions, resulting in well-defined opposing camps (de Wilde, 2011; Hoeglinger, 2016). The most intense polarization occurs when two camps advocate entirely opposing views with similar intensity.

Why might national referendums affect both the level and type of politicization around European integration? Scholars argue that referendums impact political conflicts through at least three mechanisms, influencing the visibility of an issue in public debates, the types of participants, and the dynamics of issue competition.

First, referendums are expected to draw public attention to specific issues. They enable what Kriesi (2003, p. 202) calls a "quasi-institutional going public," contrasting with national election campaigns where mainstream parties can more easily de-emphasize European issues if they are divided or disconnected from public opinion (Green-Pedersen, 2012; Hellström & Blomgren, 2016; Van der Eijk et al., 1996). During referendums, parties are in any case compelled to take a public stance on the issue. While debate intensity may vary (Hobolt, 2009, p. 95), referendums place Europe in the public spotlight, particularly in contexts where referendums are rare.

Existing comparative studies support this claim. The French and Dutch referendums on the European Constitution spurred highly salient debates on Europe from 2004 to 2006 (Hoeglinger, 2016, p. 46), an effect seen not only in these two referendum-holding countries but also in the other four Western European countries included in the study (i.e., Austria, Britain, Sweden, and Switzerland). Similar findings have emerged from analyses of the French referendum on the European Constitution by Statham and Trenz (2013a, 2013b) and Vetters et al. (2009). Hurrelmann et al. (2013) also noted that debates over the Nice and Lisbon Treaties were more intense in Ireland (which held referendums) than those around the European Constitution, which was not put to a referendum. Similarly, Hutter et al. (2016) observed a strong positive correlation between levels of politicization and whether integration steps culminated in national referendums.

Second, referendums are expected to increase the visibility of challengers from both within and outside the party system. The direct-democratic arena offers more opportunities for peripheral actors, such as social movements and civil society organizations (for the Swiss case, see Hoeglinger, 2008; Kriesi & Bernhard, 2011; Kriesi & Wisler, 1996). Unlike electoral campaigns, referendums typically impose fewer access restrictions, and the binary nature of competition ensures representation for both sides, creating a level playing field between outsiders and established political actors (de Vreese, 2006). In EU integration contexts, this dynamic often benefits Eurosceptic voices from party fringes. However, there is debate over referendums' effects on party visibility; some argue that parties are less central in direct democratic settings, while others emphasize their roles in campaigns and voter influence (e.g., Budge, 2001; Colombo & Kriesi, 2017).

Hurrelmann et al. (2013, p. 522) observed a stronger presence of civil society and party actors in Irish referendum debates, attributing this to the referendum itself. Hoeglinger (2016) also noted increased

visibility for civil society actors during referendums in France, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. However, party actor visibility increased only in France and the Netherlands but not in Switzerland. By contrast, radical parties—particularly from the populist right—gained visibility at the expense of mainstream parties in all countries (see also Petithomme, 2011). During the French referendum on the European Constitution, Statham and Trenz (2013a, p. 92) observed a "limited awakening of civil society," largely overshadowed by intensified intra-party contestation, especially within the Socialist Party.

Third, referendums can alter the nature of EU issue competition. Unlike routine periods, referendums present voters with a binary choice—yes or no—typically narrowing the set of debated issues but amplifying divergent interpretations and justifications. In Gamson's (2004, p. 245) terms, referendums intensify "framing contests." Actors must adopt frames that attract media attention and influence voters while countering opposing frames (Hänggli & Kriesi, 2010). This dynamic fosters framing contests beyond the control of any single actor, contributing to "campaign dynamics" (Hobolt, 2009). Post-functionalist integration theory suggests that referendums not only intensify framing contests but may also bias these contests toward identity politics (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 20). Referendums, therefore, are likely to shift conflicts toward identitarian and cultural frames, where pro-European mainstream parties typically rely on economic and utilitarian arguments while more Eurosceptic forces, especially from the right, advocate a nationalist critique of European integration (see Helbling et al., 2010; Hutter et al., 2016).

Demand-side studies highlight cultural factors in direct-democratic votes in Europe (e.g., Clarke et al., 2017; Hobolt, 2016 on Brexit). However, comparative research offers limited insights into how referendums influence framing diversity and bias strategies in public debates in Europe. The most systematic contribution comes from Statham and Trenz's (2013a, 2013b) comparative study on the European Constitution debate. They found that framing contests intensified during the French referendum campaign but did not observe a shift toward cultural-identitarian arguments. Instead, while the government used cultural arguments to support the Treaty, dissent within the Socialist Party centered on an economic narrative of a "Social Europe" (see also Crespy, 2008).

I propose three guiding hypotheses about how access to the direct democratic arena is likely to affect the politicization of European integration. Given the design of this study, these hypotheses are cautiously framed as associations rather than strict causal claims. The first and baseline hypothesis focuses on the level of politicization, suggesting that all dimensions of politicization (salience, actor expansion, and polarization) are likely to increase in referendum contexts. In contrast, the second and third hypotheses focus more specifically on the types of challengers and the dynamics of EU issue competition that are expected to be amplified.

1. *Level hypothesis*: National referendums on European integration are associated with increased politicization in public debates, reflected in higher issue salience, expanded participation of non-executive actors, and increased polarization with clear opposing stances.

2. *Challenger hypothesis*: National referendums on European integration are associated with increased visibility of non-mainstream actors in public debates, including Eurosceptic voices from party fringes, social movements, and civil society organizations. This hypothesis suggests that the open and binary nature of referendums levels the playing field, allowing peripheral actors to engage more visibly and

compete with established governmental elites, thereby diversifying the range of voices represented in the debate.

3. *Issue competition hypothesis*: National referendums on European integration are associated with shifts in EU issue competition, intensifying framing contests around a narrower set of issues. Furthermore, referendums are associated with the increasing prominence of cultural-identitarian frames over economic or other utilitarian arguments, reflecting a reorientation towards more value-based and polarized narratives in line with post-functionalist integration theory.

The literature review highlights that while expectations about referendums boosting politicization align with prior findings, they remain largely untested across a broad range of cases, especially beyond the well-studied referendums on European integration of the 2000s. Although previous research (including Hutter et al., 2016) shows that referendums typically increase the salience of European issues, the findings are less conclusive regarding other aspects, such as actor diversity and issue framing. These dynamics have not yet been examined within a framework that combines systematic comparisons across and within debates—a gap this study seeks to fill.

3. Design and Data

The empirical analysis in this article covers 87 public debates on major integration steps in six Western European countries (Austria, Britain, France, Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland) from the early 1970s to 2016. The dataset, collected as part of the Politicization of Europe project by Hutter et al. (2016) and updated to include the 2016 British vote on EU membership, is publicly available at the PolDem (https:// poldem.eui.eu; poldem-debate_eu; including further details on data collection strategies). Country selection was based on pragmatic reasons, as manually collecting comprehensive data on public debate intensity and content is time-consuming. However, previous analyses of the data show that the sample controls for several factors influencing levels of politicization in integration debates, especially the duration and scope of EU integration. France and Germany were founding members of the European Community; the UK joined in 1973, Austria and Sweden in 1995, and Switzerland, a non-EU member with its "semi-direct democracy," provides additional insights into the relationship between national referendums and politicization.

The data includes debates on all major European treaty reforms, both successful and unsuccessful, such as the Single European Act, Maastricht, Amsterdam, Nice, the European Constitutional Treaty, and the Lisbon Treaty. It also covers every enlargement round since the 1970s—First Enlargement, Southern Enlargement I & II, EFTA Enlargement, Eastern Enlargement I & II—as well as debates on Turkey's EU accession and nine country-specific debates from Austria, Britain, Sweden, and Switzerland. These debates centered on critical decisions regarding each country's relationship with the EC/EU, particularly their integration into the Single Market or Economic and Monetary Union, the Free Trade Agreement in the early 1970s (Austria and Switzerland), membership of the European Economic Area (EEA) in the mid-1990s (Austria, Sweden, and Switzerland), the two bilateral treaties between Switzerland and the EU, the Swedish referendum on the introduction of the Euro in 2003, and the UK's decision to leave the EU.

This sample is well-suited for the study as it includes 12 cases where a national referendum determined the outcome of an integration step. These cases cover all the countries under scrutiny except Germany, which has

not held such a vote. The sample represents only 12 of the more than 60 national referendums on European integration held, from the first referendum in France in 1972 through 2024 (del Monte, 2022). While not exhaustive, this sample offers important variation across time periods, types of institutional settings (including the Swiss case with its mandatory referendums), member and non-member states, and the specific issues at stake. As shown in Table 1, the sample includes all three types of referendums on European integration identified by Hobolt (2009): membership, treaty ratifications, and single policy decisions. As Hobolt noted, these differences in referendum content can impact supply-side strategies and shape public opinion during direct democratic campaigns.

The study's main contribution to the literature on how referendums shape the level and type of politicization is empirical, as it goes beyond analyses of just one or a few prominent cases (see Section 2). Moreover, it substantially advances the work of Hutter et al. (2016), not only by including the pivotal case of Brexit but also by (a) systematically disentangling the different components of politicization and evolving issue competition and, most importantly, (b) by combining across-debate and within-debate comparisons. In the across-debate comparison, the unit of analysis is the national debate surrounding a specific integration step, with the central question being how the public debates for the 12 steps involving a national referendum differ in quantity and quality from the remaining 75 debates without a referendum. This part of the analysis focuses on the net effect of the availability of the direct democratic arena across integration steps.

Table 1. Overview of integration debates with national referendums.

Country	Integration Step	Year of referendum	Abbr.	Type	EC/EU member	Index	Salience	Polarization	Actor expansion
UK	Brexit	2016	brexit	M	1	2.19	2.47	0.18	0.71
FR	Maastricht	1992	ma	T	1	1.87	1.96	0.26	0.70
FR	First Enlargement	1972	fenl	I	1	1.54	1.54	0.30	0.70
AT	EFTA-Enlargement	1994	efta	M	0	1.45	2.48	0.10	0.49
CH	EEA	1992	eea	M	0	1.27	1.52	0.10	0.73
CH	Bilateral Treaties II	2005	bt2	T	0	0.87	0.81	0.35	0.71
UK	First Enlargement	1975	fen	M	1*	0.84	1.07	0.16	0.62
SE	EFTA-Enlargement	1994	efta	M	0	0.71	0.92	0.19	0.58
FR	Constitution	2005	tec	T	1	0.70	0.69	0.31	0.71
CH	Free Trade Agr.	1972	fta	T	0	0.62	0.83	0.27	0.48
SE	Eurozone	2003	euro	I	1	0.61	0.49	0.38	0.86
CH	Bilateral Treaties I	2000	bt1	T	0	0.44	0.59	0.11	0.62

Notes: The table lists the 12 public debates involving a national referendum; it also shows the type of issue according to Hobolt's (2009) classification (M = Membership; T = Treaty reform; I = Single issue) and the different indicators for the politicization of the domestic public debate; the steps are sorted according to the overall index of politicization; * involves the referendum in 1975 when the UK was already a member state.

For the within-debate comparisons, I examined the over-time dynamics across the 12 integration steps that included a national referendum. This approach is feasible because integration steps and their associated public debates are not confined to a single event but unfold over extended periods. Consequently, the data include information on public debates at several key sub-decisions within each integration step. These *critical dates* include (a) the initiation of the project (e.g., formal application for membership or a European summit), (b) the European Commission's response (for enlargement rounds only), (c) the start of negotiations, (d) the drafting and signing of a treaty, and (e) the national adoption phase (either by parliament or referendum). For each critical date, public debates were coded over three weeks. The central question for the within-debate comparison is then how the debate during the actual referendum campaign differed from earlier phases of public contestation within the integration step, while also capturing differences among the 12 referendum cases.

The within-debate comparisons also partly address the potential endogeneity problem by isolating the impact of the referendum campaign on the politicization of the entire integration step. If the causal argument were that politicization leads to referendums (i.e., highly politicized debates prompt national referendums), significant differences between pre-referendum and referendum phases would not be expected—especially in cases where holding a national referendum was uncertain from the start (as in the three French cases). This analysis therefore takes a first step in testing the hypothesized links between national referendums and features of public debate. However, fully demonstrating causal mechanisms would require further (qualitative) tracing of these processes.

The public debates are examined using a manual relational content analysis of media reports. As Statham and Trenz (2013b, p. 3) state: "Politicisation requires the expansion of debates from closed elite-dominated policy arenas to wider publics, and here the mass media plays an important role by placing the contesting political actors in front of a public." The selected news reports on the different integration steps come from one quality newspaper per country: *Die Presse* (Austria), *The Times* (Britain), *Le Monde* (France), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (Germany), *Svenska Dagbladet* (Sweden), and *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (Switzerland; on the selection and sampling strategy, see Hutter et al., 2016, p. 45–48). Articles were coded using the core sentence approach, originally developed by Kleinnijenhuis et al. (1997) and further developed by Kriesi et al. (2008), where each grammatical sentence is split into subject-object relations and manually annotated by trained coders. The PolDem data from Hutter et al. (2016) captures relations between actors and European integration issues (actor–issue sentences) and between actors themselves, with a thematic link to European integration issues (actor–actor sentences). No restrictions were made with respect to the type of actors, so domestic and international actors as well as partisan and non-partisan actors were coded. However, both relation types (actor–issue and actor–actor) were coded only if they related to European integration, encompassing general orientations towards European integration as well as more specific constitutive and policy-related European issues.

The actors and issues were coded in great detail, with variables on the type, party affiliation (if available), and individual name (if available) of the actors, as well as codes for the specific issue (including a string variable). The direction of the relationship was quantified on a scale from -1 to $+1$: -1 indicating a critique or rejection, and $+1$ indicating an affirmative evaluation. In addition to the actors, issues, and their relationship, the frames used by the actors to justify their issue positions were also coded. These justification frames are at the level of core sentences, just like the actors and issues. Because actors sometimes provide different arguments for their positions, the dataset contains up to three such frames for each actor–issue sentence. The article focuses

on political conflict among domestic actors, so the sample is limited to statements involving domestic subject actors. The empirical analysis is based on approximately 17,000 core sentences and 10,000 frames.

How are the different features of politicization measured? To assess the *level* of politicization, I focused on the three dimensions emphasized in the theoretical section: salience, polarization, and actor expansion (see Table 2). Salience is measured by the average number of articles coded per selected day. Actor expansion is assessed by the share of non-governmental actor statements (e.g., opposition leaders, parliamentary spokespersons, and civil society actors) as a percentage of all coded statements. This variable is assigned on the basis of the specific roles and functions of the coded actors and not on the basis of party affiliation. For example, ministers of the national government are coded as executive actors, while statements by members of parliament or party leaders without an executive function are coded as non-executive. Polarization is measured using an adapted version of Taylor and Hermann's (1971) index of ideological polarization, ranging from 0 (no polarization) to 1, focusing on differences in actors' positions on six EU issues.

I relied on previous work by Hutter et al. (2016) to distinguish between the six EU issues: (a) basic or general orientations towards the EU, which refer to positive or negative positions towards European integration and the EU in general; (b) specific constitutive issues related to the nature of the EU polity, including membership, competences, and decision-making rules, further divided into three sub-categories: *widening*, pertaining to the horizontal dimension of European integration, most notably the accession of new member states; *economic deepening*, relating to the level and scope of integration in economic fields; *non-economic deepening*, relating to the scope and level of integration in non-economic fields; (c) policy-related issues, which are comparable to those at the national level (such as welfare or immigration policy) and cover policy questions in areas where European institutions are active. The policy issues are divided into two sub-categories: *economic intervention*, relating to whether and how Europe should exercise its competences in economic policy fields; and *non-economic intervention*, concerning whether and how Europe should exercise its competences in non-economic policy fields. Finally, the three indicators for salience, actor expansion, and polarization were combined into an overall index by multiplying salience with the sum of the other two dimensions (for a more detailed discussion on the three measures and the combined index, see Hutter et al., 2016, pp. 301–304).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of dependent variables.

Measure	N	Mean	Std. dev.	Min	Max
Politicization index	87	0.28	0.42	0.00	2.19
Salience	87	0.41	0.51	0.00	2.48
Polarization	87	0.10	0.12	0.00	0.42
Actor expansion	87	0.39	0.25	0.00	1.00
Political parties (share)	87	0.28	0.19	0.00	0.75
Radical parties (share)	87	0.09	0.14	0.00	1.00
Civil society (share)	87	0.11	0.13	0.00	0.58
Intra-party dissent	87	0.27	0.22	0.00	0.80
Issue diversity	87	1.02	0.47	0.00	1.55
Frame diversity	87	1.35	0.67	0.00	2.05
Cultural frames (share)	87	0.26	0.18	0.00	0.67

To examine non-governmental challengers that may gain visibility in referendum campaigns, I analyzed the presence of (a) party challengers from the radical left or right and (b) the presence of various civil society actors (e.g., interest associations, social movements, and experts). These shares indicate their visibility relative to all coded subject actors, including governmental actors. Furthermore, I assessed whether we also observe more intra-party dissent, measured by a weighted standard deviation of party positions on the detailed issues coded for each integration step, weighted by the relative visibility of the parties. This measure reflects how much contestation around European integration is not only due to conflicts between different parties and various other types of actors but also due to conflicts among members of the same party. Robustness checks using dissent only within mainstream parties did not lead to different results from those presented below.

Changes in the issue of competition were measured with three indicators. The indicators for issue and frame diversity use Shannon's H entropy score, commonly applied in agenda-setting research to assess the concentration or dispersion of attention across categories (Boydstun et al., 2014). Issue diversity was calculated using the same set of six issue categories introduced above for the polarization measure. The entropy score ranges from 0 (debate concentrated on a single category) to a maximum of 1.8 (equal distribution across the six-issue categories). Finally, frames—the justifications for issue positions—were coded using a theoretically derived system of categories. The coders were not allowed to create new types of frames but had to group the observed justifications into existing categories (including a "not classifiable" category).

At the most aggregate level, the specific categories used by Hutter et al. (2016) can be grouped into three major categories: *cultural frames* and *utilitarian frames*, the latter being subdivided into *economic* and *other utilitarian frames* (see Helbling et al., 2010). Utilitarian frames consist of arguments referring to particular interests, as well as to efficiency and rational cost-benefit calculations. Cultural frames, by contrast, refer to ideas and values that are considered by the actors to be inherent to a particular community. Among them are nationalistic-identitarian frames, which argue for a culturally homogenous society in order to uphold an exclusive national identity, or nationalistic-institutional frames, which refer to embedded institutions such as direct democracy or constitutional principles (such as neutrality in foreign and security policy). However, cultural frames also cover arguments related to multicultural-inclusive (e.g., cultural openness and the peaceful coexistence of cultural and religious groups) or moral-universalist values (e.g., basic civil rights, political rights, or international solidarity). For the following analysis, frame diversity was again calculated with Shannon's H entropy score based on 10 specific frame categories. Therefore, the resulting score ranges from 0 (debate concentrated on a single frame) to a maximum of 2.3 (equal distribution across all ten frame categories). The emphasis on cultural frames is measured by the percentage of cultural frames relative to all frames.

4. Empirical Findings

4.1. Across-Debates: How Do European Integration Debates With and Without Referendums Differ?

Do referendums systematically affect the quantity and quality of politicization in debates over European integration? To address this question, I compared integration debates with and without referendums. Figures 1 to 3 show the mean values of the indicators for these two categories. I also conducted OLS regressions with debate characteristics as dependent variables, including and excluding country dummies to account for variations across and within countries, and checked whether the results hold for cases with a

certain number of coded core sentences involving domestic actors and for EU member states only. As the results align with the descriptive statistics in the figures, a summary and the full models of these regressions are reported in the Supplementary File.

The findings in Figure 1 support the expectation that referendums on European integration increase the level of politicization in public debates, confirming the *level hypothesis* (see also the regression analysis in Tables A1 and A2 in the Supplementary File). The average values of all three dimensions of politicization (salience, polarization, and actor expansion) were significantly higher in debates that ended with a referendum than in those that did not—whether we consider all countries and steps or just EU member states. Statistically significant relationships between "holding a referendum" and the intensity of politicization were observed in all models. These findings confirm theoretical expectations and align with earlier studies based on smaller samples.

Moreover, by distinguishing the different dimensions, I show that the direct-democratic arena is associated with a much higher salience of contestation in the press, leading to greater visibility for public debates on European integration. The explanatory power of the referendum variable is particularly high for salience (r^2 is above 0.42), but there were also significant increases in the polarization of positions and the presence of non-executive actors in these debates (r^2 between 0.12 and 0.27; see Table A2 in the Supplementary File). This is not surprising given that the three measures are not independent of each other, with correlation coefficients of r = 0.36 for salience and polarization, r = 0.44 for salience and actor expansion, and r = 0.64 for polarization and actor expansion. However, the moderate correlation coefficients and the results presented here show that it is useful to look at them individually and see which dimension is boosted the most in the context of a referendum.
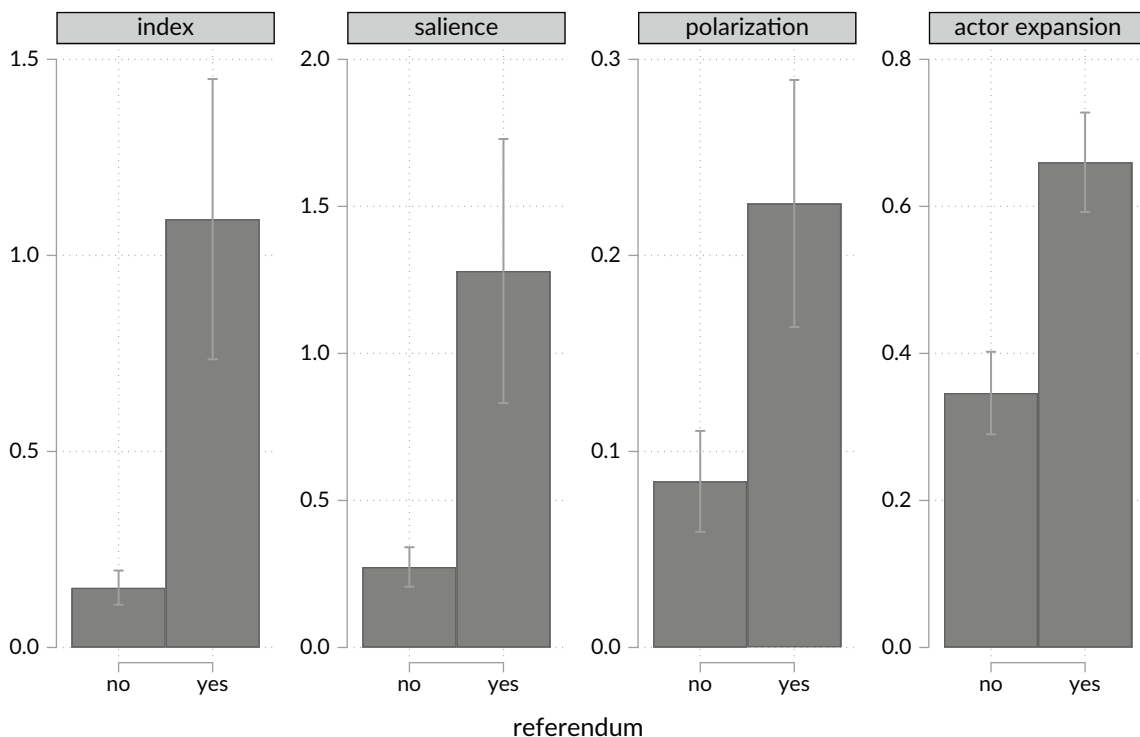

Figure 1. Politicization levels in European integration debates, with and without referendums ($N = 87$).

The results shown in Figure 2 largely confirm the *challenger hypothesis*, which posits that various types of non-governmental challengers become more visible in public debates during referendums. The average values for all three outcome variables are higher when a debate involves a referendum; governmental elites face more competition from civil society actors and increasing intra-party dissent. However, the results for radical parties diverged from expectations; while their visibility increased, the change is not statistically significant, as indicated by the confidence intervals shown in Figure 2 and the results of the regression analyses (see Tables A1 and A3 in the Supplementary File). This suggests that, contrary to the hypothesis, referendums do not necessarily lead to a significantly higher presence of radical parties in public debates on European integration.
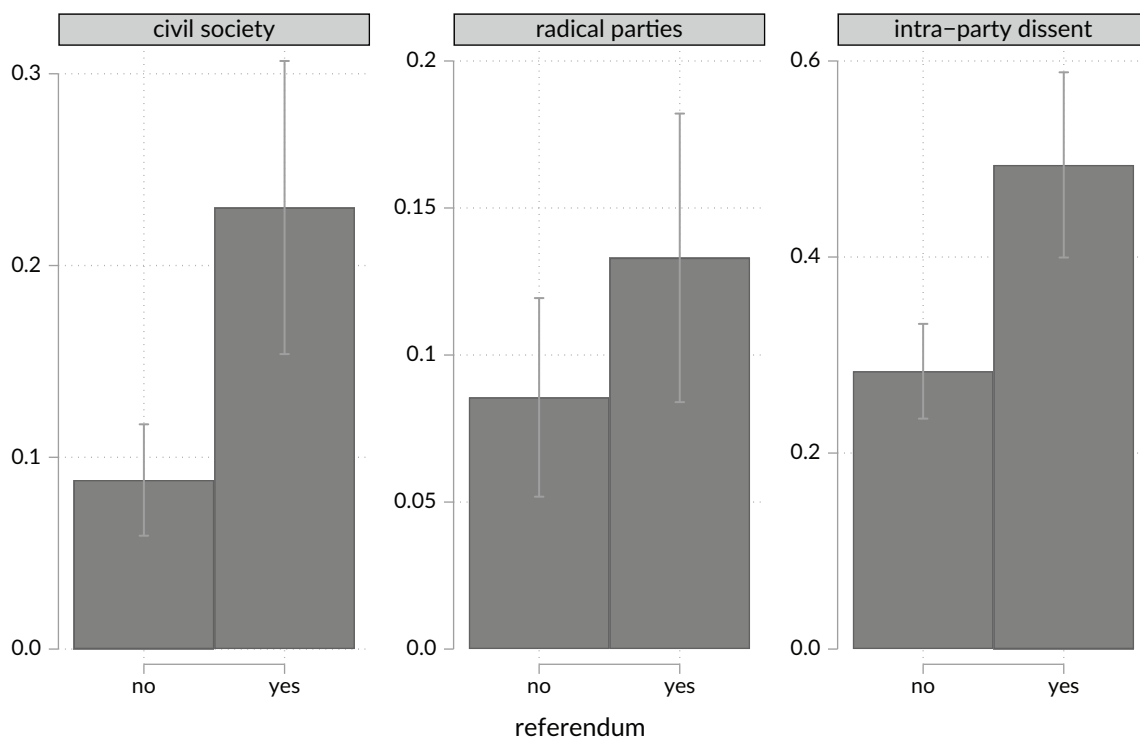

Figure 2. Visibility of actors and intra-party dissent in European integration debates, with and without referendums ($N = 87$).

The findings on issue competition provide mixed support for the *issue competition hypothesis*, making it the least supported among the three hypotheses (see Figure 3 and the regression analysis presented in Table A1 and A4 in the Supplementary File). Although "referendum debates" do not consistently exhibit a stronger focus on specific issues, there is evidence of increased framing contests. Actors diverged more significantly in how they justified their positions towards Europe in debates with a referendum, resulting in higher frame dispersion. This supports part of the hypothesis—referendums enhance framing contests in public debates, as different actors employ a wider range of frames to shape public opinion. While the descriptive data indicates an average increase in the use of cultural frames in debates involving referendums as well, this result is mainly driven by some outliers and is therefore not statistically significant, as indicated by the large confidence interval in the last panel in Figure 3 and the regression analyses in Table A4 in the Supplementary File. Consequently, the expectation that referendums would substantially shift the logic of issue competition toward cultural-identitarian arguments is not supported.
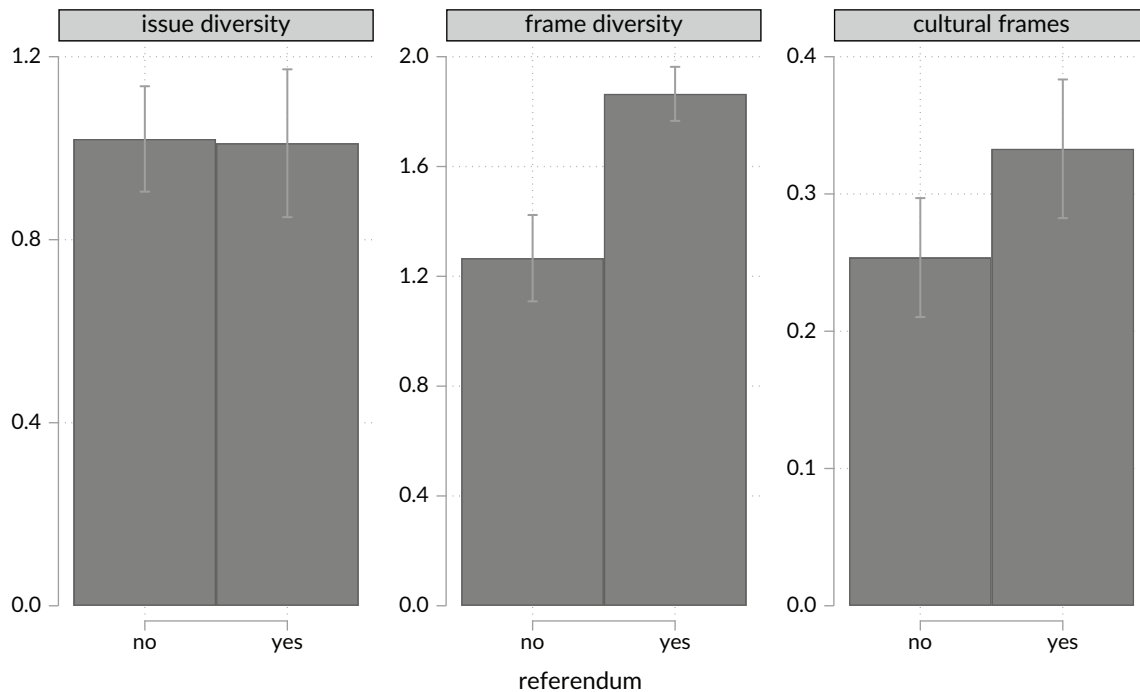
Figure 3. Issue focus and framing contests in European integration debates, with and without referendums (*N* = 87).

4.2. Within-Debates: How do European Integration Debates Differ Before and During Referendum Campaigns?

The comparison across debates indicates that holding referendums on European integration is associated with peaks in politicization. Next, I focus on the 12 cases involving a referendum and trace the development of public debates over time, comparing the weeks around the referendums with earlier critical dates leading to membership, treaty reforms, or single policy decisions. This approach allows for further isolation of the effects of the direct-democratic arena on the level and type of politicization in a more direct way. In other words, I assess how much the final weeks of the referendum campaign contribute to the differences observed earlier.

Table 3 provides summary information on the various characteristics of the debates, from the politicization index to the extent to which actors justify their positions towards Europe with cultural-identitarian frames. The third and fourth columns display the average values for the pre-referendum periods covered by the data and the three weeks around the vote, respectively. The fifth column indicates how many cases align with the hypotheses. After discussing the general pattern, the second part of the analysis focuses on the variation across cases.

The results in Table 3 both support and, in some respects, qualify the findings from the previous across-debate analysis. Referendums show a strong association with peaks in politicization levels. In all 12 cases, the politicization index rose, with an average value across these cases that was more than six times higher. This increase was most strongly driven by the heightened salience of European integration issues during the campaign period, as all cases exhibited noticeable rises in issue salience. Our baseline expectation that referendums focus attention on the issues at stake is supported in both types of comparisons.

Table 3. Summary of politicization characteristics in pre-referendum and referendum campaign periods (N = 12).

Outcome	Expected relation	Pre-referendum campaign	Referendum campaign	# Cases with increase in the expected direction
Politicization index	+	0.51	3.33	12 out of 12
Salience	+	0.72	3.40	12
Actor expansion	+	0.51	0.73	10
Polarization	+	0.19	0.26	5
Civil society	+	0.13	0.28	11
Radical parties	+	0.11	0.18	8
Intra-party dissent	+	0.26	0.44	9
Issue diversity	–	1.13	0.74	10
Frame diversity	+	1.80	1.71	4
Cultural frames	+	0.36	0.33	4

Moreover, we observed a significant increase in the range of actors involved during referendum campaigns. In 10 out of the 12 integration steps involving a referendum, there was a rise in non-executive actor participation, with the average proportion growing from 0.51 to 0.73. In contrast, the increase in polarization of advocated positions over time was less consistent. Only five cases showed an upward trend in polarization, and the average polarization value rose only slightly, from 0.18 in the pre-referendum periods to 0.26 during referendum campaigns. The within-debate comparison indicates that while referendum campaigns tend to generate more salient discussions involving a broader range of actors, they do not consistently lead to more polarized debates.

What types of challengers and dissenting voices gain prominence during referendum campaigns? The within-debate analysis strongly aligns with the across-debate findings for civil society actors. All 12 cases confirm the expectation that civil society positions become more prominent around the time of the vote compared to earlier stages of debate on European integration. The other two party-related measures shown in Table 3 also support the expected trends: eight cases display increased visibility of radical parties and nine show heightened intra-party dissent. While the association between referendums and intra-party dissent was also observed in the across-debate analysis, comparing the two types of analysis indicates that radical parties are not consistently more involved in debates over integration steps with a referendum than those without. However, as referendum campaigns reach their peak, radical parties often find an amplified platform in mass-mediated public debate.

In terms of issue competition, the over-time comparison indicates that referendum campaigns typically result in a narrowing of the issue agenda, with the entropy score decreasing from 1.13 to 0.74, and 10 out of 12 cases showed trends in the expected direction (see Table 3). This suggests that the focus of public debate does narrow during the final weeks of a referendum campaign. However, contrary to expectations and the across-debate analysis, the results do not show an increase in framing contest intensity during the referendum's concluding weeks. While integration steps with referendums generally feature greater frame diversity in public debate, this does not appear to be driven by the referendum campaign itself. Furthermore, the hypothesis that cultural frames gain prominence in referendum contexts finds limited support in either

the across or within-debate comparisons. Only four cases showed a trend in this direction, and the average values in Table 3 are nearly identical for the campaign and pre-campaign periods.

Taking a closer look at the specific cases, Figure 4 shows the information for one indicator per set of outcome variables for which we find the most variation: the relative changes in the visibility of radical parties (y-axis), the relative changes in the share of cultural frames (x-axis), and increases in polarization during the referendum campaign (indicated by a black triangle). The results indicate a lot of variation across these dimensions, with cases like the first-ever referendum on European integration (the 1972 French referendum on the first enlargement round with the UK seeking accession) being a prime example where the final weeks of the campaign were characterized by a stronger presence of radical parties, amplified cultural-identitarian justifications, and ultimately a more polarized public debate. However, this is only one potential combination, as the French 2005 referendum campaign on the European constitution shows. In that case, not only did radical parties get less attention during the run-up to the vote, cultural-identitarian frames also decreased and polarization levels did not increase. This confirms Statham and Trenz's (2013b) results on a shift to more social and economic frames and from inter to intra-party contestation during the final weeks of the referendum campaign. The only systematic pattern emerging from the three variables and the 12 cases is that the cases which saw increased polarization during the campaign (the French debate on first enlargement, Austria's membership decision, the Swiss decision on the Free Trade Agreement, Sweden's decision on the Euro, and Brexit) all saw increasing visibility of radical parties during the actual campaign as compared to pre-campaign moments. While the sample is too small to draw any strong conclusions on
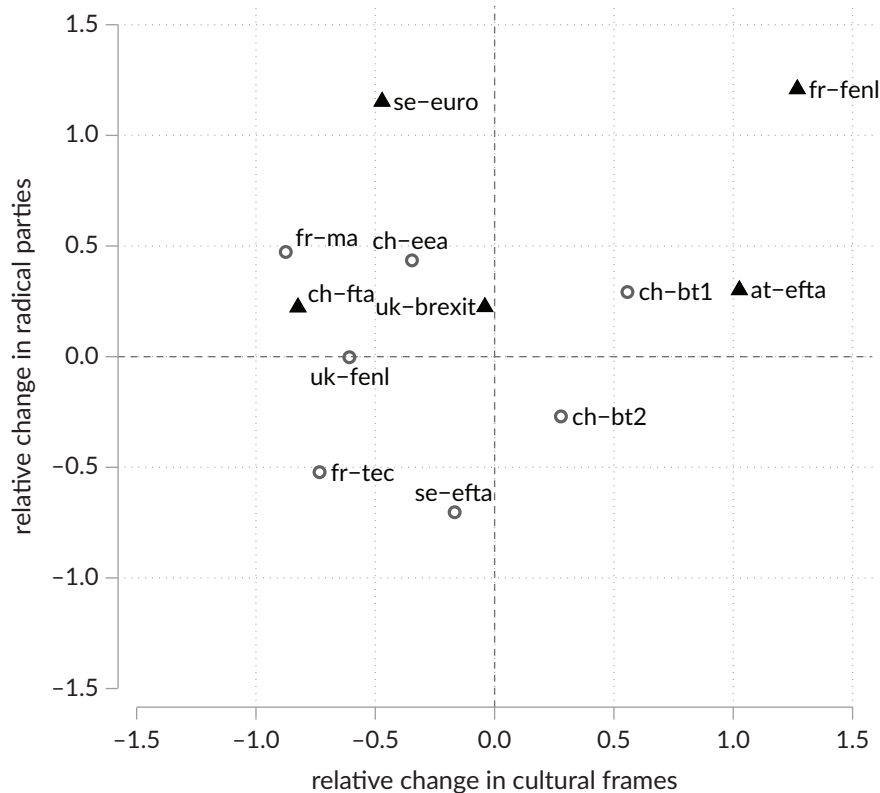

Figure 4. Relative over-time changes from the pre-referendum to the referendum campaign period (*N* = 12).

cross-national and institutional differences, the results in Figure 4 also show that the Swiss cases do not drive the results, being distributed in three of the four quadrants.

5. Conclusion

This article's primary contribution is empirical, advancing our understanding of how referendums influence the politicization of European integration by building on the work of Hutter et al. (2016) through a comprehensive reanalysis of the PolDem dataset, which now includes the pivotal Brexit debate. Covering 87 public debates across six Western European countries—including 12 debates involving referendums on membership, treaty reforms, and specific EU policy decisions—this study goes beyond prior work by systematically incorporating both across-debate and within-debate comparisons. The across-debate analysis captures broad patterns in how referendums affect politicization, while the within-debate analysis traces shifts in public debate over time, revealing the dynamics around the referendum campaigns. By combining the two approaches, this study provides a nuanced view of the structural and temporal impacts of referendums on European integration debates.

Both analyses strongly support the *level hypothesis*, supporting the baseline expectation from previous studies that referendums are associated with higher levels of politicization. Across debates, referendums were consistently associated with intensified public discussions on European integration. The within-debate analysis reveals that the spikes in politicization, particularly in salience, were most pronounced in the weeks directly leading up to the referendum. Although polarization generally increases in referendum contexts, the within-debate analysis shows that this effect is not uniform, peaking only in select cases during the final weeks around the vote itself.

The *challenger hypothesis* is also supported across both analyses, as referendums consistently broaden actor participation; civil society and other non-executive actors gain greater visibility, joining governmental actors, and diversifying the public debate. This trend underscores the role of referendums in leveling the political arena and expanding participation beyond governmental actors, aligning with expectations that referendums create a more inclusive platform for debate. The within-debate analysis reveals that civil society participation and intra-party dissent particularly intensified during the referendum campaign period. A comparison of the two types of analysis indicates that radical parties are not consistently more involved in debates over integration steps with referendums than those without. However, as referendum campaigns reach their peak, radical parties often find an amplified platform in mass-mediated public debate.

Both analyses only partially support the *issue competition hypothesis*. The findings indicate that referendums do foster framing contests, with actors using a broader range of justifications to articulate their positions on European integration. However, this increase in frame diversity is not confined to the intense referendum campaign period itself; rather, it appears as a broad characteristic of referendum debates overall. By contrast, the within-debate analysis reveals a notable narrowing of the issue agenda as the referendum date approaches. This trend, absent in the across-debate analysis, underscores that this issue concentration is a time-specific effect likely driven by the immediate focus on the referendum question. The expectation that referendums shift debates toward cultural frames finds limited support in either analysis. Referendums do not consistently focus discourse on identity-based arguments.

Referendums on European integration have a differentiated impact on politicization. They consistently increase the level or quantity of politicization by broadening actor participation and elevating issue salience. However, in terms of the type or quality of politicization, claims that referendum campaigns uniformly lead to a more polarized or identity-focused debate on European integration are not supported. This calls into question overly negative assessments that portray referendums as inherently polarizing and culturally loaded, reinforcing Europe as a divisive issue along the emerging "integration-demarcation" or "transnational" cleavage.

Overall, this study makes a significant step forward in advancing a more comparative empirical research agenda on the relationship between national referendums and public contestation over European integration. Future research, leveraging advances in computational text-as-data techniques, should expand the database beyond the six countries and 12 referendum debates examined here to further generalize these findings and explore the potential effects of institutional factors (such as mandatory vs. non-mandatory referendums), referendum content (membership, treaty reforms, or specific EU policy issues), and time periods (see Heidbreder et al., 2019). Although this study does not systematically test these features, its preliminary results suggest consistent trends in certain aspects (such as heightened salience and actor expansion) and variations in others (such as the visibility of radical parties and cultural frames) which seem less related to structural factors but more endogenous to unfolding conflict dynamics. The manual annotations used in this article could serve as valuable input for building the computational pipeline needed for such an endeavor.

Future research should also look beyond European integration as an issue—a particularly fruitful avenue could be a comparative study of referendums on sovereignty with a broader definition (see de Vries et al., 2021; Mendez & Germann, 2018). Further research might also incorporate comparative survey data to link political supply with citizens' preferences and direct-democratic choices. This would be particularly valuable for understanding the impact of cultural-identitarian frames, which, while not more prominent in referendum debates, strongly predict direct-democratic voting behavior.

Conflict of Interests
The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability
The data is available at https://poldem.eui.eu

Supplementary Material
Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

References

Atikcan, E. Ö. (2015). *Framing the European Union: The power of political arguments in shaping European integration*. Cambridge University Press.

Bornschier, S. (2010). *Cleavage politics and the populist right. The new cultural conflict in Western Europe*. Temple University Press.

Boydstun, A. E., Bevan, S., & Thomas, H. F. (2014). The importance of attention diversity and how to measure it: Measuring attention diversity. *Policy Studies Journal*, *42*(2), 173–196.

Budge, I. (2001). Political parties in direct democracy. In M. Mendelsohn & A. Parkin (Eds.), *Referendum democracy: Citizens, elites and deliberation in referendum campaigns* (pp. 67–87). Palgrave Macmillan.

Clarke, H. D., Goodwin, M., & Whiteley, P. (2017). *Brexit: Why Britain voted to leave the European Union*. Cambridge University Press.

Closa, C. (2007). Why convene referendums? Explaining choices in EU constitutional politics. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *14*(8), 1311–1332.

Colombo, C., & Kriesi, H. (2017). Party, policy—or both? Partisan-biased processing of policy arguments in direct democracy. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *27*(3), 235–253.

Crespy, A. (2008). Dissent over the European Constitutional Treaty within the French Socialist Party: Between response to anti-globalization protest and intra-party tactics. *French Politics*, *6*(1), 23–44.

de Vreese, C. H. (2006). Political parties in dire straits? *Party Politics*, *12*(5), 581–598.

de Vries, C. E. (2018). The cosmopolitan-parochial divide: Changing patterns of party and electoral competition in the Netherlands and beyond. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *25*(11), 1541–1565.

de Vries, C. E., Hobolt, S. B., & Walter, S. (2021). Politicizing international cooperation: The mass public, political entrepreneurs, and political opportunity structures. *International Organization*, *75*(2), 306–332.

de Wilde, P. (2011). No polity for old politics? A framework for analyzing the politicization of European integration. *Journal of European Integration*, *33*(5), 559–575.

de Wilde, P., & Zürn, M. (2012). Can the politicization of European integration be reversed? *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, *50*(1), 137–153.

de Wilde, P., Leupold, A., & Schmidtke, H. (2016). Introduction: The differentiated politicisation of European governance. *West European Politics*, *39*(1), 3–22.

del Monte, M. (2022*). Referendums on EU issues: Fostering civic engagement* (PE 729.358). EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service.

Fagan, A., & van Kessel, S. (2023). *The failure of remain: Anti-Brexit activism in the United Kingdom*. McGill-Queen's University Press.

Franklin, M. N. (2002). Learning from the Danish case: A comment on Palle Svensson's critique of the Franklin thesis. *European Journal of Political Research*, *41*(6), 751–757.

Gamson, W. A. (2004). Bystanders, public opinion, and the media. In D. A. Snow, S. A. Soule, & H. Kriesi (Eds.), *The blackwell companion to social movements* (pp. 242–261). Blackwell Publishing.

Garry, J., Marsh, M., & Sinnott, R. (2005). 'Second-order' versus 'Issue-voting' effects in EU referendums. Evidence from the Irish Nice Treaty Referendums. *European Union Politics*, *6*(2), 201–221.

Green-Pedersen, C. (2012). A giant fast asleep? Party incentives and the politicisation of European integration. *Political Studies*, *60*(1), 115–130.

Guinaudeau, I., & Persico, S. (2013). EU politicization through the lens of salience: How the EU enters the French, British and German electoral agenda (1986–2009). *French Politics*, *11*(2), 143–168.

Hänggli, R., & Kriesi, H. (2010). Political framing strategies and their impact on media framing in a Swiss direct-democratic campaign. *Political Communication*, *27*(2), 141–157.

Heidbreder, E. G., Stadelmann-Steffen, I., Thomann, E., & Sager, F. (2019). EU referendums in context: What can we learn from the Swiss case? *Public Administration*, *97*(2), 370–383.

Helbling, M., Hoeglinger, D., & Wüest, B. (2010). How political parties frame European integration. *European Journal of Political Research*, *49*(4), 495–521.

Hellström, J., & Blomgren, M. (2016). Party debate over Europe in national election campaigns: Electoral disunity and party cohesion. *European Journal of Political Research*, *55*(2), 265–282.

Hobolt, S. B. (2006). Direct democracy and European integration. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *13*(1), 153–166.

Hobolt, S. B. (2009). *Europe in question: Referendums on European integration*. Oxford University Press.

Hobolt, S. B. (2016). The Brexit vote: A divided nation, a divided continent. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *23*(9), 1259–1277.

Hoeglinger, D. (2008). Verschafft die direkte Demokratie den Benachteiligten mehr Gehör? Der Einfluss institutioneller Rahmenbedingungen auf die mediale Präsenz politischer Akteure. *Swiss Political Science Review*, *14*(2), 207–243.

Hoeglinger, D. (2016). *Politicizing European integration: Struggling with the awakening giant*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2009). A postfunctionalist theory of European integration: From permissive consensus to constraining dissensus. *British Journal of Political Science*, *39*(1), 1–23.

Hooghe, L., & Marks, G. (2018). Cleavage theory meets Europe's crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the transnational cleavage. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *25*(1), 109–135.

Hug, S. (2002). *Voices of Europe. Citizens, referendums, and European integration*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Hurrelmann, A., Gora, A., & Wagner, A. (2013). The legitimation of the European Union in the news media: Three treaty reform debates. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *20*(4), 515–534.

Hutter, S., Grande, E., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2016). *Politicizing Europe: Integration and mass politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Hutter, S., & Kriesi, H. (Eds.). (2019a). *European party politics in times of crisis*. Cambridge University Press.

Hutter, S., & Kriesi, H. (2019b). Politicizing Europe in times of crisis. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *26*(7), 996–1017.

Kleinnijenhuis, J., De Ridder, J. A., & Rietberg, E. M. (1997). Reasoning in economic discourse. An application of the network approach to the Dutch press. In C. W. Roberts (Eds.), *Text analysis for the social sciences. Methods for drawing statistical inferences from texts and transcripts* (pp. 191–207). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kriesi, H. (2003). Strategische politische Kommunikation: Bedingungen und Chancen der Mobilisierung öffentlicher Meinung im internationalen Vergleich. In B. Pfetsch & F. Esser (Eds.), *Politische Kommunikation im internationalen Vergleich* (pp. 208–239). Westdeutscher Verlag.

Kriesi, H., & Bernhard, L. (2011). The context of the campaigns. In H. Kriesi (Eds.), *Political communication in direct democratic campaigns: Enlightening or manipulating?* (pp. 17–38). Palgrave Macmillan.

Kriesi, H., Grande, E., Lachat, R., Dolezal, M., Bornschier, S., & Frey, T. (2008). *West European politics in the age of globalization*. Cambridge University Press.

Kriesi, H., & Wisler, D. (1996). Social movements and direct democracy in Switzerland. *European Journal of Political Research*, *30*(1), 19–40.

Mendez, F., & Germann, M. (2018). Contested sovereignty: Mapping referendums on sovereignty over time and space. *British Journal of Political Science*, *48*(1), 141–165.

Mendez, F., Mendez, M., & Triga, V. (2014). *Referendums and the European Union: A comparative inquiry*. Cambridge University Press.

Offe, K. (2017). Referendum vs. institutionalized deliberation: What democratic theorists can learn from the 2016 Brexit decision. *Daedalus*, *146*(3), 14–27.

Oppermann, K. (2013). The politics of discretionary government commitments to European integration referendums. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *20*(5), 684–701.

Petithomme, M. (2011). Awakening the sleeping giant? The displacement of the partisan cleavage and change in government-opposition dynamics in EU referendums. *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, *12*(1), 89–110.

Posser, C. (2016). Calling European Union treaty referendums: Electoral and institutional politics. *Political Studies*, *64*(1), 182–199.

Qvortrup, M. (2017). Picking winners: Forecasting the results of EU referendums 1972–2016. In L. Morel & M. Qvortrup (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of referendums and direct democracy* (pp. 307–322). Routledge.

Schattschneider, E. E. (1957). Intensity, visibility, direction, and scope. *American Journal of Political Science*, *51*(4), 933–942.

Schattschneider, E. E. (1975). *The semi-sovereign peole: A realitst's view of democracy in America*. The Dryden Press. (Original work 1960)

Schimmelfennig, F. (2014). European integration in the euro crisis: The limits of postfunctionalism. *Journal of European Integration*, *36*(3), 321–337.

Statham, P., & Trenz, H.-J. (2013a). How European Union politicization can emerge through contestation: The constitution case. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *51*(5), 965–980.

Statham, P., & Trenz, H.-J. (2013b). *The politicization of Europe: Contesting the constitution in the mass media*. Routledge.

Steiner, N. D., & Landwehr, C. (2023). Learning the Brexit lesson? Shifting support for direct democracy in Germany in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum. *British Journal of Political Science*, *53*(2), 757–765.

Svensson, P. (2002). Five Danish referendums on the European Community and European Union: A critical assessment of the Franklin thesis. *European Journal of Political Research*, *41*(6), 733–750.

Taylor, M., & Hermann, V. M. (1971). Party systems and government stability. *American Political Science Review*, *65*(1), 28–37.

Van der Eijk, C., Franklin, M., & Marsh, M. (1996). What voters teach us about Europe-wide elections: What Europe-wide elections teach us about voters. *Electoral Studies*, *15*(2), 149–166.

Vetters, R., Jentges, E., & Trenz, H.-J. (2009). Whose project is it? Media debates on the ratification of the EU Constitutional Treaty. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *16*(3), 412–430.

About the Author

Swen Hutter is director of the Center for Civil Society Research and Lichtenberg-professor in political sociology at Freie Universität Berlin and the WZB Berlin Social Science Center.