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Political Behavior in the EU Multi-Level System

Editors

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Editorial

Political Behavior in the EU Multi-Level System

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Abstract
Together with its further widening and deepening, the character of the EU has changed fundamentally during the last two decades. Acknowledging this development, the politics-dimension has become visibly more relevant in research on the EU. This "politics turn" is accompanied by an increased interest in research on political behavior of individual and collective actors—voters, parties, interest groups, executive agencies, mass and social media—in the EU multi-level system. The objectives of this thematic issue are to conceptually, empirically, and methodologically capture the different facets of this newly emerged interest in actors' political behavior in the EU multi-level system. To this end, the thematic issue strives to highlight the connections between political processes and behavior at the European level and other political layers in the EU Member States' multi-level systems. In particular, we aim to broaden the scope of research on political behavior in the EU and its strong focus on electoral politics across multiple levels of government. To this end, the thematic issue links research on voting behavior with work on party competition, electoral campaigns, public opinion, protest politics, responsiveness, (interest group) representation, government and opposition dynamics, and parliamentary behavior more broadly to the multi-layered systems within EU Member States.

Keywords
European elections; European Union; multi-level system; parties; political behavior; politics; voters

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1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of its further widening and deepening, the character of the EU has changed fundamentally during the last two decades: "The EU, long characterized as a system of multilevel governance, is moving to a system of multilevel and perhaps transnational politics" (Laffan, 2016, p. 922). Whereas much of the research in EU politics in the past decades has focused on its 'institutional development' (Dinan, 2010; Leuffen, Rittberger, & Schimmelfennig, 2013; Pinder, 2004), 'policymaking' and policy dynamics in the EU (Richardson, 2012; Wallace, Pollack, & Young, 2014), or the EU's 'political system' as such (Hix & Høyland, 2011), attention has recently shifted towards the 'politics' of the EU (Cini & Borragán, 2013; Lelieveldt & Princen, 2014; Magone, 2015). Acknowledging this overall development, it is uncontested that the politics-dimension has become visibly more relevant within the research field of EU studies (see Figure 1).

As a matter of course, the mounting relevance of the politics-dimension in research on the EU reflects the heightened interconnectedness of policymaking arenas in the EU's multi-level system. The evolution of the nomination procedure of the president of the European Commission in the context of the past European Parliament (EP) elections can be cited as an illustration of the interconnection of political actors and their behavior across the EU's multi-level system. With the introduction of the *Spitzenkandidaten* (lead candidate) system in 2014, the predominantly national election campaigns were infused with a crucial suprana-

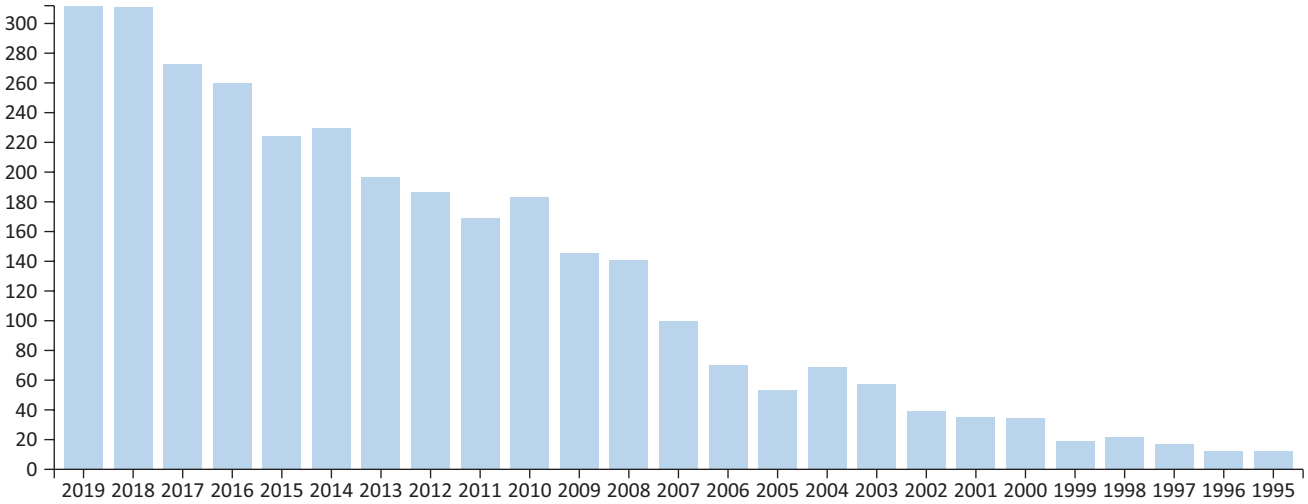

Figure 1. Total number of published articles per year with the topic 'EU politics' in academic journals covered in the Social Sciences Citation Index (1995–2019). Source: authors' calculation.

tional component: The nomination of lead candidates by transnational party groups was poised to become a precondition for the Commission presidency—at least theoretically (see Braun & Popa, 2018; Braun & Schwarzbözl, 2019). Alongside a strengthening of the supranational component in the past EP elections, the regional dimension became more focal as well: Since the German *Spitzenkandidat* of the European People's Party (EPP) for the 2019 EP elections, Manfred Weber, is a member of the Christian Social Union (CSU), a party that only campaigns in Bavaria, his election campaign also showed a strong regional component since his campaign was mostly visible in Bavaria and to a much lesser extent in other German states and European countries, respectively. Finally, none of the *Spitzenkandidaten* became Commission President because of partisan conflict among the party groups in the EP on the one hand, and because the national leaders in the European Council were also unable to muster agreement on any of the lead candidates. This example demonstrates how EU politics is shaped by 'subnational,' 'national,' 'supranational' and 'intergovernmental' decisions as well as the interconnection between each of these levels. Against this background, the objectives of this thematic issue are to conceptually, empirically, and methodologically capture the different facets of this newly emerged interest in actors' political behavior in the EU multi-level system. Moreover, the thematic issue brings together different traditions and schools of thought in political science (i.e., international relations as well as comparative politics and political sociology) which deal with EU politics although referring to different conceptual backgrounds.

2. A Brief Overview on the Study of Political Behavior in the EU Multi-Level System

Before we provide a brief overview on the study of political behavior in the EU multi-level system, we define the two main conceptual anchors of our thematic issue. According to the *Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*, political behavior refers to "the attitudes and behavior of publics, and the citizens' role within the political process" (Dalton & Klingemann, 2007, p. 3). The *Handbook on Multi-level Governance* defines 'multi-level governance' as "a set of general-purpose or functional jurisdictions that enjoy some degree of autonomy within a common governance arrangement and whose actors claim to engage in an enduring interaction in pursuit of common good" (Enderlein, Wälti, & Zürn, 2010, p. 4). The study of political behavior in the EU multi-level system therefore highlights the attitudes and behavior that publics and citizens bring to bear on political processes characterized by the interconnection of different layers of governance.

What do we know from previous research in this broad field of political behavior in the EU multi-level system? Over the course of the past decades, research on political behavior in general, and on its various subdomains in particular, has gradually ventured into EU studies. For instance, public opinion research with its focus on political attitudes and electoral behavior in the United States and individual European countries (e.g., van Deth, Montero, & Westholm, 2007) has become an area of vibrant scholarship with a strong EU-angle. As EU integration accelerated in the 1990s, the famous permissive consensus (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993, 2007) is being challenged by a constraining dissensus (Hooghe & Marks, 2008), which has made EU politics and policies increasingly salient in the domestic arena. Initially, this research on political attitudes and electoral behavior exclusively focused on the European level and did not adopt a multi-level perspective. This changed in the past two decades with several strands of literature contributing to the emergence of the research field of political behavior with an explicit EU multi-level system perspective. Picking up the multi-level perspective of the second-order election model (Reif & Schmitt, 1980), empirical studies of EP elec-

tions analyzed voting behavior in EP elections compared to voters' choices in national elections (see e.g., Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Marsh & Mikhaylov, 2010; Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2017). In addition, scholars became more and more interested in the relationship between public opinion in EU Member States and its consequences for EU politics (see de Vries, 2018; Hobolt & de Vries, 2016). Moreover, scholars increasingly analyze multi-level party politics in the EU between the national and the European level (see e.g., Mühlböck, 2012; Wonka & Rittberger, 2014), as well as between the European and the regional level (see e.g., Dellmuth & Stoffel, 2012; Gross & Debus, 2018). Furthermore, particularly the interest group literature scrutinizes country-based interest groups and their multi-level strategies towards the EU (see Berkhout, Hanegraaff, & Braun, 2017; Binderkrantz & Rasmussen, 2015; Eising, 2004; Klüver, Braun, & Beyers, 2015).

3. Locating This Thematic Issue in the Debate

As laid out in this introduction, this 'politics turn' is accompanied by an increased interest in research on political behavior of individual and collective actors in the EU multi-level system The various contributions in this thematic issue link research on party organization (Pittoors, 2020), electoral behavior (Braun & Tausendpfund, 2020; Schmitt, Sanz, Braun, & Teperoglou, 2020), interest groups (Berkhout, Hanegraaff, & Statch, 2020), party competition (Lefkofridi, 2020), responsiveness (Lefkofridi & Giger, 2020) as well as government politics and parliamentary behavior (Euchner & Frech, 2020; Heinkelmann-Wild, Kriegmair, & Rittberger, 2020) more broadly to the multi-layered systems within EU Member States, but also between EU Member States (Koß & Séville, 2020). Although the "European polity is a complex multi-level institutional configuration, which cannot be adequately represented by theoretical models that are generally used in international relations or comparative politics" (Scharpf, 2010, p. 75), the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical insights gained in this thematic issue shed light on various aspects of political behavior in the EU multi-level system beyond the predominant focus on electoral politics across multiple levels of government (see, e.g., Golder, Lago, Blais, Gidengil, & Gschwend, 2017). We are therefore confident in concluding and emphasizing that politics is not only back in EU studies (see also Risse, 2010), but here to stay.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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Part I.

Citizens and Representation in the EU Multi-Level System

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Article

It All Happens at Once: Understanding Electoral Behaviour in Second-Order Elections

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Abstract
The second-order election (SOE) model as originally formulated by Reif and Schmitt (1980) suggests that, relative to the preceding first-order election result, turnout is lower in SOEs, government and big parties lose, and small and ideologically extreme parties win. These regularities are not static but dynamic and related to the first-order electoral cycle. These predictions of the SOE model have often been tested using aggregate data. The fact that they are based on individual-level hypotheses has received less attention. The main aim of this article is to restate the micro-level hypotheses for the SOE model and run a rigorous test for the 2004 and 2014 European elections. Using data from the European Election Studies voter surveys, our analysis reveals signs of sincere, but also strategic abstentions in European Parliament elections. Both strategic and sincere motivations are also leading to SOE defection. It all happens at once.

Keywords
electoral cycle; second-order elections; sincere voting; strategic voting; turnout; vote switching

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1. Introduction

Standing on the shoulder of giants, the second-order election (SOE) model was proposed by Reif and Schmitt (1980) in an effort to understand voter motivations and electoral outcomes in the first direct election of the European Parliament (EP) in 1979. Reif and Schmitt (1980) identified this supranational election as another case of a 'low stimulus election.' The roots of this stream of research go back to the US electoral context and here in particular to efforts to explain the typical losses of the presidential party in midterm elections (Campbell, 1966; Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960). Beyond the US, there are other elections that do not directly or indirectly fill the prime executive post of a polity, be it that of a president, a prime minister or a chancellor. Among them are midterm elections in Latin America (see among others, Erikson & Filippov, 2001; Remmer & Gélineau, 2003; Thorlakson, 2015) but also all sorts of subnational elections—such as state elections in Germany (Dinkel, 1977, 1978) or provincial elections in Canada (Erikson & Filippov, 2001).

In their effort to understand EP election outcomes and their difference to national first-order elections (FOEs) and over time, Reif and Schmitt (1980, 9–15) propose altogether six dimensions of variability. Among them, the 'less-at-stake' dimension is the most important. Based on this, the skeleton version of the SOE model suggests that, compared to both the preceding and the subsequent FOE result: (1) turnout is lower in SOEs; (2) government parties loose; (3) big parties loose too; while (4) small parties win; and (5) ideologically extreme parties and protest parties win. Moreover, these regularities are not static but dynamic—they are likely to be inflated and deflated again as a function of the first-order national electoral cycle. Most important here is that (6) government parties' losses are greater the closer a SOE is located around the midterm of the first-order electoral cycle (Reif, 1984, 1997; Reif & Schmitt, 1980; but see also Stimson, 1976).

Most of the studies that followed the initial work of Reif and Schmitt focused on testing the aggregate-level predictions of the SOE model. These hypotheses have mostly been corroborated (among others, Freire, 2004; Hix & Marsh, 2011; Norris, 1997; Reif, 1984, 1997; Schmitt, 2005; Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015; Schmitt & Toygür, 2016; Teperoglou, 2010; van der Brug & van der Eijk, 2007; van der Eijk, Franklin, & Marsh, 1996). However, aggregate electoral outcomes do not themselves speak about the micro-level processes causing them. Electoral results are silent about the determinants of electoral behaviour. In their article, Reif and Schmitt (1980) were not ignorant about individual-level processes, but their respective hypotheses have received less attention. This is not to say that nothing had been done in that regard: Some scholars started to uncover the micro-foundations of the SOE model (see in particular Carrubba & Timpone, 2005; Clark & Rohrschneider, 2009; Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Hobolt, Spoon, & Tilley, 2009; Hobolt & Wittrock, 2011; Magalhães, 2016; Schmitt, Sanz, & Braun, 2009; Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015, 2017; Weber, 2011). However, a comprehensive test of the micro-level mechanisms of the SOE model is still lacking, resulting in the fact that we do not 'have a good understanding of the phenomenon' (Golder, Lago, Blais, Gidengil, & Gschwend, 2017). Against this background, we aim to contribute a succinct theoretical model for the comparative study of voting behaviour in FOEs and SOEs, and to test this model for two EP elections in all EU member countries and in very different political environments. In doing so, we provide a micro-model of inter-election voting patterns and study the most relevant of them—abstaining and defecting in SOE—at the occasion of the 2004 and 2014 EP elections.

2. A Sketch of a Micro-Model of SOE Voting

We start from the observation that the behaviour of voters in consecutive first- and SOEs is far from independent. This is to say that some voters may support party a in election B because they have supported party b in election A (and because the two elections differ in importance, among other things). In order to sort this out more systematically, it might be useful to begin with a distinction of the behavioural alternatives a voter faces in consecutive FOEs and SOEs. There are five of them. A voter might: (1) vote for the same party in both elections; (2) defect from her or his FOE choice in the SOE; (3) abstain in the SOE while having voted in the FOE; (4) vote in the SOE while having abstained in the FOE; and (5) abstain in both. We claim that the second and the third of these behavioural alternatives are the most informative when analysing electoral patterns in EP elections because they are at the base of often markedly different results between the two types of elections. Of course, this does not mean that the same voting decision—such as supporting the same party or abstaining in two successive elections—must originate in identical sets of factors causing them. We just propose that we are more likely to unearth characteristic motivational differences when we focus on different decisions of a voter—such as defecting from the earlier choice or abstaining although having voted previously.

It is the early insight of Angus Campbell (1966) that a certain group of voters, he calls them 'peripheral,' are likely to abstain in low stimulus elections due to a lack of mobilisation. These voters are characterised by little political interest and partisanship. As a result, this group of the electorate needs a particular stimulus to participate in an election, while others need less prompting because they either identify with one of the parties or habitually turn out on election day (Franklin, 2004; Schmitt & Mannheimer, 1991). Regarding the motivations of abstention, the conclusions from previous studies are inconsistent. Some claim that abstention is motivated by Euroscepticism (the so-called voluntary Euro-abstention; see Blondel, Sinnott, & Svensson, 1998; Wessels & Franklin, 2009). Others argue that SOE abstention reflects primarily a lack of politicisation and electoral mobilisation (e.g., Franklin & Hobolt, 2011; Schmitt & Mannheimer, 1991; Schmitt & van der Eijk, 2007, 2008; van der Eijk & Schmitt, 2009). The latter explanation might have minor but significant repercussions for subsequent national FOEs (see for turnout Franklin & Hobolt, 2011; this has also been argued for vote choice by Dinas & Riera, 2018).

Some voluntary abstainers are guided by sincere motivations. This can happen as a result of a certain scarcity of arena-specific policy positions on offer (i.e., when no viable Eurosceptic parties are running; see van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996; Schmitt & van der Eijk, 2001). Other voluntary abstainers follow more instrumental motivations and use abstention as a form of protest—against governmental policies more narrowly conceived or, more fundamentally, against the political supply more generally. Such strategic abstentions are expected to increase around the midterm of the FOE cycle, when government approval tends to be plummeting (Gélineau & Remmer, 2006; Mughan, 1986; Stimson, 1976).

While sincere and strategic motivations may contribute to differential abstentions, they are at the same time the two main mechanisms responsible for inter-election vote switching. 'Sincere voting' is when citizens vote for the party (or candidate) that is most attractive to them, either by way of socialisation and habit (party identification), policy considerations (position issues or valence issues and political competence), or candidate traits. By way of contrast, a 'strategic vote'—whatever its motivation might be—is indicated by the support of another than the first-preference choice option (much of the relevant literature here is initiated by Cox, 1997). Sincere and strategic voting is, again, not a behavioural constant but a variable. Voters may change their mode of operation from sincere (in one electoral arena) to strategic (in another) and vice versa.

Reif and Schmitt (1980) distinguish two versions of sincere switching. The first one is switching from a strategic FOE to a sincere SOE vote choice. This can be motivated by the desire of voters to express their true first preference (in any kind of election) even if the chosen party is not expected to gain representation (i.e., when the first preference is a small party). This version of switching is facilitated by the fact that the likely political consequences of such a choice are limited in an EP election because there is less at stake. The second type of sincere vote switching occurs when SOE defectors sincerely support another than their FOE party due to arena-specific issues and policies. In the case of EP elections, voters may prefer one party on European and another on domestic politics and sincerely support different parties in the two electoral arenas. Running somewhat against the original SOE model, this idea is substantiated by a growing literature focusing on European policy and polity issues as explanatory factors of vote choices in EP elections (e.g., Clark & Rohrschneider, 2009; de Vries, van der Brug, van Egmond, & van der Eijk, 2011; Hix & Marsh, 2007; Hobolt & de Vries, 2016; Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Hobolt et al., 2009; Hobolt & Wittrock, 2011).

The analysis of the different electoral patterns between FOE and SOE and in particular vote switching in EP elections revealed a specific type of strategic voting, the so-called protest voting or voting with the boot (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; van der Eijk et al., 1996). Strategic defectors in EP elections signal discontent at the occasion of a SOE with their government's performance in the first-order electoral arena. These signals can be issued in a harder and a softer form. The harder version is actual defection (former FOE government voters support an opposition party in a subsequent SOE); the softer version manifests itself in differential abstention (former FOE government voters abstain in a subsequent SOE). This being said, we note that (strategic) protest voting is likely to boost around the midterm of the first-order electoral cycle. During the 'honeymoon' period shortly after a FOE, government parties will receive greater or near identical support in an EP election (e.g., Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Regarding the later term of the national electoral cycle, some argue (e.g., van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996) that the closer a SOE falls to the next FOE the more likely voters are to opt for 'strategic defection,' while the original statement of the model expects a certain recovery of support for national government parties.

3. Micro-Level Hypotheses about Inter-Election Voting Patterns

Considering that we analyse voter data from half a hundred different electoral contexts (23 in 2004, and 28 in 2014), we expect a multitude of inter-election voting patterns. While some SOE abstainers might lack mobilisation, others follow sincere and still others strategic motives in abstaining. SOE vote switchers are expected to do much the same: Compared to their previous FOE vote choice, some switch due to sincere and others due to strategic motives. These are our five main hypotheses about inter-election voting patterns between first- and SOEs (see Figure 1).

Four of them are conditional upon contextual factors; for those we specify a couple of additional expectations about contextual interactions. Specifying direct and interaction effects, the following two figures display those hypotheses in the form of path diagrams for each of the dependent variables.

Starting with differential abstentions (Figure 2), our first hypothesis (H1) predicts that SOE abstentions can in part be explained by the lack of mobilisation: Those with no partisanship and no interest in the electoral cam-

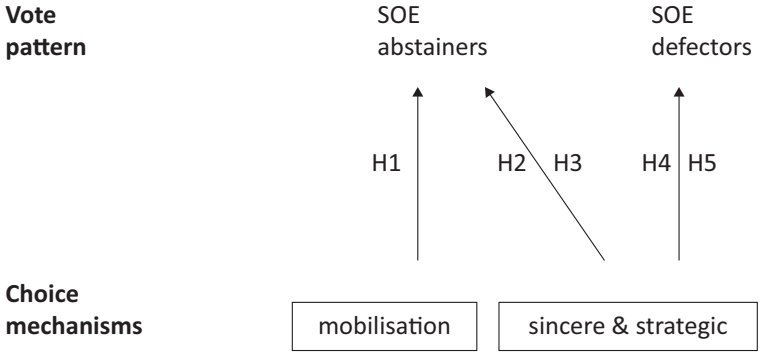

Figure 1. Basic vote pattern and choice mechanisms according to the SOE model.

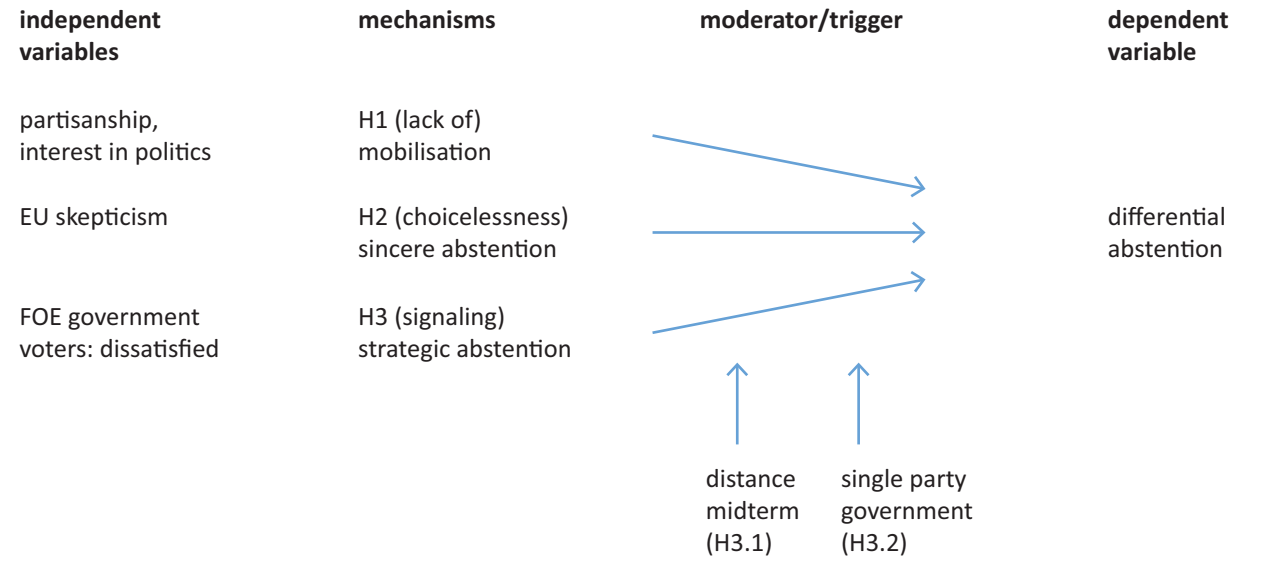

Figure 2. Expectations about differential abstention.

paign are more likely to abstain than others. The second hypothesis (H2) predicts that abstention has also sincere roots: EU sceptics are more likely to abstain in EP elections than others. The third hypothesis (H3) specifies strategic motivations to abstain and refers to FOE government voters who are dissatisfied with its performance. In accordance with most recent scholarship, we expect those to be more likely to abstain than others. This effect should be moderated by the distance of the EP election to the midterm of the national electoral cycle when government popularity is plunging quite generally (H3.1). Moreover, government dissatisfaction is expected to have a stronger effect on abstention when there is only one party in government (rather than a government coalition of several parties), as the responsibility for government policies is clearer then (H3.2).

The second set of hypotheses addresses vote switching between the previous FOE and the EP election under study (Figure 3). Our first defection hypothesis predicts that voters with a first preference for a small party (i.e., if their party with the highest probability-to-vote score is small) are more likely to defect because there is less at stake in SOEs (H4). This sincere defection mechanism is expected to be moderated by two trigger variables. One is the ideological distance to the most preferred party in terms of left and right: We expect that sincere defection from a FOE vote choice is the likelier the smaller this distance is (H4.1). The other trigger variable is the distance

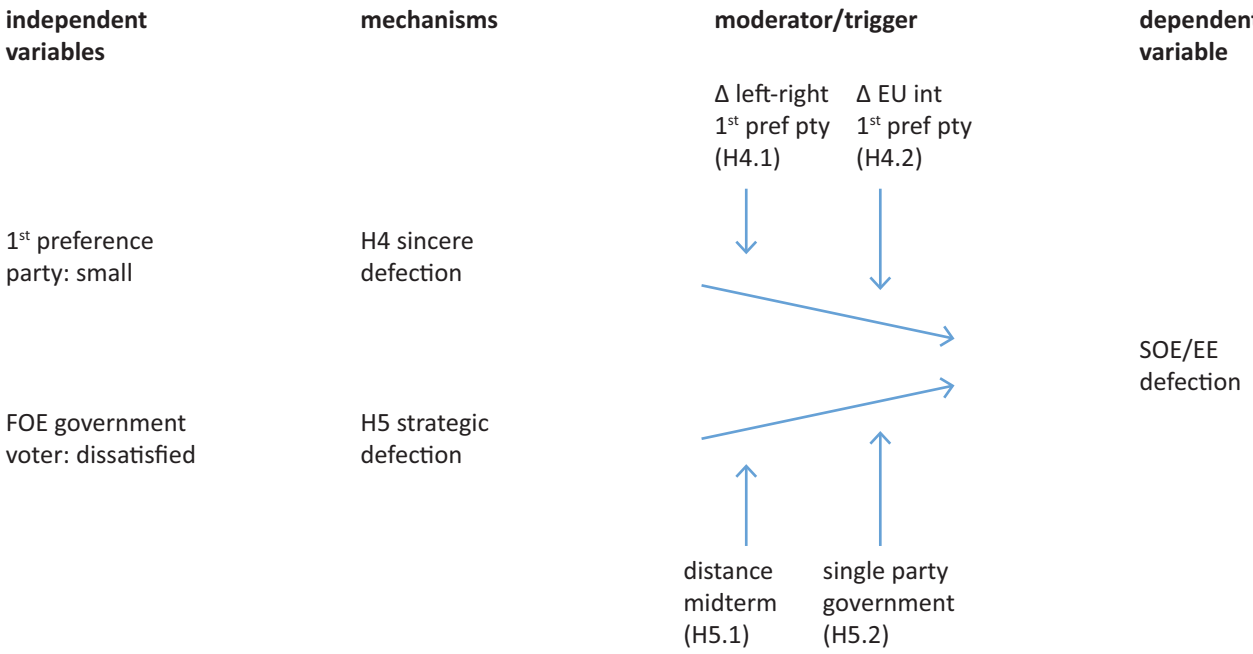

Figure 3. Expectations about SOE defection.

between self and party regarding support for European integration: Here as well we expect that sincere defection from a FOE vote choice is the likelier the smaller this distance is (H4.2). We note in passing here that ideological positions enter the equation not as absolute values (like a '4' indicating a centre-left position of a citizen) but as the distance between that '4' and the perceived position of the most preferred party (which may stand at '5,' in which case the distance would be '1' and very small). This procedure closely follows the seminal work of Downs (1957), who suggests that voting decisions of citizens are guided by the distance between the ideological position of a citizen and his or her perception of the ideological position of relevant choice options. We come back to this operationalisation in the Supplementary File to the article.

Finally, the defection hypothesis is of a more strategic nature. Here we predict that former government voters who are dissatisfied with government performance are more likely to switch (H5). This effect should be moderated by the shrinking distance to midterm (H5.1), and by the clarity of responsibility for government policies (H5.2). These last two 'strategic interactions' are identical to those put forward with respect to differential abstention.

4. Data and Strategy of Analysis

4.1. Data and Case Selection

In order to test these micro-level hypotheses, we are analysing post-electoral voter surveys of the European Election Study (EES; for further details see www.europeanelectionstudies.net). As we aim at a comprehensive test of the micro-level mechanisms of SOE abstention and vote switching, two different waves of these voter surveys are analysed, namely the EES 2004 and the EES 2014. Among a much larger set of variables in each study, these surveys contain a largely identical set of indicators and are separated by a 10 years' period of turbulent political and economic change. As a result, these two studies allow for testing the SOEs model in vastly different contexts. The 2004 EES was conducted when EU membership was expanded to include eight new member countries from Central and Eastern Europe (plus Cyprus and Malta); this made it possible to study the determinants of the vote for the new Eastern EU citizens for the first time. Ten years later, the 2014 EES study was conducted in a completely different environment. The shape of the EU had changed dramatically during these ten years. At a most general level, the EU—and the EP within it—gained greater legislative powers in many policy domains (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Schmitt & Toygür, 2016). From the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 onwards, Europe has been moving into its post-functionalist phase, which is characterized by a constraining dissensus over issues of European integration rather than the permissive consensus of the past (Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Hutter & Grande, 2014). More specifically, the 2014 EP elections are held in a very different socio-political context, provoked by the turmoil in some of the EU member states following the global economic crisis (Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014; Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015; Talving, 2017). In the words of Reif and Schmitt's (1980) original statement of the SOE model, the specific arena dimension—one of the six dimensions that are at the base of differences between FOE and SOE election outcomes—has changed dramatically between the elections of 2004 and 2014. Despite these fundamental changes, studies of aggregate election results conclude that the character of the 2014 EP elections still follows the SOE predictions (see Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015; Schmitt & Toygür, 2016). In the rest of this article we will investigate whether this also holds for the micro-level mechanisms governing electoral behaviour as specified by the SOE model.

4.2. Dependent Variables

With regard to both participation and party choice, we analyse vote recall (measured at one point in time) about voting decisions in successive elections (conducted at different points in time). Their validity is less than perfect because memory is fading with growing distance to the event, and wishful thinking coloured by the opinion climate of the day is likely to take over (e.g., van der Eijk & Niemöller, 1979; Waldahl & Aardal, 1982, 2000). Panel data would certainly be preferable here, but they are not available for 2004 and efforts to collect them in 2014 were less than successful. There is an additional complication regarding the determination of inter-election vote patterns. It originates in the fluidity of party systems, which is particularly aggravated in the new member countries from Eastern Europe. The problem arises when choice options in one election are no longer available in the next because parties in between have split or merged or simply disappeared. The methodological issues associated with the recall of the vote in multiple elections (in one survey) must be expected to lead to an overestimation of stable voters. Our painstaking recoding of vote patterns in fluid party systems avoids the overestimation of vote switchers as far as possible. What we know about the over-reporting of electoral participation suggests, in addition, that the relatively small number of abstainers our surveys identify are real abstainers, while many declared voters are true non-voters (e.g., Bernstein, Chadha, & Montjoy, 2001; Traugott & Katosh, 1979). In sum, there are reasons to believe that the two categories of our dependent variable we are most interested in—SOE defectors and SOE abstainers—are rather crisp and clean, while stable voters—our reference category as presented above—are most likely to be overestimated.

Table 1 presents the vote recalls in 2004 and 2014. Stable voters—much as expected—are the strongest category (33% and 31% respectively). While this points to-

Table 1. Inter-election voting patterns (percent).

	2004	2014	Difference
R chose the same party in both elections	33	31	–2
R chose a different party in one election	15	12	–3
R did not vote in SOE but in FOE	26	19	–7
R did not vote in FOE but in SOE	5	5	0
R did not vote in either election	21	33	+12
N of respondents	27856	29852	—

Source: EES 2004 (Schmitt, Bartolini, et al., 2009) and EES 2014 (Schmitt, Hobolt, Popa, Teperoglou, & European Parliament, Directorate-General for Communication, Public Monitoring Unit, 2016)

wards the stability of inter-election voting patterns, we find an astounding increase in the percentage of citizens who abstained in both FOE and SOE in 2014 (33% compared to 21% in 2004). This discrepancy could be a true reflection of the reality in the two election years, but it could also be a result of different sampling strategies. We will not dwell on this, however, as we are interested here in the determination of inter-election electoral behaviour rather than in its distribution. We also find a modest decrease in the percentage of differential abstainers between the two EP elections (26% in 2004 and 19% in 2014). The number of 'accidental' SOE voters who abstained in the preceding FOE is equally small (5% in both elections). These are the most remarkable descriptive findings.

Based on these patterns of inter-election voting behaviour, we construct the two dependent variables of this article, i.e., differential abstention and defection. Both of them will take the value of '0' for stable voters. Differential abstainers are identified by the value of '1' when respondents voted in the previous national election but abstained in the EP election. Defectors are coded '1' if the respondents chose a different party in the national FOE as compared to the EP election.

4.3. Independent Variables

We consider just a few independent or predictor variables at the individual level. In the case of electoral participation, these are citizens' party identification and their interest in the EP campaign, their evaluation of EU membership, and the (dis-)satisfaction with the national government of former government voters. With regard to party choice, we consider just two predictors: Whether or not the first-preference party of a respondent is small and whether the respondent voted for the incumbent national government in the previous FOE and has been dissatisfied with its performance since. These independent variables are not meant to do all the explanatory work by themselves. Rather, they often become effective only in conjunction with what we call trigger (i.e., moderating) variables. One of these trigger variables is whether a country is run by a single party government. The other trigger variable is the location of the EP election in the national electoral cycle. Finally, with regard to the prediction of vote choice, we expect the size of the first preference party to interact with the left–right distance between the respondent and that party, and the EU integration distance of the respondent and that party. The details on question wording, variable recoding and descriptive statistics for the dependent, the independent and the trigger variables of our study are available in the Supplementary File of the article.

5. Findings

The determinants of differential abstention and defection for the 2004 and the 2014 EP elections are reported in Table 2. The table reports the three SOE mechanisms as presented above, namely mobilization first, sincere motivations second, and strategic motivations third. Due to the hierarchical structure of our data, we test our individual and system level hypotheses with multi-level logistic regression models. Hierarchical multi-level models were specified with fixed and random effects. Fixed effects were used in accordance with our hypotheses, while random (country) intercepts account for the country clustering of our data. The quantitative variables involved in interactions were centred at their means to ease the interpretation of additive effects. In order to make the interpretation of interaction effects more accessible, we also present them graphically as marginal effect plots in Figures 4 and 5.

5.1. Differential Abstention

Our first hypothesis predicts that the decision not to cast a vote in an EP election (although having voted in the previous FOE) is a result of the characteristic lack of mobilisation in these elections, among other things. We find H1 corroborated for both elections under study. A low interest in the EP election campaign and the lack of partisanship are strongly increasing the likelihood of abstaining both in 2004 and 2014. Having said that, we note that the effect of low interest in the EP election campaign seems to be higher in 2004 than in 2014, while the reverse holds regarding partisanship.

But the lack of mobilization is not the only factor that contributes to the likelihood of abstention in these two EP elections, there are also signs of sincere non-voting.

Table 2. Determinants of differential abstention and defection in SOE.

	Differential abstention		Defection	
	2004	2014	2004	2014
Mobilisation				
Partisanship (yes)	−0.831***	−1.187***		
	(0.047)	(0.048)		
Interest in campaign (not at all)	1.163***	0.940***		
	(0.051)	(0.065)		
Sincere Voting				
Euroscepticism: EU membership bad	0.496***	0.727***		
	(0.045)	(0.043)		
Less at stake: 1st preference party small			1.083**	1.003**
			(0.070)	(0.063)
Δ Left–Right to first preference party			−0.009	−0.006
			(0.036)	(0.032)
Less at stake * Δ Left–Right			0.114**	0.107**
			(0.054)	(0.045)
Δ EU to first preference party			0.015	−0.032
			(0.029)	(0.023)
Less at stake * Δ EU			0.009	0.073**
			(0.043)	(0.033)
Strategic Voting				
Dissatisfaction with gov.	1.237***	0.339**	1.794**	0.725*
supported in last FOE	(0.252)	(0.151)	(0.319)	(0.431)
Dissatisfaction * electoral cycle	0.928***	1.629***	0.221	2.083**
	(0.270)	(0.242)	(0.603)	(0.318)
Dissatisfaction * coalition gov.	−0.364	0.305**	−0.403	0.423
	(0.248)	(0.146)	(0.309)	(0.426)
Dissatisfaction with government	−0.185	—	−0.180	—
	(0.073)	(0.069)	(0.116)	(0.093)
Government support in previous FOE	−0.106	—	−0.089	−0.179*
	(0.073)	(0.067)	(0.120)	(0.094)
National Context				
Electoral cycle: distance to midterm	0.670	1.558**	0.553	0.335
	(0.690)	(0.745)	(0.827)	(0.427)
Coalition government	−0.072	−0.221	0.295	1.158**
	(0.580)	(0.447)	(0.595)	(0.319)
Intercept	−0.475**	0.070	—	—
	(0.209)	(0.403)	(0.557)	(0.310)
Variance component (intercept)	0.702	0.880	0.559	0.244
Log likelihood	−6,698.665	−7,341.947	—	—
N respondents / countries	12,301 / 22	13,375 / 28	6,724 / 20	8,084 / 26

Notes: Entries are multilevel logistic regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses); * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Sources: EES 2004 (Schmitt, Bartolini, et al., 2009) and EES 2014 (Schmitt et al., 2016).

Euroscepticism (i.e., negative evaluations of EU membership) increases the likelihood of abstaining both in 2004 and somewhat stronger in 2014, even if controlled for mobilisation effects. This confirms H2. Therefore, low levels of electoral participation in EP elections are associated with critical stances towards the EU.

We continue with our hypothesis regarding strategic abstention in EP elections. The findings in Table 2 reveal that voters who previously supported a national government party might have abstained in EP elections in order to signal discontent with its performance. This kind of strategic abstention in EP election is triggered by the timing of an EP election in the first-order national electoral cycle. According to this, voters of a national government party who are dissatisfied with government performance are more likely to abstain around the midterm of the national electoral cycle (H2.1). Finally, H2.2 predicts that strategic abstention is also triggered by the clarity of government responsibility. In coalition governments with less clarity of government responsibility, strategic abstention is more likely to happen. This is only confirmed for the 2014 EP election.

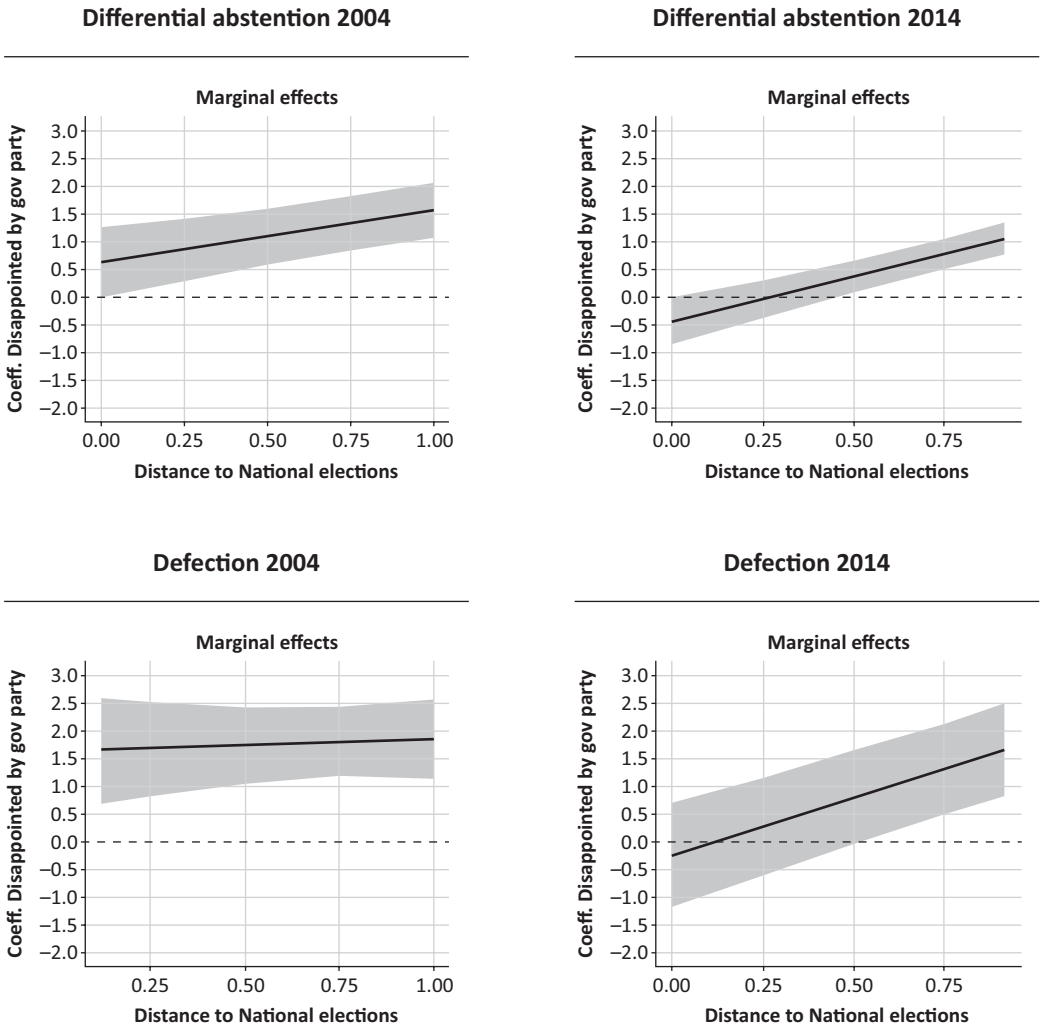

Figure 4. The marginal effects of dissatisfaction with the performance of the national government among its previous FOE voters as moderated by the electoral cycle, for differential abstention and defection in the EP elections of 2004 and 2014. Source: EES 2004 (Schmitt, Bartolini, et al., 2009) and EES 2014 (Schmitt et al., 2016).

5.2. Defection in EP Elections

Moving on to the results of sincere SOE vote switching, we find that perhaps the most important factor of the original SOE model, the fact that there is 'less at stake' in these EP elections, is confirmed at the micro level. We hypothesized that voters whose first preference party is small will show higher probabilities to switch their votes from the previous FOE to the EP election under study (H4). The results in Table 2 confirm this hypothesis; the coefficient of a first preference for a small party is positive and very substantial for both the 2004 and the 2014 EP elections.

In addition, we hypothesized that the left–right distance to the most preferred and small party is one of the triggers for defecting (H4.1). Because there is less at stake, supporters of small parties might take the EP election as an opportunity of 'voting with the heart' (van der Eijk et al., 1996). The results as presented in Table 2 seem to refute this presumption at first sight. In both elections, we find that the larger the left–right distance to the most preferred party is the likelier it is to defect from the FOE vote choice. But we must not forget here that we are still talking about distances to the most preferred party: those who are ideologically very close to it might not have defected previously to begin with. Rather, it seems that those with some distance have abandoned their first preference in the previous FOE, and that these voters are 'returning home' when less is at stake in the subsequent SOE. In essence, then, our hypothesis H4.1 is not falsified, but nicely specified by our analysis. What about the proposed trigger of support of or opposition to EU integration (H4.2)? For the 2004 election we find that the distance on EU integration does not significantly moderate the voting decision of small party supporters. Only in 2014, when the politicisation of EU integration has increased, we find the same phenomenon as for the left–right dimension: Small party supporters return to their first preference in a SOE when they are at some distance to it on EU integration matters.

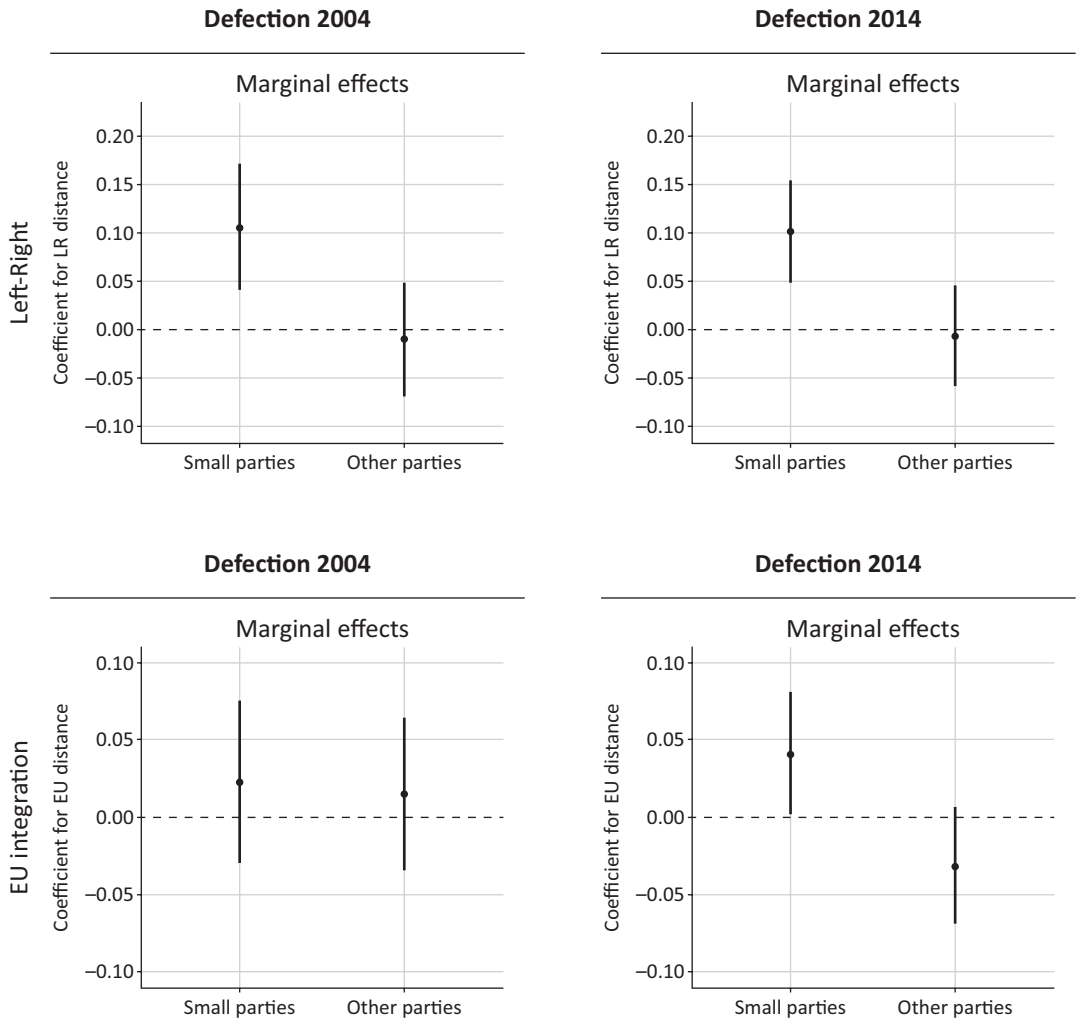

Figure 5. The marginal effects of the 'less at stake' mechanism as moderated by the left–right distance (first row) and European integration distance (second row) on defection in the EP elections of 2004 and 2014. Source: EES 2004 (Schmitt, Bartolini, et al., 2009) and EES 2014 (Schmitt et al., 2016).

Are then SOE defections from the previous FOE choice strategically motivated? Signalling discontent with the incumbent government not only motivates differential abstentions from former government voters, as we have shown previously. It is at least equally important as a mechanism for defecting from the previous FOE vote choice. Both in 2004 and in 2014 dissatisfaction with the government party respondents previously supported significantly contributes to their probability of defection in the EP election. These signs of 'voting with the boot' (van der Eijk et al., 1996) confirm H5. If it comes to interactions, our measure of protest voting is moderated by the FOE electoral cycle only in 2014. Only in these elections does the decreasing distance to midterm significantly increase the contribution of dissatisfaction to the probability of defecting from the party voted in the previous FOE. Therefore, the expectations formulated in H5.1 are only partly confirmed. One explanation for this could be that in 2004 there was not yet much of a cyclical regularity in the political orientations of citizens in the then eight new Eastern member countries (e.g., among others Marsh, 2007; Schmitt, 2005). Finally, our hypothesis that strategic signalling might be especially intense in countries with single party national governments (H5.2) is not confirmed in either election. The clarity of responsibility for government policies is not moderating the likelihood of defection of dissatisfied FOE government voters.

6. Concluding Remarks and Perspectives

The formulation of the aggregate hypotheses of the SOE model as originally proposed by Reif and Schmitt (1980) aims to explain the differences in the electoral results between FOEs and SOEs. While likely reasons for these characteristic differences in the outcomes of these elections were suggested early on, the easier-to-grasp macro-level predictions of the model have long been in the centre of scholarly testing. Less attention has been given to the micro-foundations of the SOE model, that is, the hypotheses about the motivations and intentions of individ-

ual voters that drive their behaviour in a SOE—relative to what they have done in the preceding FOE. In this article, we summarise the hypotheses underlying the SOE model and subject them to a rigorous empirical examination using the data from the EES 2004 and 2014 post-electoral voter surveys.

At a conceptual level, we started by distinguishing the behavioural alternatives that present themselves to the citizens at a SOE following a FOE and identified two of them which we claim to be critically important for the empirical analysis of inter-election voting. These are differential abstention and SOE defection. In the empirical part of the study, we analysed the mechanisms for both participation (differential abstention) and vote choices (SOE defection)—something has hardly ever been done in the scholarship available so far. Our main finding is that it all happens at once: Mobilization as well as strategic and sincere mechanisms affect electoral behaviour at different levels of a multi-level electoral system.

Differential abstention is mostly due to a lack of mobilization. Moreover, in 2014 (but not in 2004) we also found support for our hypothesis on sincere abstentions: those who are 'opposing Europe' (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008) were significantly more likely to abstain in the EP election while having voted in the previous FOE. In addition, our analyses also identified signs of strategic abstentions. Dissatisfied former government voters were more likely to abstain, particularly in EP elections close to the midterm of the national electoral cycle. Turning to voter motivations for defection in EP elections, we mostly found sincere mechanisms at play. Voters whose first preference is a small party were found more likely to defect than others, and first preference voting means sincere voting. Moreover, our trigger variables were shedding some additional light on the motivations of the defectors: the left–right distance as well as the EU integration distance (in 2014) to the first preference party was found to significantly moderate the likelihood of voters with first preference for a small party to defect. But there are also indications that SOE defection is of a more strategic nature. Dissatisfied former government voters were found to be more likely to defect than others. This strategic defection is moderated by the distance to the midterm of the electoral cycle (in 2014, but not in 2004); defections increase with decreasing distance to first-order midterm. However, our second trigger variable for strategic defection—clarity of responsibility for government policies—was not found to be moderating defection in either election.

So we know that mobilisation and sincere and strategic factors are all playing an important role in our understanding of differential abstention and defection: it all happens at once. We might therefore conclude that the decision to participate in an EP election is a more multi-layered phenomenon than often portrayed, combining both motivations from the national (domestic) and the European political arena. This has been established in two largely different electoral environments—the enlargement election of 2004 and the post-crisis election of 2014—and we therefore are confident that these findings are reliable and can be found again and again.

Our results are important for the current and future understanding of electoral behaviour of political actors in multi-level electoral settings. We claim that they can be generalised to previous and future EP elections as well as other SOE at sub-national levels, like Canadian provincial elections, Spanish regional elections, German state elections, and so on. Multiple levels of a multi-layered electoral systems are not isolated from one another, they are permeable and interwoven. This openness comes at a price: As we have shown in this article, voters take their behavioural cues from different levels. Moreover, political parties present themselves more or less uniformly at different levels in order to retain their credibility (which means among other things to assume compatible policy positions, see e.g., Braun & Schmitt, 2018).

It is often said that the EU is a moving target; no other SOE-specific arena undergoes as rapid and profound institutional and procedural changes than the EU does. Will future EP elections with perhaps even starker changes in this 'specific arena dimension'—like the 2019 election with its fundamental challenge of the EU by populist parties on the right—still fit that picture? We claim that they will, provided that citizens still perceive that there is 'less at stake' in the EU electoral arena.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

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

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Article

Democracy or Oligarchy? Unequal Representation of Income Groups in European Institutions

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Abstract
In this study we examine the representation of income groups in two EU-level institutions, the Council and the European Parliament. We find that the political positions of these institutions, and especially of the Council, are always on the right compared to European citizens, though closer to the wealthy among them. However, a more systematic analysis of congruence between different income groups and the Council reveals that while the poor are systematically underrepresented, the rich are not systematically over-represented. This holds both when we examine the poor and the rich across the EU as a whole and when we cluster them according to their respective member states.

Keywords
congruence; Council of the European Union; European Parliament; European Union; inequality; representation

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1. Introduction

At the core of any political regime stands the relationship between political and economic power. In Aristotle's *Politics*, the pioneering comparative study of political systems, Aristotle (384–322 BC) observed that an Athenian citizen under a democratic regime would not classify as such under an oligarchic regime and that the key difference between democracy and oligarchy was poverty and wealth (Aristotle's *Politics*, 1280a, as translated by Moschovis, 1989). Aristotle considered both democracy and oligarchy to be 'corrupt' regimes since neither served the preferences and interests of the whole society: While the poor dominated in democracy, oligarchy served only the interests of the wealthy. For this reason, in Aristotle's view, power should lie with the middle class. In contemporary representative government, citizens' views and opinions are channeled through professional party politicians who are expected to represent them and voice their concerns to various political institutions. This type of regime does not allow for the direct participation of citizens in political decision-making, and hence it is impossible for the poor to dominate. What about the wealthy, however?

Under representative government, the ballot concerns a choice between predefined policy directions, and in theory everybody's ballot has equal weight irrespective of income, and representatives should consider all citizens' preferences equally. However, there are reasons why representatives might neglect the views of the poor and/or cater to the rich. To begin with, deputies by definition do not belong to the lowest social strata; quite the contrary, as being a deputy comes with several economic and political privileges. Since the poor tend to turn out to vote in smaller numbers (Gallego, 2007; Lijphart, 1997), moreover, their limited participation may affect the outcome in ways disadvantageous for them. Furthermore, income may play a role in stages

of the political process preceding or following the ballot: For instance, the rich can influence the policy agenda and direction through legal and/or illegal means such as the financing of party campaigns, or attempts to corrupt party politicians (see, for example, Rosset, Giger, & Bernauer, 2013). Alternatively, the rich can block policymaking that threatens their interests; for example, big businesses faced with increases in taxes or wages may threaten to relocate production to countries with cheaper labor and lower taxes.

This raises the question of whether and to what extent the poor are well represented by contemporary democratic political institutions, especially in comparison to the rich. A growing literature on unequal representation of income groups in the US documents that citizens from the poorer income strata are less well represented and their voices less likely to be heard by US politicians (Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2005; Kelly & Enns, 2010; Soroka & Wlezien, 2008; Ura & Ellis, 2008). Recent research on unequal representation in a large number of European countries finds similar trends (e.g., Donnelly & Lefkofridi, 2014; Giger, Rosset, & Bernauer, 2012).

A large majority of these European countries are members of the EU, however, and in such a multilevel polity as the EU wealthy citizens may have more influence over policy simply because they have more resources to invest in lobbying actors at different levels of governance, including not only national political party organizations and national governments but also EU institutions. Surprisingly, however, very little is known about unequal representation at EU level. Studies on EU representation have focused quite narrowly on the European Parliament (EP) and have largely neglected the Council (though, see Hagemann, Hobolt, & Wratil, 2017). We argue that this is an unsatisfactory state of the art and that we need to compare and contrast potentially unequal representation in the EP to the same phenomenon in its counterpart, i.e., the Council.

Ignoring the question of unequal representation at EU level is highly problematic for several reasons. From the outset the EU promoted economic integration among European states, including the opening of borders, market liberalization, and economic competition, which in turn has created new cleavages of winners and losers within European publics, i.e., between those able to engage in and benefit from these processes and those who cannot (Kriesi et al., 2006; see also Fligstein, 2008). Economic integration has additionally exacerbated income inequality within member states by impacting their welfare states and by undermining the position of labor through the pressures of international wage and employment competition (Beckfield, 2006). At the peak of the Great Recession in 2008, the direction of the EU's economic policy decided on by the Council (i.e., austerity, including budget and wage cuts) tended to hurt middle- and low-income citizens rather than the wealthy across the EU. Thus, unequal representation may also concern specific income groups within member states and/or across the EU.

The question thus arises as to whether EU institutions represent poor Europeans less well than they represent the rich. In this article we tackle this question by examining the two major channels of representation in policy-making at EU level, using empirical evidence regarding the unequal representation of income groups. On the one hand, the EP is the only EU-level body whose composition can be determined directly by the European people and the only supranational institution with a clear mandate of citizen representation; it is also the only supranational institution where citizens' representatives sit according to party-ideological rather than national/territorial lines.

On the other hand, the Council brings together 'sovereigns.' In fact, there are two types of Council. First there is the European Council, which is the top-level political configuration of heads of states and governments of the EU member states and which defines the most important policy issues and determines the political direction of the entire Union. Second, there is the Council of Ministers, which meets for the purpose of legislation in ten different policy-related configurations of the 28 ministries of the member states. Here we treat both as a 'unified' political body of the Union, hereafter referred to as the 'Council' or 'EU Council,' since individual Council members, whether they be presidents, prime ministers or ministers, enjoy territorially-bound democratic legitimacy for their actions. Scrutinizing the Council is particularly important given that, prior to the Lisbon Treaty of 2007, the Council was the main legislator with the highest decision-making competences.

This study contributes to the scant literature analyzing the EU Council in terms of political representation (Hagemann et al., 2017) and is the first to examine the unequal representation of income groups in EU institutions. In pursuit of these goals, we study the degree of ideological congruence, which is a very useful indicator of alignment between publics and policymakers. Congruence constitutes an important prerequisite for citizens' 'substantive' representation in the policymaking process (Mansbridge, 2009; Pitkin, 1967): If publics and their representatives diverge greatly, it is unlikely that the latter will include the public in policy-making processes. In this study we examine the ideological congruence between poor and rich Europeans with regard to two key EU institutions over a ten-year period. We are thus able to uncover important facets of representation and to document for the first time the degree of inequality that exists in representing citizens at EU level.

2. Citizens' Representation at EU level

Thomassen and Schmitt (1997; Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999) have long argued for a distinction to be drawn between two different channels of representation of citizens' preferences at EU level. There is one direct channel of influence via the EP, which operates through the selection of (national) party candidates to represent citizens

in the Parliament. The second channel is indirect and operates through the participation of national governments in the EU Council. While this distinction is widely recognized, empirical research has fallen short in analyzing these two channels of representation simultaneously. In fact, empirical research on the topic has mainly focused on representation via the direct channel of the EP (see, for example, Lefkofridi, 2020; Costello, Thomassen, & Rosema, 2012; Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2014; Mattila & Raunio, 2012). These studies generally suggest that EP representation works quite well on the left–right dimension but less well for European integration-related topics (see, for example, Costello et al., 2012). Research on the indirect channel is scarce, though a recent exception is Hagemann et al. (2017), who show that decision-making in the Council is influenced by citizens' opinions: For example, when domestic electorates are skeptical about the EU their governments are more likely to oppose legislation aimed at deepening European integration. On the other hand, Alexandrova, Rasmussen, and Toshkov (2016) have shown how citizens' priorities play a role in determining the amount of attention certain topics are given by the Council.

To date, however, no study has examined whether representation is equally good for different societal groups, e.g., differentiated by income. This is quite remarkable given that several strands of research suggest economic and political inequality to be related to each other (e.g., Lefkofridi, Giger, & Kissau, 2012). First, the significant negative effect of income inequality on turnout is consistent both across and within countries (Schäfer & Schwander, 2019). Moreover, the poor participate less in democratic elections at both national and European levels (Gallego, 2015; Mattila, 2003). One reason why the poor tend to participate less in democratic elections is the well-established relationship between income and education, which in turn impacts upon political knowledge. In such a complex multilevel and transnational system of governance as the EU, political knowledge has been shown to matter in regard to turning out to vote in European elections (Braun & Tausendpfund, 2019).

Second, research on representation shows that the poor are not well represented in either the US or in Europe. Studies that have examined responsiveness in the US, (i.e., focusing on the question of how citizens' preferences are mirrored in public policy) have found that when the preferences of rich and poor diverge, the views of the affluent will count more (e.g., Bartels, 2008; Gilens, 2012; Gilens & Page, 2014). This holds also for the subnational level (see, for example, Flavin, 2012). Similar findings emerge from studies focusing on a diverse set of European countries, including relatively developed and rich states such as Sweden (Persson & Gilljam, 2019), Germany (Elsässer, Hense, & Schäfer, 2017) and the Netherlands (Schakel, 2019). Besides these case studies, comparative research has also revealed that congruence between citizens and policymakers is often tilted towards the more affluent in European societies (e.g., Peters & Ensink, 2015; Rosset et al., 2013; Schakel & Hakhverdian, 2018). On the basis of national-level evidence from both sides of the Atlantic, therefore, unequal representation seems to be a widespread phenomenon.

These findings beg the question of whether and to what extent a similar phenomenon is present when it comes to the representation of less affluent citizens at EU level. The mechanisms that drive unequal representation listed in the current literature, e.g., the poorer strata turning out in lower percentages or the more affluent using their financial means to influence policy via campaign donation or lobbying, seem equally relevant at EU level as they are at the national level. Accordingly, we aim to fill this research gap by examining how unequal income groups are represented both by the EP and by the EU Council.

3. Research Design

In order to tackle the general question of the potentially unequal representation of citizens' preferences by EU institutions, we proceed in two steps. Our first goal is to trace the evolution of the income groups' positions over time and examine their congruence with the two key institutions. In the context of political representation, the term 'congruence' (which connotes agreement, harmony, or compatibility between two entities) is a criterion for assessing whether representation works (Lefkofridi, in press), since comparing citizens' opinions with the opinions of those who make policy on their behalf helps assess the 'democratic' character of political representation (Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2012, p. 87). In this step of the analysis, we study income group representation at the level of the EU-wide citizenry who are affected by the decisions made by the Council and the EP. To be clear, if the preferences of the poor and the rich do not differ, then even if representatives disregard the poor there is no problem regarding democratic representation. However, research shows that on many issues, and especially on the issue of economic redistribution, the preferences of the poor and the rich differ systematically (e.g., Donnelly & Lefkofridi, 2014; Giger et al., 2012), at least at national level.

Our second goal is to take a closer look at the Council, which represents citizens clustered in member states. In essence, the Council as a whole can be conceived of as a political body in which representatives of all member states come together to decide about common policy for the EU as a whole while at the same time seeking to ensure that domestic preferences are promoted (or at the very least do not jeopardize those preferences). Conceived thus, each member of the Council would make efforts not to diverge from the position of their national constituency. However, the ways in which domestic preferences are defined differ according to the ideological composition of the government in place—and some governments may be closer to the poor/rich within

their national constituencies. Considering this additional type of congruence not only helps to answer questions about national-territorial representation in the Council, i.e., of each member state separately, but also helps us to ascertain whether the EU-wide pattern regarding the representation of the poor/rich also holds if we disaggregate the EU into its members. This step helps examine whether the findings based on the aggregate picture are replicated at member-state level and ensures that the EU-wide pattern does not mask a skewed distribution of unequal representation.

To answer our research question, we use existing data gathered from both mass and elite levels. For citizens' positions we mainly use the European Social Survey covering the period 2002–2012 (European Social Survey, 2002–2016). More information on the development of mass political positions over time in the 26 member states covered by this study can be found in Supplementary File A. It should be noted that survey data is missing for Malta and Croatia. All the mass surveys have been weighted according to their population. For elites' positions, we use expert surveys: The Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES; Bakker et al., 2015) and the expert survey undertaken by Benoit and Laver (2006), as we will explain in more detail below.

Using these data sources, we focus on the left-right dimension of political conflict. The left–right heuristic is rooted in the French Revolution and summarizes divergent policy positions, providing an organizing principle for party competition and voting behaviour; albeit crude, the left–right dimension provides valuable information about the match between the represented and their representatives in terms of general ideological orientation and is thus particularly useful for comparative research (Lefkofridi, in press). When examining representation within the EU, however, there is also a second dimension of political contestation to consider, i.e., that of pro-/contra European integration (Mair & Thomassen, 2010). Prior to the Eurozone crisis, it was mainly parties on the fringes that mobilized voters on the EU dimension (de Vries, 2007); European issues did not play a major role even in EP elections (Braun, Hutter, & Kerscher, 2016; Lefkofridi & Kritzinger, 2008). The salience of the EU dimension for EU-level party competition and citizens' representation increased in 2014 (see Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2018). For most of the years covered by our study, therefore, the EU dimension was not as important as the left–right dimension in European elections, and even less important in national elections. Given that the Council's composition is the result of a series of national elections, the present study thus does not analyze this dimension. Besides, the EU question was not included in the European Social Survey.

Our analysis necessitates a summary measure of the Council's position, and for this purpose we rely on earlier work that uses a measure called the 'Center of Gravity' (CoG; Gross & Sigelman, 1984; Manow & Döring, 2008). The CoG is an aggregated position of national cabinets. We calculate the CoG of the Council using information from two sources: national government compositions from the Parlgov website and party position data from expert surveys. We primarily used the CHES from Bakker et al. (2015), which has the advantage of time-variant party positions; in the case of Luxembourg, Malta, Cyprus, and Croatia, however, as well as a few single parties in other countries not covered by the CHES, we utilized the Benoit and Laver (2006) expert survey instead. While the position of each government is the weighted average of all incumbent party positions, or in other words the CoG of national cabinets (see Supplementary File B for more information), the CoG of the Council is an aggregation of all member states' national government positions. For the descriptive figures and the subsequent regression analyses the data is presented in a monthly format, since the Council is subject to change when new national governments are formed. The position of the EP was measured with the same kind of data and is defined as the weighted average (by seats) of the parties present in the EP (with party positions based on data from CHES and Benoit and Laver [2006]). It can thus vary both according to election periods and enlargement rounds. This is relevant for the accession of Romania, Bulgaria, and Cyprus.

Ideological congruence is calculated as the distance between the left-right position of EU citizens belonging to different income groups and the CoG of the Council. As we are interested in the representation of sub-constituencies of the population (poor and rich), we have to measure congruence at individual level. Only in this way can we distinguish between citizens with high or low income. Individual congruence C_{ij} is defined as the absolute distance between the position of a citizen P_cit_{ij} and the CoG of the Council *CoG_council*, times -1. The multiplication by -1 allows for an easier interpretation of the results, as higher values indicate greater congruence.

$$C_{ij} = -|CoG\_council - P\_cit_{ij}|$$

If the distance between a citizen and the government/party decreases, C_{ij} rises from negative values towards 0 and ideological congruence increases. We use this individual level congruence measure to analyse both congruence across the EU as a whole and clustered in their respective national constituencies.

In doing so we follow recent developments in the study of congruence, especially the seminal work by Golder and Stramski (2010), who use a similar measure for studying national-level congruence. However, insofar as we differ methodologically from earlier work on representation in EU institutions, which has mainly used cross-tabulations or factor models (e.g., Costello et al., 2012; Thomassen & Schmitt, 1997), we cannot directly compare our results to those findings.

The population is split into three income groups, as is standard practice within this research field. Household income has been adjusted to household size (see Rosset

& Pontusson, 2014; Rueda & Pontusson, 2010). The two lowest deciles of the income strata are classified as 'poor' while the two top deciles are classified as 'rich.'

As a first step, we thus present graphically the development of the ideological positions of our income groups and compare them to the ideological leanings of both the European Council and the EP. In a second step we regress income groups' positions on the CoG of the Council in a multilevel setting.

4. Results

We begin with a comparative picture of income group representation in the EP and the Council. Figure 1 shows an aggregate picture of how the positions of the Council and the EP evolved over time in the period 2000–2012 as compared to the positions of less and more affluent citizens across the EU (the income groups of all member states). In Figure 1 we see, first of all, that both the citizens (poor and rich) and the institutions (the EP and the Council) move around centrist (i.e., not extreme) positions, which is not surprising given that these are highly aggregated measures that tend to be very centrist. We also see that the poor are consistently positioned to the left of both the rich and the EU institutions (the EP and the Council). This indicates, in the first place, that the potential for unequal representation exists, since poor and rich citizens do not have identical preferences on the left–right dimension. These findings also echo other studies undertaken at national level in various European states (e.g., Giger et al., 2012). A third observation concerns the position of the rich as lying in-between the poor and the EU institutions. While the Council is systematically located further to the right of the citizenry, the EP overall seems to be more congruent with the citizenry (poor and rich). The Council moved to the left around 2007, which improved its congruence with the citizenry (the poor, but even more so the rich), but subsequently moved rightwards. The general picture, however, remains that the rich tend to be closer to both institutions' positions than the poor, which indicates that the representation of poorer citizens is worse than for those with higher income shares. We can only speculate how much these shifts are linked to the Great Recession, in regard to which some scholars (e.g., Lindvall, 2014) propose that there was first a shift to the right followed by a shift to the left.

Figure 2 focuses solely on the Council. Here we again examine the Council's representation of the poor and the rich but this time with income groups disaggregated into their respective national constituencies. Derived from data in Table 1, in technical terms Figure 2 displays the random slopes of the two individual-level predictors (high and low income) by country. In substantive terms it shows the degree of unequal representation of the poor and rich strata of society compared to the middle-income category. Negative coefficients signify worse representation, while positive numbers signify a closer match between the preferences of a group and the Council. In this figure we see that the poor are more likely to be underrepresented across member states: In 18 countries we see either a clear underrepresentation of their ideological preferences (e.g., in Cyprus and Romania) or no big differences between the representation of their ideological preferences and the preferences of the middle-income category (e.g., in France), while in only seven EU member states do the poor seem represented to a degree commensurate with middle-income voters (e.g.,

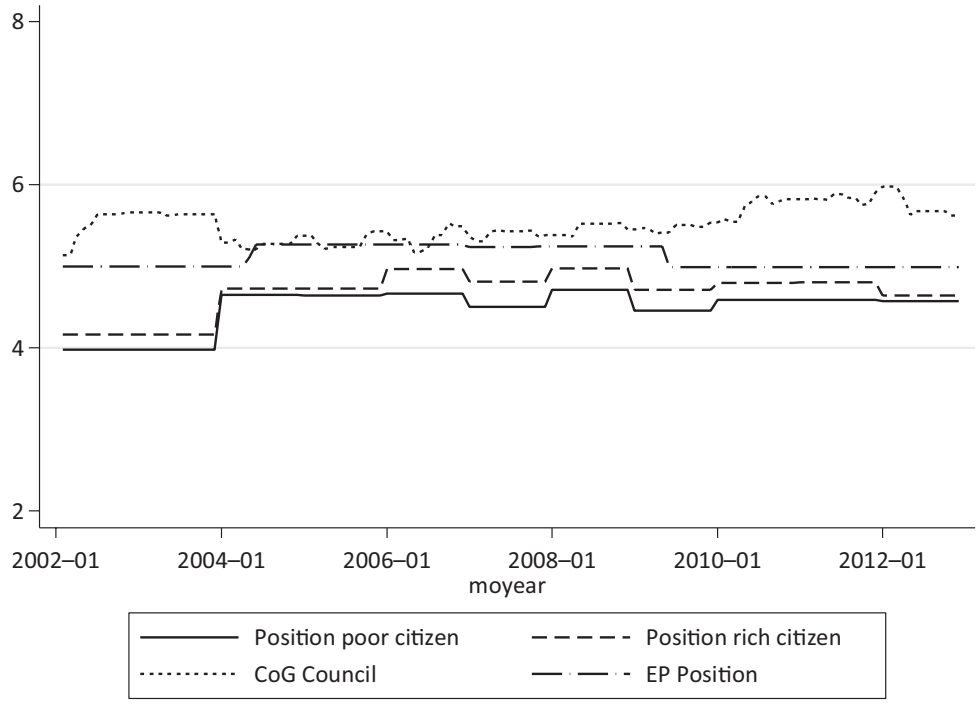

Figure 1. Congruence between the rich and poor and the EP and Council (across the EU).

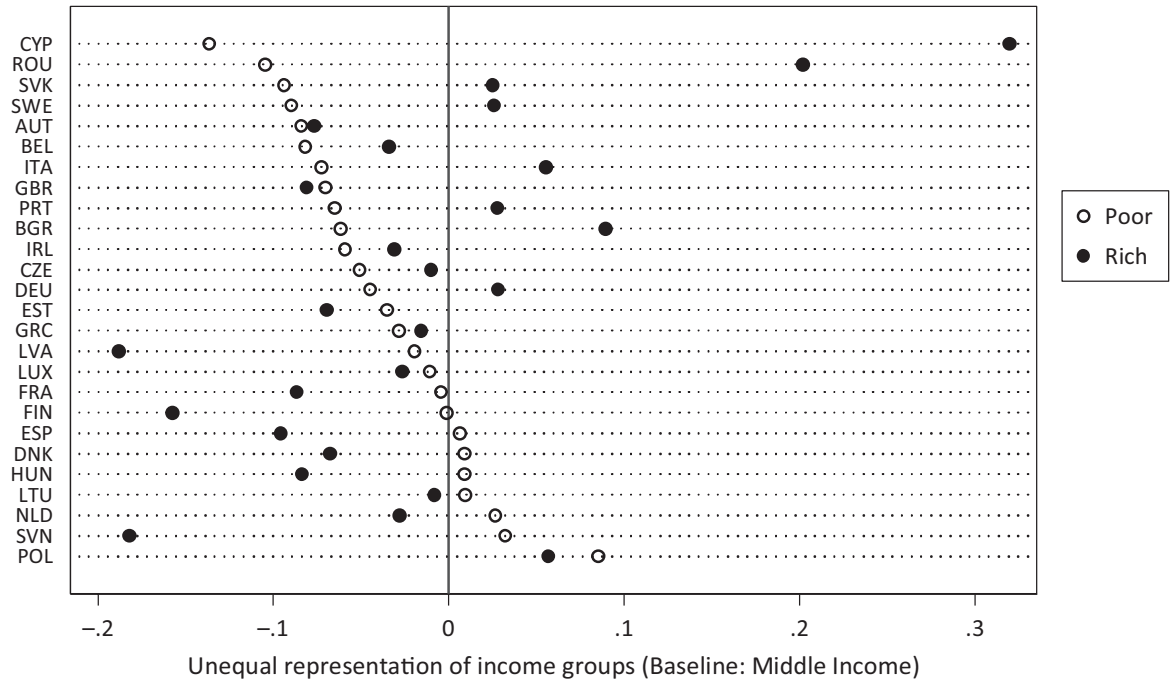

Figure 2. Unequal representation: Congruence of income groups across member states with the CoG of the Council.

in Denmark) or even, as in the case of Poland, better represented. For the rich, by contrast, there is no clear pattern. In other words, while the position of the Council systematically differs from the poor in the majority of EU member states, the CoG of the Council does not lead to systematic overrepresentation of the rich.

Table 1. Multilevel regression of individual-level congruence with the CoG of the Council.

	Model 1	
	B	S.E.
Low income	−0.04	0.02 *
High income	−0.02	0.03
Year	−0.02	0.00 *
Constant	31.33	2.39 *
Random terms		
Variance (countries)	0.24	0.03
Variance (individuals)	1.37	0.00
Variance (low income)	0.06	0.02
Variance (high income)	0.12	0.02
N (countries)	140316 (26)	
Log Likelihood	−243588	

Note: * $p < 0.5$.

This picture is also visible in Table 1 (from which Figure 2 was produced), which shows the results of a multilevel analysis (for a similar approach, see Giger et al., 2012). It becomes evident that, while there is a statistically significant underrepresentation of the poor in the Council, there is no significant overrepresentation of the rich. In substantive terms this means that the ideological position of the poor is systematically neglected in the Council. At the same time, however, there is no evidence from this data that the ideological position of the wealthy is overrepresented in this major EU-level institution.

5. Conclusions

Many centuries ago, Aristotle criticized democracy for embodying the rule of the poor and oligarchy for serving only the wealthy. Although much ink has been spilt on the EU's democratic deficits, no study has inquired into the unequal representation of income groups in EU-level institutions. The EU's complex system of multilevel transnational governance may be easier to navigate for those who have the necessary resources to do so, including knowledge and money for example, than for those who do not. The poor's unequal representation at EU level could be due, amongst other things, to their limited participation both in European elections that affect the composition of the EP and in national-level elections that affect the composition of the Council. By focusing on specific income groups our study constitutes a pioneering empirical examination of the ideological congruence (left–right) of EU institutions (i.e., the EP and the Council) with the publics for whom they make policy. By examining unequal representation on the left–right dimension of political conflict (both within the EU-wide citizenry and within national-territorial constituencies), our study also extends previous inquiries of representation on European integration in the Council (Hagemann et al., 2017), as well as work on the Council's political CoG (Manow & Döring, 2008).

Does the EU system approximate more to a democracy or an oligarchy in its representativeness of citizens? While our research shows the EU is not an oligarchy that

systematically over-represents the wealthy, nor does our data reflect Aristotle's fears about the poor dominating in democracy. This conclusion is based on an examination of whether the EU Council and the EP, as the major political decision-making institutions of the EU, exhibit any bias towards a specific income group, i.e., the poor or the rich. We found that both institutions tend to be positioned to the right of both rich and poor citizens, albeit closer to the rich. We then looked more closely at the Council, examining the income groups clustered in member states. On the basis of this data analyzed here we further found that while there is a systematic underrepresentation of the poor in these EU institutions there is no systematic overrepresentation of the rich. These findings complement comparative studies that have focused on the national level of governance and demonstrated a systematic underrepresentation of middle- and low-income citizens both by party systems and governments in Europe (Giger et al., 2012; Rosset et al., 2013).

These findings have important implications for our understanding of representation in the multilevel system of the EU. While it seems impossible to adequately assess the quality of democratic representation in EU member states without taking into account the extent to which citizens' views and preferences are made present at EU level, the literature has continued to neglect addressing the question of how specific social groups are represented by EU institutions (e.g., groups such as women, see Kantola and Agustín, 2019, and the poor). With the EU becoming increasingly influential in an ever-growing number of policy areas, including the fiscal policies of its member states, questions regarding the unequal representation of specific social groups can no longer be disregarded by scholars of multi-level politics.

Against this background, the following two interrelated questions arise. First, to what extent do our findings hold beyond the period of our investigation of 2000–2012? In the last years covered by our study, the Council's CoG seemed to be moving further away from all income groups, though its distance from the poor was greater. It remains to be seen whether this picture has deteriorated or improved in the intervening years, particularly given the austerity policies pursued across the EU. Second, to what extent would the picture painted in this study of broad ideological (left–right) preferences be similar, better, or worse if we also looked at specific issue dimensions? This question is pertinent given the increasing politicization of the EU dimension of political conflict that ensued from the Eurozone crisis that followed the 2008 global financial crisis, the migration crisis in the summer of 2015, and the Brexit saga that started in the mid-2016, in addition to the larger issue of immigration. Earlier work has found that, in general, the quality of representation is better in terms of left vs right ideological preferences, i.e., the main dimension of conflict in European politics, but worse in terms of cultural and European integration dimensions (Costello et al., 2012). National-level research on representation and congruence is moving towards the study of single-issue dimensions (see, for example, Rasmussen, Reher, & Toshkov, 2019; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016) and some first attempts have been made to study unequal representation across issue-dimensions (e.g., Rosset & Stecker, 2019). Future work on EU-level representation should thus also go beyond the general left-right dimension to examine the EU institutions' congruence with income groups on key policy issues of concern, such as European integration, immigration, and redistribution. Given recent work suggesting that inequality is also apparent with regard to the attention given to the priorities of less affluent citizens (Traber, Hänni, Giger, & Breunig, 2019), future work should examine the extent to which primary concerns of poor EU citizens are equally or unequally considered by and represented in EU-level institutions.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare they have no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

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

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Article

Electoral Behaviour in a European Union under Stress

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Abstract
Is electoral behaviour affected by the current challenges of the EU and, if it is, through which channels and mechanisms? This study offers a cross-national analysis together with a broad understanding of both the crisis phenomenon and electoral behaviour. To investigate this research question appropriately, we first distinguish at the most general level between the two main behavioural alternatives at play when it comes to electoral behaviour, namely abstention and vote choice. Second, and no less important, we differentiate between the mechanisms that mediate the relationship between the 'EU under stress' and electoral behaviour, namely egocentric and sociotropic economic voting motivations. Drawing on data from the European Election Study 2014, our article provides important insights into the study of electoral behaviour in an EU under stress. First, we are able to show that the multiple crises that have hit the EU have the potential to determine both turnout and the decision to vote for a Eurosceptic party. Second, different mechanisms are in play for each of the two behavioural alternatives: Turnout is clearly related to egocentric determinants and thus depends on individuals' personal exposure to the financial crisis. Conversely, the decision to vote for a Eurosceptic party is based on a different mechanism. Voters—without necessarily being personally affected by the crisis—have a higher propensity to vote for a Eurosceptic party if they perceive their country to be threatened by such an EU under stress. These findings add to a better understanding of the EU's multi-level democracy.

Keywords
economic voting; electoral behaviour; European crises; European Parliament elections; Eurosceptic parties; multi-level analysis; multi-level system

Issue
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1. Introduction

Starting with the financial crisis which hit the world in 2007–2008, followed by the economic and the sovereign debt crisis, the EU has faced numerous events that together have brought the European system of multi-level governance into a permanent state of crisis. Although the ensuing recession was certainly a significant event, the Brexit referendum and related discussions around the procedure of the UK's withdrawal from the EU as well as continuing debate among EU member states within the policy field of immigration have also contributed to the air of crisis. In short, the EU is "in the midst of its worst crisis since its inauguration in 1993" (Verdun, 2013, p. 45). Scholars have already begun to investigate the conditions and consequences of such an EU under permanent stress (e.g., Cramme & Hobolt, 2015). The bottom line is that the multiple crises had and still have far-reaching implications not just for the political systems of EU member states but also for the European level of governance. Moreover, empirical studies have shown that not only has the political system been affected but also the dimension of wider EU politics. Political parties adapt their policy positions towards

the EU in times of crisis (Braun, Popa, & Schmitt, 2019; Conti, Hutter, & Nanou, 2018), while citizens adjust their perceptions of the EU system of multi-level governance (Braun & Tausendpfund, 2014; Hobolt & Wratil, 2015). Not only have citizens' perceptions changed in times of crisis but so too has their political behaviour. Empirical studies show that the crisis has consequences for individual voting behaviour (Hernández & Kriesi, 2016), although in particular economic effects on incumbent support are less crisis-driven than has previously been assumed (Talving, 2018). The bulk of empirical studies focuses on the vote of government and mainstream parties as well as Eurosceptic parties in times of crisis, whereas scholars have traditionally been less interested in voters' electoral participation. Although we agree that the investigation of the Eurosceptic vote or respectively the defection from mainstream or government parties is highly relevant, this is only one possible citizens' reaction. At least theoretically, voters can choose between two main behavioural alternatives. Hirschman (1970) aptly labels these two basic behavioural alternatives "exit" or "voice" as possible options if consumers (in our case voters) are no longer satisfied with the quality of the product (in our case the EU under stress).

Against this background, the aim of our article is to provide a comprehensive and systematic theoretical framework as well as an in-depth empirical study on electoral behaviour in the EU under stress. Since electoral behaviour in the EU can best be studied by examining elections to the European Parliament (EP), we draw on data from the 2014 European Elections Study (EES; Schmitt, Hobolt, Popa, Teperoglou, & European Parliament, 2015). To effectively examine the idea of the EU that has been much challenged in recent years, we look at the economic crisis and study its implications on electoral behaviour, namely the two main behavioural alternatives of abstention and vote choice. To put it simply, our empirical study seeks to investigate whether and how (i.e., through which mechanisms) electoral behaviour is affected by an environment in a state of permanent crisis or under stress. In line with major insights from economic models of voting (e.g., Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007), we argue that two different mechanisms are in play when studying the implications of the series of EU crises on electoral behaviour. Either individuals decide to abstain or to cast their vote with reference to their personal economic situation ('egocentric voting'), or they take into account the national economic conditions ('sociotropic voting'). In order to present a comprehensive and systematic overview of electoral behaviour in the EU under stress, we integrate the two behavioural alternatives together with the mechanisms into one analytical framework. Our findings show that the existence of an EU under stress has implications for both turnout and the decision to vote for a Eurosceptic party. Moreover, different mechanisms are present for each of the two behavioural alternatives: Turnout is clearly related to egocentric determinants and thus depends on personal exposure to the financial crisis. Conversely, the decision to vote for a Eurosceptic party is based on a different mechanism. Voters—without necessarily having been personally affected by the crisis—have a higher propensity to vote for a Eurosceptic party if they perceive their country to be threatened by such an EU under stress. These findings add to a better understanding of EU multilevel democracy.

2. Electoral Behaviour in the EU under Stress: Abstaining or Voting for Eurosceptic Parties

What do we know about electoral behaviour in the EU under stress so far? From a predominantly theoretical perspective, the standard model of political participation, the civic voluntarism model (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995) postulates that political participation depends on motivation, mobilisation, and resources. In times of crisis, when material resources become scarcer, political participation is thus supposed to decrease. According to Verba and Nie (1972), people with access to the necessary resources are more prone to participate actively in politics. Conversely, individuals with fewer resources tend to participate less in political life than others. To put it differently, "actors require resources to be able to participate politically" (Kern, Marien, & Hooghe, 2015, p. 466), primarily because these individuals realise they have fewer possibilities to exert an influence on politics. They thus decide not to take part and become in a sense apathetic with respect to political life. Linking this argument to the current crisis environment of the EU, di Mauro (2016) has been able to show that the economic crisis—one important trigger for the EU under stress—indeed has an effect, albeit limited, on electoral participation.

Not only can electoral participation be affected but also the choice to vote for a specific party. One likely scenario in this regard is that citizens in an EU under permanent stress vote to a higher degree for Eurosceptic parties to show their discontent with the current situation. Empirical studies point to an intensification of a broader trend towards destabilisation within the European party systems during times of EU crisis—e.g., with higher vote shares for populist and Eurosceptic parties (Hernández & Kriesi, 2016). The latter insight dovetails with the finding that citizens behave differently in normal times than in times of crisis (Kern et al., 2015). Individuals decide to vote for their preferred mainstream parties in a crisis-free environment, whereas they tend to avoid choosing established parties in times of economic hardship because they have lost their faith in the main actors of the political system and vote instead for more extreme parties (Hernández & Kriesi, 2016). It has also been shown that motivations to vote for incumbent parties varied at different stages of the economic crisis (Okolikj & Quinlan, 2016), but that voters have certainly defected from government parties in times of crisis as a protest against the EU's fiscal policies (Magalhães, 2016). In addition, voters

seem to have been more reactive to government policy decisions in the post-crisis period than before (Talving, 2017). In contrast to these findings, Talving (2018) has also shown that economic effects on incumbent support are surprisingly stable over time, which suggests that economic voting is as pronounced during times of crisis as it is in normal times. Moreover, citizens harmed more by the crisis have a higher propensity to vote for Eurosceptic parties (Hobolt, 2015; Hobolt & de Vries, 2016), a tendency which is driven by two main factors: a general dissatisfaction with mainstream parties on the one hand and, on the other, fundamental concerns of voters about the domestic effects of EU membership or their discontent with the EU's handling of the various crises (Hobolt, 2015; Hobolt & de Vries, 2016; Treib, 2014).

3. Lacking Resources, Egocentric and Sociotropic Economic Considerations in View of the 'EU under Stress'

To sum up, findings from previous studies suggest that an environment of crises or, in the case of our study more precisely, the EU under stress, has important implications for electoral behaviour, namely abstention and a Eurosceptic vote. As summarised in Figure 1, we seek to investigate how (i.e., through which mechanisms) the EU multi-level system under stress influences the two main alternatives of electoral behaviour. Beside the fact that previous studies mainly focused on these behavioural alternatives, we opted for turnout and vote choice as principal variables, building on Hirschman's (1970) general framework which has been applied successfully for electoral research and in the case of EP elections (Weber, 2011). It suggests that voters can generally choose between "exit" or "voice." Applying these two behavioural alternatives to our research question implies that voters can either decide to abstain from an election ("exit") or they can show their disapproval with the current situation by voting for Eurosceptic parties ("voice"). Our study seeks a better understanding of the precise motivation for each of these decisions in times of permanent crisis. We study in particular the underlying mechanisms in play: egocentric or sociotropic economic motivations. The subsequent sections serve to explain in more detail these mechanisms and their role in the case of electoral behaviour in the EU under stress. To abstain from elections as well as to vote for Eurosceptic parties is related to some degree to the fact that the EU is under stress. But, to study this link appropriately, we need to take into account insights from additional scholarly work. To capture each of the mechanisms appropriately, we draw both on economic models of voting (Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007) as well as on utilitarian arguments put forward in the literature on EU attitudes (for a similar approach see Elkink, Quinlan, & Sinnott, 2019).

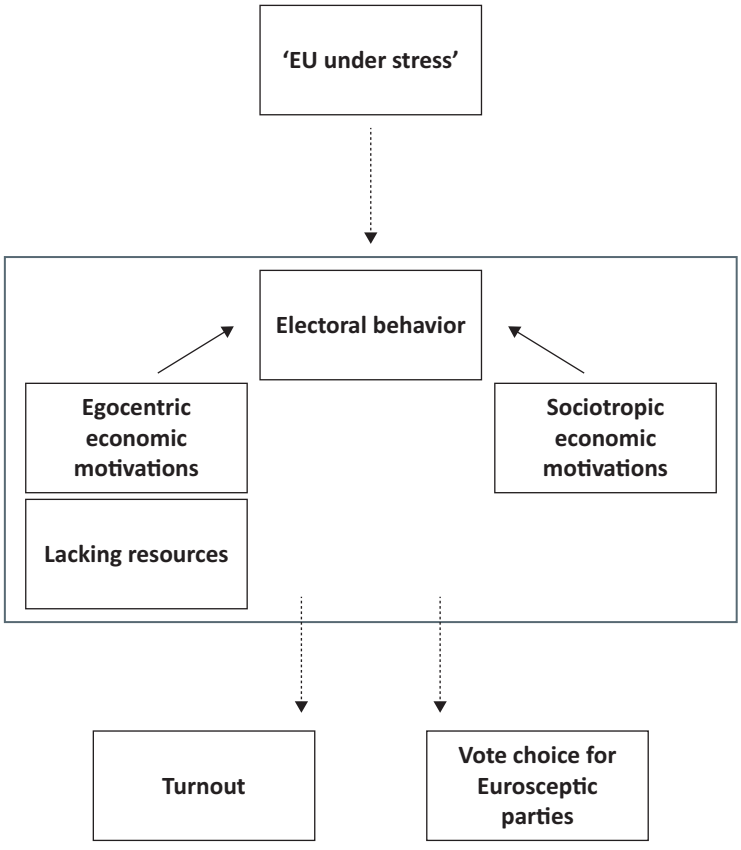

Figure 1. Electoral behaviour in an EU multi-level system under stress.

Together with the general civic voluntarism model and the empirical findings reported above, insights from two additional strands of literature can tell us a lot about the particular mechanisms in play when economic considerations unfold in the case of electoral behaviour. First, empirical studies on EU support have highlighted for a long time the predominant role of utilitarian considerations when determining public attitudes towards European integration (Eichenberg & Dalton, 2007; Gabel, 1998). Elkink et al. (2019, p. 335) mention in this regard that "sociotropic motivations—an altruistic drive—are a significantly more potent driver of the voter vis-à-vis utilitarian motivations." The latter differentiation has been inspired by the second strand of literature—economic voting (Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck & Lobo, 2017; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007)—which is also highly relevant to our task of disentangling the mechanisms behind electoral behaviour. The economic voting model posits that voters will reward the incumbent government with their vote if the economy is good, and conversely punish it by casting their vote for another party if they perceive their economic environment as less successful. Additionally, it is a common claim that individuals either cast their vote with reference to their personal economic situation, i.e., based on egocentric considerations ('pocketbook voting'), or they take into account the perceived or objective national economic conditions ('sociotropic voting'). In the latter case, voters behave not in an egocentric way, but display a more altruistic and therefore sociotropic behaviour (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007). Important to note, however, research shows that 'sociotropic voting' has a greater impact than egocentric pocketbook voting (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2013).

Overall, these thoughts from a) the civic voluntarism model, b) the economic voting literature, as well as c) insights from utilitarian accounts in the EU support literature, lead to the following theoretical assumptions: Based on the theoretical account of the civic voluntarism model, we assume for the most fundamental type of political participation—namely, electoral turnout—that individuals who have suffered personally in times of crisis and economic downturn or who have more generally experienced the EU under stress are assumed to participate less often in elections because they feel unable to exert any influence on politics. This is a reasonable assumption since unemployment rates have increased in many, though not all, EU member states in the years following the financial crisis. Moreover, at least in the member states that have been hit hardest by the subsequent waves of financial, economic, and Euro currency crises, material resources have become scarcer. In addition, the literature on EU attitudes and economic voting theory suggests that economic—egocentric as well as sociotropic—considerations apply when voters decide to vote for a particular party, in our case affecting the vote for Eurosceptic parties. As such, we have created the following hypothesis:

H1a: The greater the individual exposure to the financial crisis and its consequences (e.g., experienced through reduced income, less money, lost job), the less inclined are respondents to cast a ballot in EP elections (lack of resources egocentric non-voting);

H1b: The greater the individual exposure to the financial crisis and its consequences (e.g., experienced through reduced income, less money, lost job), the more inclined are respondents to vote for Eurosceptic parties (lack of resources egocentric Eurosceptic voting);

H2: The more citizens perceive the financial crisis and its consequences as a threat for their country (i.e., are dissatisfied with the current and future state of their national economy), the more inclined they are to vote for a Eurosceptic party (sociotropic Eurosceptic voting, individual level);

H3: The more strongly a country has been hit objectively by the financial crisis and its consequences (e.g., measured via levels of unemployment, gross domestic product (GDP), national debt), the less inclined are respondents to cast a ballot in EP elections and the more inclined are respondents to vote for a Eurosceptic party (direct non-voting and Eurosceptic voting).

Altogether, we assume that the financial crisis and its consequences that marked the starting point of the EU's current permanent state of tension has implications for electoral behaviour (H1 to H3). More specifically, we believe that different motivations are in play in this regard: A (perceived) lack of resources which is almost identical to 'egocentric' considerations in the perspective of economic voting theory can be linked theoretically to both abstention and a Eurosceptic vote (H1). 'Sociotropic' considerations, in contrast, might in particular occur in the case of Eurosceptic voting (H2) which is related to the idea of winners and losers of globalisation (Kriesi et al., 2008). In short, the assumption is that the so-called losers of globalisation (and to a similar degree of European integration) do not benefit from these new trends but rather fear them. Although transnational cooperation in general is thus perceived as a threat to their national environment, these feelings intensify in times of permanent crisis. Finally, one could of course assume that the crisis itself has direct implications for electoral behaviour (H3).

4. Design of the Study

Figure 2 summarises the overall model of our analysis for the two dependent variables. While H1 and H2 are dedicated to testing the individual-level effects of the financial crisis and its consequences on the two dependent variables, H3 is formulated to examine the aggregate-level link. Moreover, to single out the genuine effects of what we have labelled 'EU under stress,' it is necessary

not only to take into account economic indicators that shine a light on the crisis itself. We also need to control for relevant determinants of electoral behaviour as well as for the particular character of EP elections.

According to classical theories of voting behaviour (Arzheimer, Evans, & Lewis-Beck, 2017) and vote abstention (Cancela & Geys, 2016; Smets & van Ham, 2013) traditional determinants of electoral behaviour are political interest, internal political efficacy, party identification, and left–right placement, as well as demographic features such as education, social class, gender, and age. With regard to the particular character of EP elections, we take into account satisfaction with the EU and the national government. This is important insofar as EP elections represent a particular set of elections since these contests are considered to be second-order elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2017)—mainly because there is less at stake compared to national first-order elections. Equally important in terms of EU-level particularities is the individual perception of responsibility on the part of the EU for the series of crises (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014). Moreover, in EP elections, voter turnout is also to a large degree determined by factors related to the electoral systems of the member states and factors connected to the EU such as compulsory voting (Mattila, 2003), EU membership duration (Flickinger & Studlar, 2007) and satisfaction with EU membership (Steinbrecher & Rattinger, 2012; Stockemer, 2012). Accordingly, we control at the individual level for socio-demographic background, general political attitudes and EU support. At the aggregate level, we take into account the duration of EU membership, compulsory voting, post-communist membership, and the electoral cycle.

In line with the model illustrated in Figure 2 we include in our analysis individual-level and context-level variables. Hence, we need to apply a multi-level approach (Hox, Moerbeek, & Schoot, 2018). This method estimates both the influence of individual-level and contextual factors in a simultaneous and statistically accurate manner. Both dependent variables are binary variables. Therefore, we use multi-level logistic regression. Following the logic of hierarchical modelling, we present a series of models, with each model building upon the preceding one. Taking as our starting point the 'empty' model, which excludes independent variables, we can establish the variance to be explained for the micro and macro levels (intra-class correlation). In the next step, we include the individual variables (H1, H2), before considering the contextual indicators (H3).

For the empirical analyses, we draw on data from the EES 2014 (Schmitt et al., 2015). From 30 May to 27 June 2014, a national post-election survey was conducted in each of the 28 member countries of the EU. The sample size is roughly 1,100 people in each EU member state, with the exceptions of Cyprus, Luxembourg, and Malta, where the sample size is 500, as well as the UK and Germany, where the sample is approximately 1,400 and 1,600 citizens respectively. Overall, 30,064 citizens across all member states of the EU were interviewed (by means of a computer assisted personal interview).

Before we start to test our theoretical assumption, we should shed some light on the dependent variables of our study: abstention and the choice to vote for a Eurosceptic party. To map abstention, we use the following question: "EP elections were held on the [date]. For one reason or another, some people in [our country] did not vote in these elections. Did you yourself vote in the recent EP elections?" 17,217 respondents participated in the European election, while 12,778 persons stayed away from the ballot box and 69 respondents answered with "don't know." The latter group was coded as non-voters. Turnout, measured via survey data, varies considerably between the EU member states (see Figure 3). Moreover, it becomes obvious that turnout in EP elections is overestimated when we draw on data from the EES 2014 (see also Mattila, 2003, p. 453). With the exception of Belgium and Luxembourg, the official

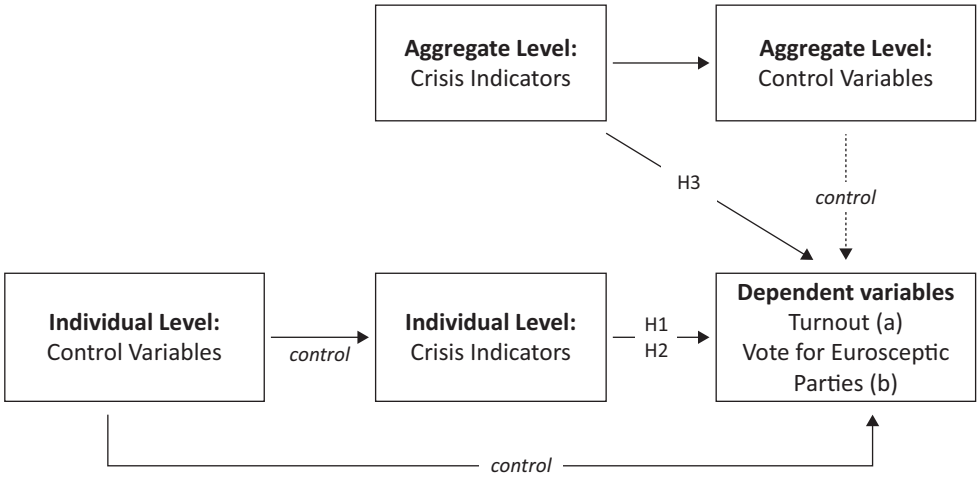

Figure 2. Theoretical hypothesis for the link between electoral behaviour and the 'EU under stress.'

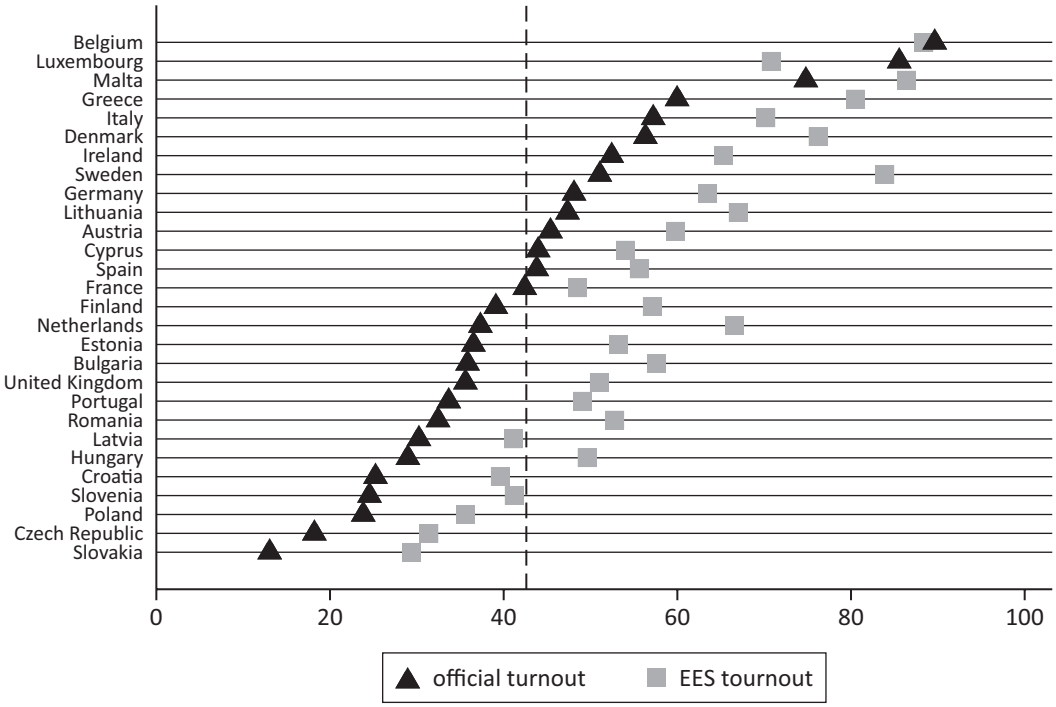

Figure 3. Turnout in percentages in the European Election 2014.

turnout is on average 12 percentage points lower than that based upon the post-election survey. Although this phenomenon can be clearly classified as 'over-reporting,' the correlation between official turnout and our survey data is very high (r = .89; N = 28). In the end, at least for the investigation of our research question, the issue of over-reporting is negligible.

The second dependent variable in our analysis is the choice to vote for a Eurosceptic party. To classify the national political parties as Eurosceptic, we use the information provided by Hobolt (2015, p. 13; see Table A1 in the Supplementary File). We coded the vote of a Eurosceptic party as 1 (N = 3,286), whereas the vote of non-Eurosceptic parties was coded as 0 (N = 13,931); non-voters were excluded from this particular analytical step. As in the case of abstention, the Eurosceptic vote varies strongly between EU member states (see Figure 4). While more than 60 percent of voters in Hungary voted for a Eurosceptic party, the share of Eurosceptic votes in Malta was 0 percent (as a result, no party in Malta has been classified as a Eurosceptic party). Again, the pattern differs between the official results and the findings provided by the EES 2014. What we can learn from this rather descriptive lesson is that drawing on survey data alone can lead to an underestimation of the share of Eurosceptic parties (this is true for all countries except Latvia). Nonetheless, the correlation between the aggregated individual data and the official data is r = .97 (N = 28), whereby the strong correlation indicates that possible biases are also negligible.

As previously discussed, when it comes to our main independent variables, we need to distinguish carefully between factors operating at the individual and the contextual level. At the individual level, we use five variables to capture the individual economic situation in the aftermath of the financial crisis. As indicators for the idea of egocentric considerations due to lack of resources (H1), we use three different questions: First, whether the respondent or someone in the household of the respondent has lost his or her job during the last two years; second, if the household has experienced a decrease in income during the last two years; third, how often the respondent faced difficulties in paying bills at the end of the month during the last twelve months. These three indicators ideally map different nuances of economic deprivation in the aftermath of the crisis. As indicators for 'sociotropic voting' (H2), we use the individual perception of the current national economy and the evaluation of the general economic situation over the following twelve months. Higher values indicate a negative perception of the national economy. To map the implications of the crisis at the contextual level (H3), we use GDP per capita, the unemployment rate, and the national debt as objective indicators for the economic situation. In contrast to previous studies, we have opted not only to use static values (e.g., the economic situation in 2013) but also to allow for a dynamic perspective taking into account changing values over time (2008 to 2013). Furthermore, we include a dummy variable to indicate whether a country is a member of the Eurozone (yes = 1) or a bailout country (yes = 1).

In addition to the economic variables, empirical research on turnout and vote choice suggests a number of other potentially influential factors, especially at the individual level. Therefore, we include several variables designed to control for other potentially confounding fac-

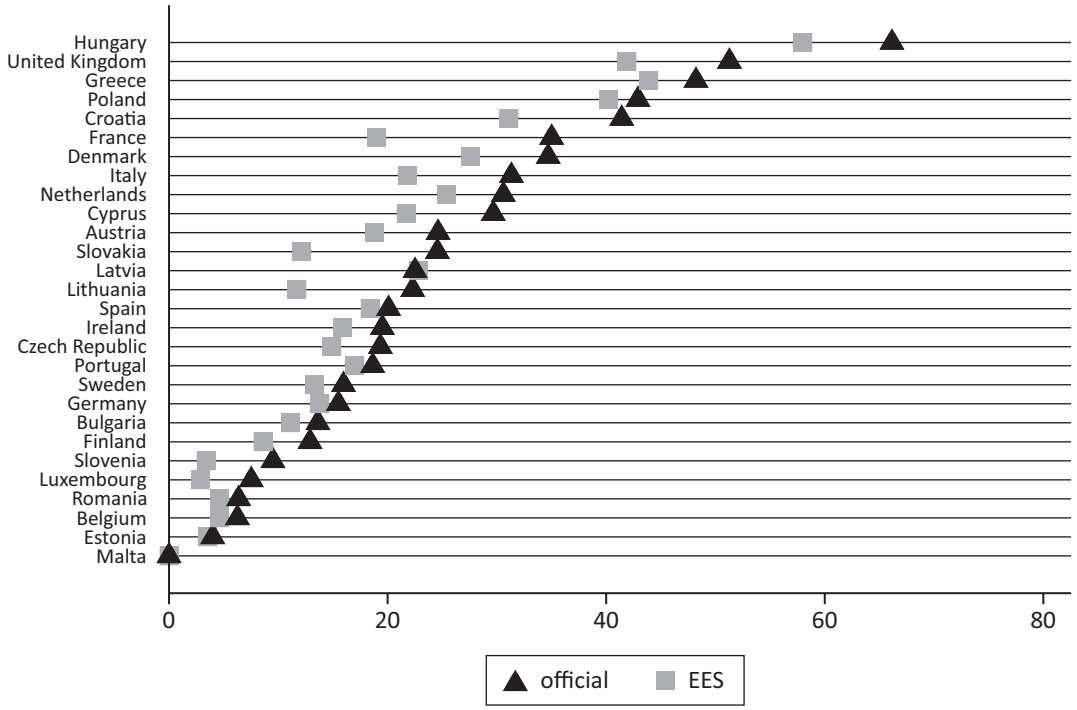

Figure 4. Eurosceptic vote in percentages in the European Election 2014.

tors: the individual perception of responsibility of the EU for the current economic situation; satisfaction with the EU and the national government; political interest, internal political efficacy, party identification, and the left–right placement as classical determinants of turnout and voting. Finally, we consider demographic features such as education, social class, gender, and age. At the macro level, we control for compulsory voting, election cycle, duration of EU membership and communist history.

All indicators are coded identically with low values indicating low levels and high values indicating high levels of the respective characteristics. All variables are rescaled—the lowest value is 0 and the highest is 1. Whereas in the case of turnout, we consider all member states of the EU (N = 28), in the case of the Eurosceptic vote, Malta will be excluded due to the lack of a Eurosceptic party in this country (N = 27). Descriptive information concerning the independent variables can be gathered from Table A2 in the Supplementary File and the question wording is also documented in the Supplementary File's Table A3.

5. Empirical Analysis

Following the logic of hierarchical modelling, we present a series of models, where each builds on the preceding one. Starting with the empty model, the share of cross-national variance on the total variance amounts to 14.6 percent (turnout) and 21.8 percent (vote for a Eurosceptic party). The estimates also indicate that turnout and the vote for a Eurosceptic party depend on both individual- and context-level indicators. In a further step, we consider the effects of our core individual-level determinants of vote abstention and vote for a Eurosceptic party. The results of the individual models are presented in Table 1 via stepwise models: M1 displays the effects for egocentric considerations only; M2 displays the effects for sociotropic considerations only; and M3 combines the two models into one final model. The coefficients in M1 confirm the impact of egocentric considerations due to lack of resources (H1) and can be interpreted as follows: Egocentric considerations decrease electoral participation (H1a) and raise the likelihood of voting for a Eurosceptic party (H1a). Moreover, viewed through the lens of the notion of sociotropic voting (M2), our results are interesting in two ways: First, a respondent with negative current perception and/or future evaluation of the economic situation is less likely to cast a ballot in the EP elections; second, a negative current perception and/or future evaluation of the economic situation also increases the likelihood of voting for a Eurosceptic party (H2). In summary, our results thus support the idea of both sociotropic and egocentric voting.

For ease of interpretation, we now include our individual-level control variables in the subsequent model. The key message of the results in Model 3 in Table 1 is that under the influence of relevant individual characteristics, the effects of the economic indicators are weaker than in Models 1 and 2 and sometimes no longer significant, albeit without changing substantively. Put simply, the economic indicators continue to exert an independent effect, whereby the loss of a job and problems in paying bills reduces the likelihood of electoral participation. This pattern clearly confirms our first hypothesis (H1), showing that egocentric voting has a sig-

Table 1. Individual models of electoral participation and the vote for a Eurosceptic party.

	Electoral participation			Vote for Eurosceptic party		
	M1	M2	M3	M1	M2	M3
Individual level						
H1: lost job (yes = 1)	−.26***		−.15***	.14**		.08
H1: decrease in income (yes = 1)	−.00		.05	.17**		.04
H1: paying bills (ref. no problems)						
occasionally	−.36***		−.11**	.12*		−.02
most of the time	−.62***		−.23***	.38***		.06
H2: bad economic evaluation (now)		−.40***	−.07		.47***	.10
H2: bad economic evaluation (future)		−.62***	−.15		.92***	.55***
EU responsibility economic			.39***			−.15
EU (ref. dk)						
dissatisfied			−.08			.55***
satisfied			.18***			−.23**
National government (ref. dk)						
dissatisfied			−.06			.44***
satisfied			−.04			−.16
Political interest			1.85***			.21*
Internal efficacy			.11			−.16
Party identification (yes = 1)			.63***			.64***
Left–right scale (ref. middle)						
left (0–3)			.15**			.27***
right (7–10)			.29***			.50***
don't know/refusal			−.24***			−.18
Education (ref. middle)						
low			−.16***			.03
high			.17***			−.15**
Level in society			.62***			−.64***
Gender (male = 1)			−.12***			.26***
Age			1.55***			−.79***
Random effects						
Contextual level	.56	.54	.54	.91	.95	.94
Intra-class correlations	.145	.141	.141	.212	.225	.222
Akaike Information Criterion	33163.5	33328.57	29003.27	13588.1	13489.85	12648.39
Bayesian Information Criterion	33212.68	33361.36	29199.99	13633.93	13520.39	12831.64
N individual (countries)	26.804 (28)	26.804 (28)	26.804 (28)	15.297 (27)	15.297 (27)	15.297 (27)

Notes: Multi-level logistic regression. Coefficients are not standardised; all variables are rescaled (lowest value is 0; highest value is 1). Coefficients indicate the change associated with moving from the lowest to the highest value. Significance level: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Source: Schmitt et al. (2015).

nificant impact only on electoral participation, but not on the vote for Eurosceptic parties. In contrast to this observation, a negative future evaluation of the economic situation increases the likelihood of voting for a Eurosceptic party which in turn confirms our second hypothesis (H2), that the mechanism of sociotropic voting is relevant in the case of voting for Eurosceptic parties. Finally, the effects of the control variables on electoral participation and the vote for a Eurosceptic party are in line with previous research. Perception of responsibility on the part of the EU regarding the economic situation has a positive effect on electoral participation, but the effect on party vote is statistically not significant. Satisfaction with the EU also promotes turnout, whereas being dissatisfied with the EU and the national government fosters voting for a Eurosceptic party. The findings confirm the idea that national politics has an impact on voting behaviour in EP elections, whereby higher political interest, education, and party identification have a positive effect on turnout.

In the next step, we include the context-level variables in our model in order to detect whether the crisis also has a direct impact (H3), in addition to the effects via the individual level already shown. At this point, we distinguish between the current economic situation and a dynamic perspective. Initially, we consider the indicators separately in the models, i.e., we estimated 24 different multi-level models, one model for each indi-

cator. Individual variables are always included but not shown for reasons of clarity (compared to Model 3, the results of the individual-level indicators remain stable). The results of the multi-level regression are presented in Table 2. Two crisis indicators show statistically significant effects. We can see that the greater the national debt, the more citizens cast their ballot in EP elections. A fast economic recovery after the economic crisis—operationalised by the change in GDP—reduces the likelihood of a Eurosceptic voting decision. With an eye to the control variables at the contextual level, our findings suggest that compulsory voting and a longer membership in the EU increases turnout, whereas a communist heritage reduces electoral participation. Moreover, in Eurozone countries, the probability of voting for a Eurosceptic party is somewhat lower than in non-Eurozone members.

In a final step, we merge the significant context-level indicators into one multi-level model (M5; Table 3). The results of the multi-level regression show that compulsory voting has a positive effect and a communist heritage has a negative effect on electoral participation. National debt no longer has a statistically significant effect. In terms of the vote for a Eurosceptic party, we find two statistically significant effects: First, a fast economic recovery after the economic crisis reduces the likelihood of a Eurosceptic voting decision; and second, the likelihood of voting for a Eurosceptic party is lower in countries of the Eurozone compared with non-Eurozone countries. To sum up, our final results corroborate that there is indeed a direct relationship between the financial crisis and its consequences and electoral behaviour (H3). Nevertheless, this holds true only in the case of the vote for a Eurosceptic party, but not for electoral participation. What does this mean substantively? First, in cases where a country is a member of the Eurozone, the likelihood of voting for a Eurosceptic party is lower. Second, the faster the economic recovery of a country, the less inclined are respondents to vote for a Eurosceptic party.

6. Conclusion

The financial crisis which turned quickly into a global economic crisis was followed by severe political consequences. This led to a certain transformation of the EU multi-level system, but also the dimension of EU politics. Our study adds to a growing literature on EU politics illustrating that not only citizens' perceptions towards the

Table 2. Individual and contextual fixed effects models of turnout and vote in the European election 2014.

	M4 (Electoral participation)	M4 (Vote for Eurosceptic party)
GDP (2013)	.92	−1.11
Δ GDP (2008–2013)	.33	−1.55#
Unemployment rate (2013)	.52	.71
Δ Unemployment rate (2008–2013)	.73	.75
National debt (2013)	1.40*	1.29
Δ National debt (2008–2013)	.26	.17
Bailout countries	.52	.19
Member of the Euro area	.29	−.71#
Duration of EU membership	.74#	−.04
Compulsory voting	1.02**	−.55
Post-communist member	−.81**	−.19
Cycle	−.61	.47

Notes: Variables at the individual level (Model 3) are included. Significance level: # $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 3. Individual and contextual fixed effects models of turnout and Eurosceptic vote in the European election 2014.

	M5 (Electoral participation)	M5 (Vote for Eurosceptic party)
Δ GDP (2008–2013)	./.	−1.78*
National debt (2013)	.38	./.
Member of the Euro area	./.	−.81*
Duration of EU membership	−.07	./.
Compulsory voting	.72*	./.
Post-communist member	−.59#	./.
Intra-class correlations	.089	.172
Akaike Information Criterion	28996.94	12643.98
Bayesian Information Criterion	29266.44	12842.5
N individual (countries)	26.804 (28)	15.297 (27)

Notes: Variables at the individual level (Model 3) are included. Significance level: # $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$.

EU but also different types of electoral behaviour in EP elections have been and are still being affected by these turbulent times, to be more specific the EU which is currently under stress. While most of the conventional determinants still hold true, our findings most importantly show that the crisis and its implications indeed have an independent effect on electoral behaviour as the crisis has provoked EU citizens to participate to a lesser degree in the 2014 EP elections and increased the vote for Eurosceptic parties. Moreover, our empirical study enables us to get a better idea of the precise mechanisms in play. As hypothesised, lacking resources and therefore the fact that the individual life of a person is affected by the crisis—a phenomenon which we labelled 'lack of resources egocentric non-voting' (H1)—indeed has an impact on electoral participation, whereas these egocentric considerations do not affect the decision to vote for a Eurosceptic party. In contrast, the mere perception of worsening economic conditions, i.e., the idea of 'sociotropic' voting (H2) as well as some objective indicators of the crisis (H3) affect the decision to vote for a Eurosceptic party, but not the non-participation in the 2014 EP elections. What does this pattern tell us? A citizen may be individually affected by the crisis and its economic and political consequences, but does not (automatically) vote for a Eurosceptic party. Instead of voting for a Eurosceptic party, in that case he or she decides not to vote at all. Moreover, the 'mere existence' of the crisis in a country as well as its perception—but not necessarily whether an individual feels personally affected by the crisis—heightens the propensity to vote for Eurosceptic parties. This could indeed be interpreted as an intensification of a broader trend towards destabilisation within the European party systems (Hernández & Kriesi, 2016). Instead of voting for established parties in times of economic hardship, voters make their choice for parties outside the mainstream since they have lost their faith in the main actors of the political system.

The findings of our study are not only of interest for scholars of voting behaviour, but will also further the understanding of EU multi-level politics. To gain a different perspective beyond the findings reported above, Figure 5 maps the entire process from a multi-level point of view. A European-wide event, the financial crisis followed by the Euro currency crisis, hit most of the member states, but not all of them equally hard. A few years later, the 2014 EP elections took place and, as our findings indicate, this crisis and its implications affected

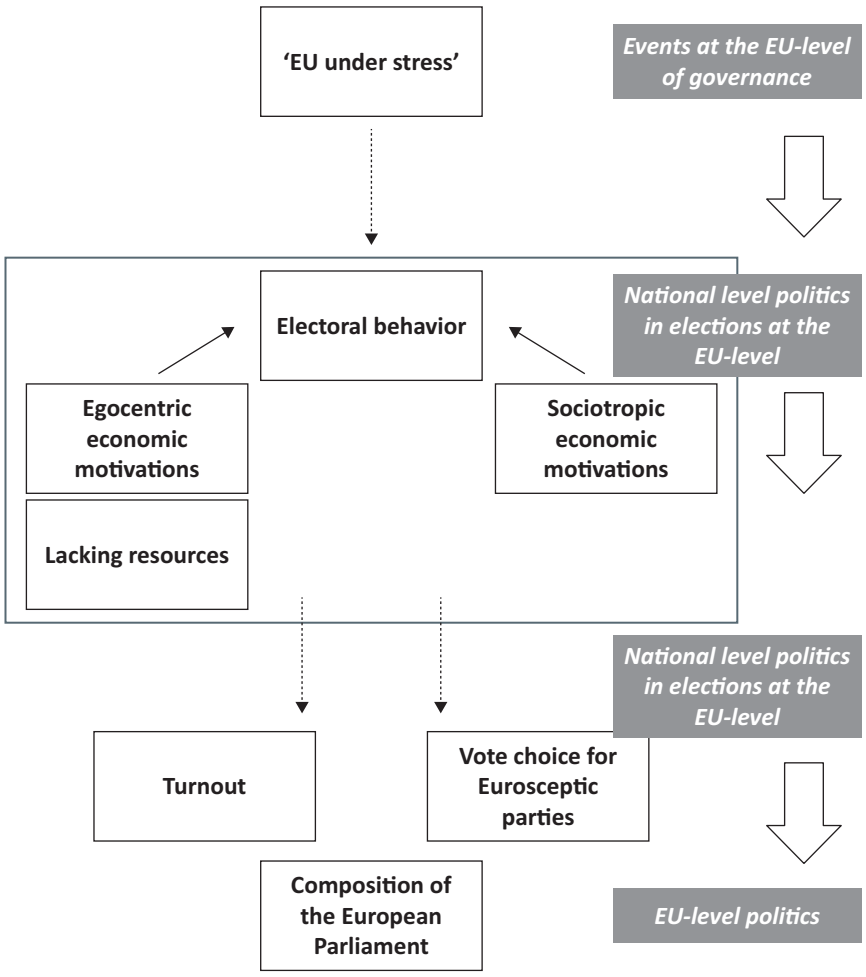

Figure 5. Implications of electoral behaviour in an EU multi-level system under stress.

individual-level electoral behaviour (see in more detail the introduction to this thematic issue, Braun, Gross, & Rittberger, 2020). To be more specific, the national economy, affected by a European crisis, is related to the outcome of the EP elections. Although these elections take place at the European level, they are widely viewed as being second-order national elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980)—and this second-order character still holds true for the 2014 EP elections (Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015). This means that EP elections might be different from national elections since they produce different results and always need to be interpreted with an eye to national elections. Nevertheless, in the end the results are meaningful for the two electoral levels: the EU level since the composition of the EP represents the result of the EP elections; and the national level as the EP elections are always to a certain degree the test balloons for national first-order elections.

The lesson we can thus draw from our study beyond the undoubtedly interesting mechanisms in operation is that electoral behaviour in the EU multi-level system is far from independent from the different levels in play. Accordingly, each of these levels needs to be taken into account when investigating electoral behaviour (but see also Golder, Lago, Blais, Gidengil, & Gschwend, 2017; Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt, Sanz, Braun, & Teperoglou, 2020) or party politics in the EU (Braun & Schmitt, 2018). The 2019 EP elections should provide scholars of EU politics with a fertile resource for appropriately studying these and related mechanisms regarding electoral and party politics. Nonetheless, we do not have any reasons to expect a completely different pattern for each of the described mechanisms in the 2019 EP elections. The slightly higher levels in turnout could be interpreted by a decrease in 'egocentric' considerations whereas the unabated high levels of Eurosceptic vote should still be related to 'sociotropic' considerations.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

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

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Part II.

Political Parties and Interest Groups in the EU Multi-Level System

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Article

Competition in the European Arena: How the Rules of the Game Help Nationalists Gain

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Abstract
Why does the European election fail to produce competition between European policy alternatives despite the increased politicization of European integration and efforts to connect election results to the Commission Presidency via the *Spitzenkandidaten* process? In this article I theorize the European arena's incentive structure for political competition by synthesizing Strøm's (1990) behavioral theory of competitive parties (votes, office, policy) and Bartolini's (1999, 2000) four dimensions of electoral competition (contestability, availability, decidability, and incumbent vulnerability). I model EU decidability (party differentials on EU policy) and formulate specific expectations about party differentiation by considering parties' vote-, office-, and policy-seeking motives under the European arena's specific conditions. How parties behave under the specific incentive structure of the European arena matters for the EU's development as a polity.

Keywords
dimensions of competition; European election; European Parliament; European Union; political parties; party goals

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1. Introduction

Research on the European Parliament (EP) as a legislative arena shows that there is not only a high degree of policy coherence and cohesive voting behavior within European Political Groups (EPGs) but also clear differentiation and competition between EPGs on key policy issues (e.g., Hix, Kreppel, & Noury, 2003; Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2018; McElroy & Benoit, 2010; but see also Cicchi, 2011). However, transnational policy differentiation between alliances in the European parliamentary arena has consistently failed so far to translate to 'translate' in the European electoral arena.

Contestation over transnational policies in the EP electoral arena would increase European Union (EU) policy responsiveness to the (changing) preferences of EU citizens, thus benefiting European democracy (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). Although the EPG system has long since grown strong and "ready for power" (Hix et al., 2003), it has not transformed into a transnational party system that offers EU voters alternative European policy options to choose from. Seeking to address this deficit, the EP made use of a new Treaty article (EU, 2007, Article 17[7]) that links the Head of the Commission to the results of European elections and came up with the *Spitzenkandidaten* experiment in 2014 (see Hobolt, 2014), a system which it preserved up until the 2019 election. Note that this occurred after significant EP empowerment (e.g., the expansion of policy areas subject to co-decision; EU, 2007) and at a time of high levels of politicization of European integration. As recent empirical research has convincingly shown, however, the experiment had limited success (Braun & Popa, 2018; Braun & Schwarzbözl, 2019). A persistent deficit of EP elections continues to be the absence of competition among alternative transnational policies. While EU issues play an increasing role in the European electoral arena, this arena remains dominated by national issues or EU polity issues that are not subject to the EP's jurisdiction (Braun, Hutter, & Kerscher, 2016; Lefkofridi & Kritzinger, 2008; Novelli & Johansson, 2019).

Why does the European election fail to produce competition between European policy alternatives even in spite of the increased politicization of European integration and efforts to connect its results to the Commission Presidency via the *Spitzenkandidaten*? In this article I present a model of the actual choice likely to be offered by vote-, office-, and policy-seeking parties under the specific conditions of competition in the European arena. This model synthesizes insights from Strøm's (1990) behavioral theory of competitive parties (votes, office, policy) and Bartolini's (1999, 2000) four dimensions of electoral competition (contestability, availability, decidability, and incumbent vulnerability). Using this model of the European arena as a political-electoral 'market,' I highlight major obstacles to EU policy responsiveness that relate to the supply and demand of transnational policy competition.

Debates about the EP election's connection to EU-level executive office through *Spitzenkandidaten* often overlook the barriers to enter this competition in the first place. Although such barriers to entry may be variably low for national-level newcomers and outsiders, they are universally high for transnational ones (low EU-level contestability). As such, these barriers encourage nationalist vote- and policy-seeking strategies as opposed to transnationalist strategies. In spite of a growing transnational cleavage (Hooghe & Marks, 2018) and large numbers of potentially 'available' voters (who might be willing to switch from national to supranational policy suppliers), these voters remain trapped in segmented electoral markets (low EU-level availability). As it stands, therefore, the European arena discourages the transnational expression of support for or opposition to EU policies on both the supply and demand sides of competition. By inhibiting competition over transnational (as opposed to national) policy alternatives (EU-level decidability), this arena traps European citizens and elites in a futile debate in favor of or against the EU as a whole. Crucially, as long as the debate is structured not in EU policy but in EU polity terms (pro/anti-EU), nationalists have an advantage because their basic ideology (nationalism versus Europeanism) structures the competition. This means that where there is a growing transnational cleavage (Hooghe & Marks, 2018), then the transnational part of that cleavage is disenfranchised by the way in which EP elections are conducted. Under current conditions, the connection of the EP results to the Commission Presidency is unlikely to produce the desired results in terms of transnational expression of support for or opposition to EU policies (EU policy differentiation). Unless structural change is pursued, therefore, the very rules of the EP game will continue to help nationalists gain.

2. Party Goals and Conditions of Competition

I assume that parties are purposeful actors pursuing votes, policy, and office (Strøm, 1990). Parties aim at increased electoral shares, enhanced advocacy of their ideologies, and the attainment of executive power in the form of politically discretionary governmental and sub-governmental appointments (Bartolini, 1999, 2000; Pedersen, 2012; Strøm, 1990). While vote-seeking addresses the electorate at large (public opinion), policy-seeking is a goal closely linked to parties' ideologies and their partisans (de Sio & Weber, 2014; Lefkofridi & Nezi, 2019) aimed at strengthening advocacy for ideologies supported by core segments of the electorate who identify with a specific party instead of others.

The feasibility of each goal is conditioned by institutional opportunities and constraints, which further shape the trade-offs that parties face between these goals (Müller & Strøm, 1999, pp. 5–13). A strategy of optimizing votes, for example, may render a party unacceptable as a cabinet coalition partner by other parties on policy grounds, while to achieve office a party may sacrifice policy or "soft-pedal" issues and policy promises that could maximize its votes (Bartolini, 2000, p. 44).

2.1. EP Empowerment, Politicization, and Contestation over EU Policies

Party contestation over EU policies in the EP arena was expected to benefit from the politicization of European integration, the EP's empowerment, and the connection of the European election's outcome with the Commission Presidency (Bardi et al., 2010; Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Hix, 2002, 2013). The Lisbon Treaty (EU, 2007) established the EP as a co-legislator on an equal footing with the Council and linked EP election results to the Commission Presidency. As a result, in 2014 and 2019 some EU-level parties appointed lead candidates for the post of Commission President. The *Spitzenkandidaten* system operated during a decade of unprecedented levels of politicization of the EU and its policies, generated by multiple crises (the economic and financial crisis, the migration crisis, and Brexit). Taken together, these developments should have generated "greater incentives for stronger party organizations and greater possibilities for parties to shape EU policy outcomes in a particular ideological direction" (Hix, Noury, & Roland, 2005, p. 211). Politicization should have strengthened vote-seekers' incentives to invest in EU issues for electoral gains; the strengthening of the EP should have enhanced policy-seekers' interest in EU-level advocacy of their ideology; and the *Spitzenkandidaten* experiment should have motivated office-seekers to engage in a transnational contest over the Presidency.

In the most recent (2019) election, the key dividing line was (still) less about different visions of the Union and accompanying policy proposals to implement these visions than about whether we want the Union or not. Turnout increased for the first time, however, and EU voters broke the historical pattern of electing a combined majority held by two major mainstream pro-EU party families (i.e., Christian and Social Democrats). The winners of this election were either clearly pro-integration

parties, such as the Greens and the Liberals, or the most obviously anti-integration forces, such as the far-right Identity and Democracy group. One winning group sees the EU as an opportunity for their prime policy goals (environmentalism, liberalism), while the other sees it as a major obstacle to their goals (nationalism). While this result constitutes evidence of a rising transnational cleavage (Hooghe & Marks, 2018), as long as the debate is structured not in policy but in polity terms (pro/anti-EU dimension), nationalists will continue to have an advantage because their basic ideology (nationalism versus Europeanism) structures the competition. Below I will argue that the specific conditions of competition in the EU arena encourage nationalist vote—and policy-seeking strategies while hampering transnationalist vote- and policy-seeking strategies.

Competition is understood here as the process through which parties try to shape (to their advantage) the structure of electoral preferences (Bartolini, 1999, 2000). To understand how and which types of goal-oriented behavior would result in more or less EU policy differentiation, we first need to specify how different conditions of competition incentivize vote-, policy- and office-seeking parties to differentiate (or obfuscate) the EU policy offer. For this purpose, I review the general conditions under which parties compete and present a model of decidability (policy differentiation).

2.2. Conditions of Competition

Bartolini's (1999, 2000) framework identifies four empirical dimensions of politico-electoral competition:

- Contestability: The rules of the game that structure political opportunities for old and new contestants (Bartolini, 1999, p. 460), including legal eligibility requirements to stand for and vote in an election and thresholds for seat distribution;
- Availability: The quota of available voters who are "willing to consider changing their party choice," or the potential for electoral volatility (Bartolini, 1999, p. 465);
- Decidability: The level of actual choice available to voters (Bartolini, 2000, pp. 34–51);
- Incumbent vulnerability: The likelihood of incumbents being replaced as a result of changes in voters' choices (Bartolini, 2000, pp. 52–55).

Given the interconnectedness of these four dimensions, any empirical theory of competition must link one dimension with another by highlighting what "consequences each entails for the other" (Bartolini, 2000, p. 61). Since responsiveness is a key concern in the debate about EU-level contestation, here I will focus on decidability, which, along with incumbent vulnerability, constitutes a necessary condition for responsiveness. While the vulnerability of incumbents is a necessary condition for decidability, however, it is not sufficient of itself (Bartolini, 2000).

In Bartolini's (2000) model, decidability is assumed to be dependent not only upon incumbent vulnerability but also upon contestability and availability (Table 1). Differentiation in the policy offer between parties is expected under the following conditions: First, when barriers to newcomers in the political market are low (high contestability ↑); second, when a considerable part of the electorate is willing to switch along the key dividing lines (high availability ↑); third, when voters are able to reward or sanction incumbents (high vulnerability ↑). Table 1 summarizes this proposition and visualizes the relationships involved.

3. Contestability, Availability, and Incumbent Vulnerability in the European Arena

Applying this model we would expect EU decidability (which concerns levels of differentiation and clarity in the EU positions offered by parties) to be generated by low barriers to transnational policy supply and demand, tougher with high EU-wide availability of voters willing to switch between EU-level parties, and high capacity of the EU-wide electorate to sanction EU-level incumbents. Given that such conditions would serve to incentivize transnationalist vote-, policy- and office-seeking, the first question that must be addressed is whether such conditions exist.

Until now, the political and scholarly debates have concentrated on strengthening the electoral connection to an EU-level office (incumbent vulnerability) as a means of incentivizing office-seeking parties to engage in an arena which (for them) is regarded as a "beauty contest" (van der Brug, van der Eijk, & Franklin, 2007). However, the strong focus of this debate on office-seeking parties and their lack of engagement overlooks the fact that incumbent vulnerability alone is not a sufficient condition for decidability. In the following, I place

Table 1. Supply and demand conditions of political competition (Bartolini, 1999, 2000).

SUPPLY \ DEMAND	Availability (voters willing to switch)		Decidability (party differences)
Contestability (high when barriers to enter are low)	↑ / ↑	→	↑
Incumbent Vulnerability (high when executive tenure is *not* safe)	↑ / ↑	→	↑

a strong focus on the barriers to entry, which helps in assessing the degree to which transnationalist/nationalist vote- and policy-seeking strategies are encouraged or discouraged. By combining this dimension with the vulnerability and availability dimensions we can assess the consequences for EU-level policy differentiation in a more comprehensive manner.

3.1. Contestability

The 1976 Direct Election Act establishes some common basic principles, but national laws regulating contestability in the EP arena differ. Since 2002, all members use some form of proportional representation with varied list systems that provide different incentives to create a strong connection between deputies and electorates (Hix & Hagemann, 2009). For countries using disproportional rules in domestic elections (e.g., France, Greece, and the UK), the European election grants easier access to willing competitors. Precisely because the EP election does not lead to government formation and is conducted using proportional electoral rules, (small) parties lacking "governing potential" (Sartori, 1976) at national level are likely to seek those votes that they would not receive in national elections, especially in systems where ballots cast for third-parties are "wasted" (Mueller, 2003).

That being said, the threshold for seat allocation used across the EU varies, ranging from 0% to 5%. Many EU member states (Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and the UK) employ no threshold at all. Cyprus and Greece set the threshold at 1.8% and 3% respectively, while Austria, Italy and Sweden employ a 4% threshold. In nine EU member states (Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia), competitors face the highest threshold of 5% (EP, 2019). Where thresholds are low, vote- and policy-seeking incentives are stronger for small existing parties, as well as for new competitors for whom the EP arena may serve as a 'back door' for entering their national electoral arenas (e.g., *Alternative für Deutschland*). Even stronger incentives to seek votes in the EP arena are provided in countries where parties become eligible for public funding once they have received a specific number of votes in the EP election, including Greece, Germany, and Portugal (see van Klingeren, Orozco, van Spanje, & de Vreese, 2015).

There is also variation in the right to stand for election in the European arena. Besides national differences in the minimum age required for candidacy, candidacies are restricted to EU citizens who are nationals of x member state or residents of x member state that satisfy the same requirements that each member sets for its own nationals (EP, 2019, Article 10, Council Directive 93/109/EC). To stand as a candidate in Luxembourg, for instance, where the foreign population exceeds 20% of the electorate, a residence period of five years is required. Such residence requirements disadvantage mobile EU citizens who move frequently between member states for work purposes. While nominations may only be submitted by political parties and political organizations in some EU member states, in other states nominations may be endorsed by a required number of signatures, ranging from 5,000 in Belgium to 150,000 in Italy (Alemanno, 2018; EP, 2019). Candidate nomination and selection procedures, in turn, impact the kind of activities in which deputies engage once elected (Euchner & Frech, 2020).

Last but not least, no person may stand as a candidate in more than one EU country in the same election (Article 4, Council of the EU, 1993). This last provision closes the market to candidates with an ambition to mobilize voters in more than one member state, which would necessitate a transnational policy platform. To address this deficit, Andrew Duff, a Member of the EP (MEP), developed a proposal for transnationalizing electoral lists—an idea that was discussed in light of Brexit (see Verger, 2018). This proposal for the first "really pan-European" constituency was rejected in the EP's final plenary vote in February 2018 (VoteWatch EU, 2018). The failure of the proposal was due not only to Eurosceptics but also to the members of the European People's Party (EPP) that currently dominates EU institutions.

The rules of the EP game as they currently stand provide a relatively open politico-electoral market to national-level competitors in most (but not all) member states. Wherever and insofar as the EP lowers the barriers to enter the competition, the EP arena is likely to be highly valued and utilized by outsiders/newcomers and small existing competitors to increase their electoral strength and/or reinforce their policy influence in the EP. Provided that national parties can find congruent counterparts and form EPGs, they can use the European arena for forming common policy fronts against their competitors. Green parties did exactly this and managed to bring about policy changes to their national systems via successful coordination at EU level (Bomberg, 2002).

That said, the EP arena sets high barriers to the entry of new transnational competitors such as, for example, the pan-European movements Diem25 and Volt. Fielding candidates in 28 different member states with different national provisions complicates the strategies of transnational movements willing to engage in the arena. In some member states the 5% threshold may be too high to overcome for new transnational organizations competing against national parties that are organizationally entrenched in domestic systems. Volt ran candidates in eight different countries and won only one seat, for example, while Diem25 fielded candidates in eleven countries but failed to gain any seats at all, even in Greece where one of its (famous) founders, Yanis Varoufakis, won 2.99% of the vote. This is because EU-level contestability of the EP arena is very low (high barriers), which undermines the vote- and policy-seeking efforts of transnational political entrepreneurs seeking to diversify the EU policy offer.

Barriers to entry also concern the right to vote, hence it is worth highlighting that voting methods vary for EU citizens resident abroad (Sabbati, Sgueo, & Dobreva, 2019; see also SpaceEU, 2019). On the basis of the free movement of labor, EU citizens can seek jobs in different member states, which results in increasing mobility within the EU territory. In 2017, about 17 million (4% of the EU's working population) were living in a country other than their member state of origin, while an additional 1.4 million constituted cross-border workers (European Commission, 2018). Mobile EU citizens are confronted with complex procedures and varied deadlines for electoral registration in their countries of residence or of origin, often needing to travel to distant cities if no voting booth is provided where they live. These EU citizens are the most likely to have preferences for or against specific transnational policies, but the European arena makes exercising their democratic right particularly cumbersome. This implies that those "who are in effect building Europe from the bottom up, along with their lives and families" face more difficulties in steering its political future (Alemanno, 2019). Setting high barriers to voters who are likely to have preferences for specific EU policies thus weakens the incentives for vote-seeking parties to address these preferences.

3.2. Availability

The organizational encapsulation of voters has been in decline in Western Europe, while it has never been very strong in Central-Eastern Europe (Rohrschneider & Whitefield, 2012; van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012). In the EU as a whole there is a high availability of voters, which is manifested through low voters' scores of various indicators such as party identification and party membership, and higher electoral volatility (e.g., Kriesi & Pappas, 2015, p. 2). To date, these large amounts of available voters across the Union remain "encapsulated territorially." The fact that voters can only choose between those parties operating within the borders of a single member state (either the EU member state of their origin or of their residence) does not encourage the articulation of transnational policy alternatives by vote-seeking parties.

On the demand side the market is segmented, while the partisan connection between citizens and EU-level parties remains weak. This is due, amongst other factors, to the attitudes of Europarties' own national member parties towards individual membership, since strengthening European citizens' individual membership of Europarties would compete directly with national parties over their own (existing or potential) party members (Hertner, 2019). This holds true also for the Greens, despite being the most Europeanized party family (Bomberg, 2002). This effort by policy-seeking organizations to retain control over their partisans also impedes the transnational expression of preferences for/against EU policies.

3.3. Incumbent Vulnerability

The European arena is not bound to the alternation of executive power at EU level, which means safety of tenure. EU-level institutions cannot be (collectively) sanctioned for the policies they pursue, which disincentivizes office-seeking parties from EU-level differentiation. The missing connection between the EP arena and some kind of 'EU-level government' implies weak incentives for office-seeking parties to engage in this arena, and this has been regarded as the key obstacle towards the development of a transnational party system, the strengthening of transnational parties and, ultimately, contestation over EU policies in European elections (Bardi et al., 2010, p. 7; Follesdal & Hix, 2006; Hix, 2002).

The specific conditions of competition in the EP arena are summarized in Table 2.

4. Parties' Goals and the Consequences for Decidability in the European Area

Approaching the European arena from the perspective of party goals under these specific conditions (as summarized in Table 2) generates three key insights. First, the multilevel structure separates party goals from one another, since the successful pursuit of each goal concerns different levels of aggregation in the same channel (national vs. EU-levels of EP representation) or even

Table 2. Conditions of competition in the EP arena.

DEMAND 'Segmented' / SUPPLY 'Protected'	Availability Territorially encapsulated; high barriers to *transnational* citizens		Decidability National-level and EU-level differentiation
Contestability Open to national competitors Closed to transnational competitors	NAT ↑ EU ↓	→	NAT ↑ EU ↓
Incumbent vulnerability 'Safety of Tenure—Inability to Sanction' Arena very weakly connected to EU institutions' executive power.	NAT ↑ EU ↓	→	NAT ↓ EU ↓

different institutions (national government, EU Council, Commission); hence strategies to optimize votes or policy have no direct repercussions for office-seeking, which is served by another arena. Moreover, although a conflict between vote- and policy-optimization is possible (a strategy optimizing votes may alienate EPG partners), EPGs' strength in the assembly (seats), and consequently their potential for policy influence, strongly depends upon the success of EPG members' national level vote-seeking strategies.

Second, the European arena serves some party goals (votes, policy) but not all (office). Among those party goals that are feasible in the EP arena, vote-seeking appears easier than policy-seeking. Successful policy-seeking requires both mobilizing partisans and joining a congruent EPG after the election. Hence, although the European arena provides an important opportunity for policy-seeking, it requires some effort (see also Pittoors, 2020). At the same time, transnationalist vote-seeking is discouraged through barriers to entry and the territorial encapsulation of (potentially available) voters.

Third, under the current conditions of competition in the EP arena (closure of the supply market to transnational supplies, territorial encapsulation of demand, and safety of EU-level executive tenure), party goals incentivize parties to structure competition in different ways, with consequences for EU-level policy differentiation (summarized in Table 3).

Since ideology matters for party positions on specific EU policies (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002), policy-seekers should by definition be more likely to structure contestation on EU policy issues and thus enhance EU-level policy differentiation. And while parties, once elected, make policy for all Europeans (not just their domestic voters), they compete for the electoral support of domestic voters only. In this competition, policy-seekers must compete successfully against vote- and office-seeking parties (who employ different strategies, see below) in an arena with low levels of EU-level contestability. Even the most fervent transnational policy-seekers must first win the support of enough domestic voters to pass the threshold if they want to succeed in their EU level policy pursuit. In a market of territorially segmented voters, policy-seeking parties have little to gain electorally by structuring competition along the national versus transnational dividing line (Table 3).

Under the same conditions, office-seeking considerations motivate parties to structure competition along the government/opposition dimension (government disapproval) and to utilize the European election as a popularity test of the domestic government's performance (Table 3). By structuring competition along the incumbent-opposition dimension, the EP "beauty contest" (van der Brug et al., 2007) provides office-seekers with valuable information about 'available' voters' preferences and behavior that they can use as a basis for de-

Table 3. Dimensions of competition and party goals.

		Dimensions of Electoral Competition in the European Arena			
		Contestability	Availability	Vulnerability	Decidability
Party Goals	Votes	Potential for electoral gains for newcomers and insiders at the margins	Potential for electoral gains from shifts along the mainstream vs. anti-establishment dividing line	Sanction/reward mainstream parties (and the EU as their creation)	Level of differentiation focuses on (domestic) public opinion; clear positions on EU polity; inconsistent/blurred positions on EU policies
	Office	No potential for executive office gains (Weak connection to Commission Presidency)	Potential for informational gains from shifts along the incumbent/opposition dividing line	Sanction/reward governments	Level of differentiation focuses on government performance: (dis-)approval of national government; blurred positions on EU polity and EU policies
	Policy	Potential for policy advocacy gains through cooperation in the EP	(Weak) Potential for electoral gains from shifts along the national versus transnational dividing line	Sanction/reward EU policy	Level of differentiation focuses on party ideology; clear positions on EU polity and EU policies

vising strategies to gain office at the next national election. At the same time, vote-seekers are motivated to structure competition along the insiders vs. outsiders (mainstream vs. anti-establishment) conflict line and benefit from the high availability of voters (Table 3). Note that vote-seeking considerations imply the instrumental use of both national and EU (polity and policy) issues, depending on what 'sells' best within the respective electorate at a given point in time (see also Heinkelmann-Wild, Kriegmair, & Rittberger, 2020). Greater clarity of positions among vote-seekers is expected on the polity dimension (pro-/anti-EU) and on those specific EU policy issues from which parties can gain electorally in the given (domestic) context. To incentivize parties to campaign on transnational rather than national issues, Europe's voting space should be (even if only partially) transnationalized (Bright, Garzia, Lacey, & Trechsel, 2016).

5. Conclusion: How the Rules of the Game Help Nationalists Gain

The 'second-order national election theory' of EP elections centers on turnout and government party losses (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt, Sanz, Braun, & Teperoglou, 2020). The focus of this and related theorizing (for a discussion, see Marsh, 2009) is on voting behavior, while the locus of explanation for EP election results lies in the national arena (electoral cycle/rules, etc.). In this narrative, European elections are likely to cease being dominated by national issues once European issues penetrate the national arena, which is what has happened during multiple crises. Here I focus on party behavior and locate the explanation in the European arena itself. Since parties embody the link between the citizenry and EU institutions, party behavior is particularly important for understanding the relationship of European citizens and the EU polity, as well as the rise of Euroscepticism across Europe.

The argument I develop concerns barriers to the supply and demand of political competition and the ways in which the institutional setup of the European election undermines 'transnational policy' competition. Conceptualizing the EP arena as a political-electoral market (Bartolini, 1999, 2000) and examining the dimensions of competition in the EP arena in relation to one another sheds light on structural obstacles to political integration. Specifying the empirical conditions under which parties compete in this arena, using Bartolini's (1999, 2000) framework, reveals the consequences of vote-, policy-, and office-seeking behavior under the particular conditions of this arena.

How vote-, policy-, and office-seeking parties engage with the EP electoral arena has implications for decidability, understood here as the 'levels of actual choice' offered to European voters. Although the European arena is not appealing to office-seekers, it enables easier entry for willing vote- and policy-seeking outsiders, as long as these are national (as opposed to transnational) organizations. When political opposition cannot be expressed in transnational policy terms within the system, however, then it inevitably directs itself at the polity and the political personnel, which is exactly what nationalist and populist parties seeking votes have been doing, and which, in the absence of structural reform, they will keep on doing with success (Mair, 2007). If Europeans' opposition to EU policies cannot be of a transnationalist nature under the current structure, then such opposition is likely to be nationalist. In other words, the system inhibits the transnational expression of opposition to EU policies (which, however, is key for Europeans' capacity to influence supranational policy direction and for Europe's political integration). Since the rise of nationalist populist Euroscepticism is evidently detrimental to the European project, convinced Europeanists might want to consider changing the current incentive structures. Any future reform, however, needs to take into account not just one but all dimensions of electoral competition and the consequences each dimension entails for the others.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Living Apart Together? The Organization of Political Parties beyond the Nation-State: The Flemish Case

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Abstract
This article aims to contribute both theoretically and empirically to the study of political parties in the EU context, focusing on party organisation. Theoretically, it draws on insights from various literatures to develop a novel typology of multilevel party organisation specific to the EU context. It argues that parties are goal-seeking actors that choose their organisation based on a cost-benefit analysis, involving both party characteristics and the institutional context. Empirically, the article applies this framework on the Flemish political parties. It finds that rational goal-seeking behaviour cannot fully account for parties' organisational choices. Results show that normative and historical considerations play a crucial role in parties' cost-benefit analysis. It therefore calls upon future research to expand the number of comparative studies and to further assess parties' goal-seeking behaviour regarding their multilevel organisation.

Keywords
European Union; multilevel democracy; political parties; vertical integration

Issue
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1. Introduction

The EU poses national political parties with a fundamental challenge, as it simultaneously issues significant constraints on the policy freedom of national legislators and presents parties with a political arena that goes beyond the boundaries of the familiar nation-state (Blomgren, 2003; Hix, 2008). The EU thus "confronts domestic political parties with a new structure of threats and opportunities" (Hix & Lord, 1997, p. 5), as they now "act outside the nation-state in ways that they have never done before" (Blomgren, 2003, p. 2). Indeed, "the EU, long characterized as a system of multilevel governance, is moving to a system of multilevel and perhaps transnational politics" (Laffan, 2016, p. 922; see also Braun, Gross, & Rittberger, 2020). However, parties have shown to be rather unmoved by these events: They have not fundamentally altered the way they organise in response to this changing environment (Poguntke, Aylott, Carter, Ladrech, & Luther, 2007).

Even so, while European integration might not have been a major instigator of organisational change, it nevertheless generated a level of governance on which a number of actors are active: Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), ministers, commissioners and several presidents—all of which "are predominantly recruited from political parties" (Hix & Lord, 1997, p. 1). Moreover, Europarties and the European Parliament (EP) groups are increasingly taking centre stage in the development of a genuine EU party system (Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2018), which also demands specific attention from national parties. More fundamentally, just as in the national arena, political parties also "embody the link between citizenry and EU institutions" (Lefkofridi, 2020). The main question this article thus aims to answer is: How do parties structure their contacts with the European level, and what explains differences between parties?

Building on the concept of vertical integration, this article aims to identify parties' organisational strategies and offers a rational choice institutionalist explanation

for why parties opt for certain strategies. Applying this framework to the Flemish parties, the article shows that, while electoral gain is an important incentive for parties, functional goal-seeking cannot fully explain parties' approach to multilevel interactions. Rather, parties also take into account historical and normative considerations in their cost-benefit equation. Moreover, the qualitative analysis makes clear that parties treat the EU primarily as a political issue, rather than as a genuine polity—which has significant implications for the democratic nature of the EU. These results highlight the importance of EU politicisation in the domestic arena, simultaneously showing that norms and traditions can overrule functional imperatives. The article therefore concludes by calling for more comparative research to address the concrete nature of parties' multilevel interactions.

2. The Vertical Integration of Political Parties

In their seminal study of the Europeanisation of national party organisation, Poguntke et al. (2007) have shown that parties adapt little to the existence of the EU. Ladrech (2007) went so far as to claim that national parties are in fact "missing in action" when it comes to European affairs. The Europeanisation literature, however, looks at a rather specific element of party organisation: the internal balance of power. It considers to what extent European integration has altered the accountability of party leaders and the influence of "EU specialists" on party decisions, (unsurprisingly) concluding that the EU has in fact not altered the fundamental organisational structures of national parties in any significant way (Carter, Luther, & Poguntke, 2007). Alternatively, while studies of the relationship between parties and MEPs have shown that parties hardly try to control their EU-level agents (Hix, 2002; Mühlböck, 2012; Raunio, 2000), recent research has highlighted strong indications that there are frequent contacts between national parties and their people at the European level (Jensen, Proksch, & Slapin, 2013; Senninger, 2017; Senninger & Bischof, 2017). They have not, however, delved into the concrete nature of these contacts. Indeed, they "do not provide an analysis of the fine-grained coordination mechanisms that shape policy issue transfer" (Senninger & Bischof, 2017, p. 158).

This article does not aim to re-do those excellent studies. Rather, it aims to take off where these studies explicitly say they ended: studying the concrete nature and structure of the contacts between the national party and the European level. To study this multilevel organisation of political parties, the article turns to federal scholars in the tradition of Deschouwer (2003), Fabre (2011), Thorlakson (2011), and Detterbeck (2012), who address the relationship between party organisations at different levels. They show how contextual and party-specific factors combine to define parties' multilevel organisation. Accordingly, this article uses the concept of vertical integration to describe and measure the cross-level interactions of political parties.

Vertical integration is understood varyingly throughout the literature as the "linking of activities and strategies at…different levels" (Deschouwer, 2006, p. 299), as "formal and informal linkages in organisation, personnel, finances and political programmes" (Detterbeck & Hepburn, 2010, p. 24), and as "the extent of organisational linkages, interdependence and cooperation" (Thorlakson, 2009, p. 161). Although emphases differ, they all convey the existence of a "common governance structure" between levels within a party (Thorlakson, 2009). This article thus aims to capture the common governance structures between the national and the European level within a party, focussing on both formal decision-making and informal coordination. These structures can be either weak or strong. Having 'weak' structures means that contacts are limited in quantity, but also that interactions are informal, ad hoc, and on the personal level. Having 'strong' structures, by contrast, means that contacts occur more frequently, and that interactions are formal, regular, and organised.

At the national level, one can arguable divide a party into the party organisation, the parliamentary group, and, when in government, the party in executive office. While a party's ministers are active simultaneously in the national government and in the EU's Councils, the distinction between a party organisation and parliamentary group has more or less been mimicked at the European level: the Europarties and EP delegations. While EP delegations perform a similar function to national parliamentary groups, the Europarties are important platforms for parties to coordinate at the European level beyond the legislative work in the EP. However, some of these are more 'of the party' than others. MEPs, for example, are official members of the national party and are competing in European (but nationally organised) elections where they represent their national party. The Europarty, by contrast, is a federation of national parties: its officials are not necessarily directly linked to the national party. It nonetheless offers its member parties a forum to debate European election strategies, develop a common manifesto, prepare for European Councils and even put forward their own *Spitzenkandidat*. Therefore, this article argues that national parties' multilevel interactions are structured along two dimensions: internal and external.

The internal dimension involves those actors who are formally part of the national party: MEPs, ministers, European Commissioners, party staff and EU experts—parties' "EU specialists" (Poguntke et al., 2007, p. 12). Vertical integration on the internal dimension is the extent to which there exist common governance structures with these EU specialists. Are they integrated in the functioning of the national party, or do they work in isolation from the rest of the party? MEPs' active participation in national group meetings and party boards, for example, can be considered an indication of 'strong' common structures. The external dimension involves those actors that form the European transnational partisan network in which national parties are active—given shape

through the Europarty. Vertical integration on the external dimension is the extent to which national parties are invested in the Europarty and broader network. Are national parties active and committed members of such a network, or do they go at it alone? For example, proactive preparation of and senior participation in a Europarty congress can be considered an indication of 'strong' common structures.

Four types of multilevel organisation can be identified (Figure 1). 'Federated' parties have strong external common structures, but weak internal ones. They are active in their European network, but keep the European level rather isolated from the rest of the parties' activities. 'Stratified' parties have weak common structures both internally and externally. Their national and European activities are separated, nor do they significantly invest in a European network. 'Integrated' parties have strong common structures both externally and internally. They aim for an extensive integration of the EU in their own party structure, as well as for far-reaching cooperation in a broader EU network. 'Unified' parties, finally, have strong internal common structures, but weak external ones. They aim to keep their own party organisation as unified as possible, limiting coordination cost across levels.

One characteristic of the qualitative measurement of these indicators is that there is room for interpretation on behalf of the researcher. The common governance structures parties develop, both on the internal and external dimensions, may indeed vary from weak to strong. However, this distinction is not a strict dichotomy. Between 'weak' (informal, ad hoc, personal) and 'strong' (formal, regular, organised) structures, different concrete situations are possible that combine weak and strong features. For example, one could imagine a situation where MEPs are not actively involved in decision-making within the party ('weak' structure), but are presented with and follow compulsory vote instructions by the national party leadership ('strong' structure). In such a case it would be up to the researcher to make a judgement, based on the overall information available about that party, whether the structures are deemed 'weak' or 'strong'—and consequently which type of organisation the party is considered to have. Although the author of course maximised the objectivity of the research, a certain degree of interpretation is thus inevitable (see also Aylott, Blomgren, & Bergman, 2013).

3. Explaining Variation

To address the question which of these organisational strategies parties are likely to pursue, one must keep in mind that 'weak' structures are the default situation on which parties can fall back. The question then becomes: Why would parties decide to invest in more than the default situation? This article turns to rational choice institutionalism to provide an explanatory framework. Parties have limited resources and whether or not they invest in common governance structures is thus a cost-benefit issue. The costs involve building these structures, while the benefits involve reaching party goals—votes, office, policy, and internal cohesion (Harmel & Janda, 1994; Hellström & Blomgren, 2016; Müller & Strøm, 1999). Does building these structures help parties reach their goals? As such, parties are rational goal-seekers, who strive to make the most cost-effective decisions based on their own attributes and the institutional context that presents itself. Both these aspects will need to

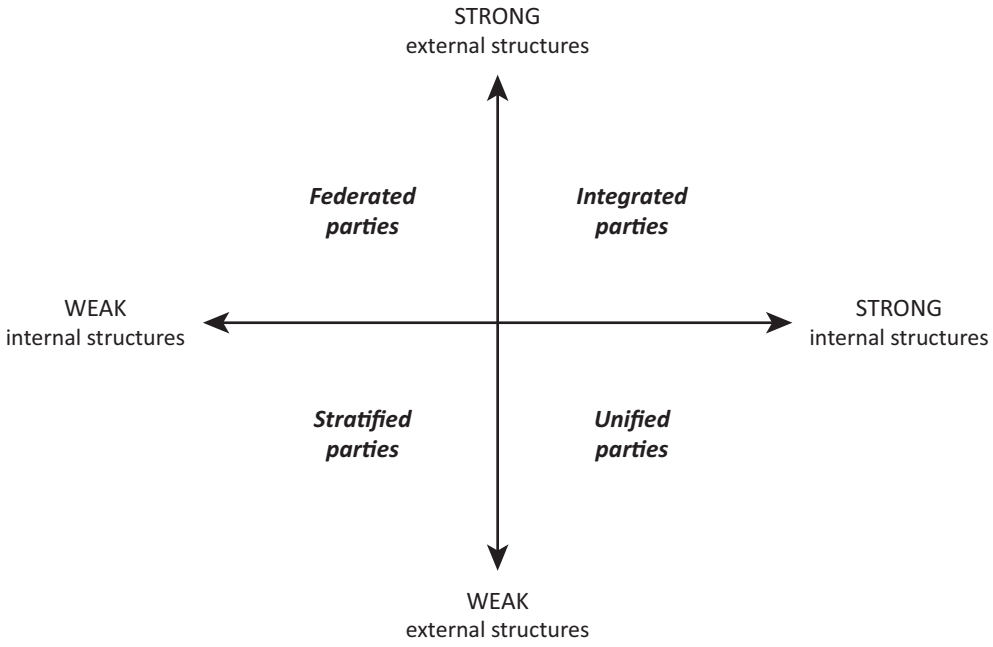

Figure 1. Typology of multilevel party organisation in an EU context.

be taken into account in order to get a full picture of both the costs and benefits involved (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013; Peters, 2005).

3.1. The EU Context

Generally, the EU's multilevel system increases the costs of investing in common governance structures, while the benefits gained are far from obvious. Although the European level is increasingly more important in terms of policy-making, politically it is a distant entity. The EU is often considered to have its own political dynamic that is often not reported on in national media. Additionally, the complexity of EU legislation and decision-making—with its many checks, compromises, and technicalities—increases the mental distance with 'Brussels' (Poguntke et al., 2007). Bridging this wide gap requires significant investment.

At the same time, the benefits that can possibly be incurred are not very clear. For one, it is far from certain that multilevel coordination will result in more votes or prestigious offices. The salience of EU policies in the domestic political arena is generally rather low: European elections are still second-order to national elections, meaning that whatever EU-level actors do will have little impact on the domestic electoral fortunes of their national parties (Cabeza, 2018; Hoeglinger, 2015; Mair, 2007; Marsh, 1998; Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Additionally, it is difficult for individual parties to directly influence EU policy-making. They often only have a limited number of MEPs, while Commissioners are supposed to be apolitical and ministers in the Council need negotiating autonomy (Carter & Poguntke, 2010). Also, in terms of office the EU is unattractive, as majority parties cannot divide prestigious offices amongst themselves as they usually can in the national context. Not unimportantly, the EU can also be a highly divisive issue both within a party and the broader society (Green-Pedersen, 2012; Kriesi, 2016). All in all, the benefits of investing in vertical integration are thus far from obvious.

3.2. Party Characteristics

Although it is important to keep this context in mind, it applies to virtually all national parties in the EU and thus in itself cannot explain variation between parties within the same political system. One should therefore also consider party-specific characteristics. To explain differences between the Flemish parties, this article takes into account two fundamental variables: their government/opposition status, and the Europarty of which they are a member. While aware that there are other variables that could possibly have an influence, for the Flemish case these two are considered to be the most relevant in terms of parties' rational goal-seeking behaviour. For example, although internal dissent over the EU could be an important reason for parties to (not) invest in interaction with the European level, dissent within the Flemish parties under study is so low that it is not taken into account for explaining variation.

First, keeping in mind that there was no asymmetry in Flemish/federal government composition during the data gathering period, opposition parties have less incentives to invest in internal common governance structures than governing parties. One can reasonably assume that most opposition parties aim at winning elections (vote-seeking). Given the low salience of EU affairs in Flanders, this is a goal they are unlikely to achieve by investing in multilevel coordination. Additionally, Flemish opposition parties have only one MEP, meaning that their chances of directly influencing major EU legislation are slim. Granted, as argued by several authors (for example, see Senninger, 2017), opposition parties might use their MEPs to gain information about EU legislation and as such reduce the information asymmetry with governing parties. However, keeping in mind that 'weak' structures are parties' default, it would seem unlikely that opposition parties would be swayed to invest their limited resources in multilevel coordination only to (sporadically) gain information that they might just as well gain from informal contacts. All in all, opposition parties thus have little to gain from that investment.

Governing parties, by contrast, take aim not only at votes but also at policies—a goal for which they need to spend time and energy on the EU (if only to transpose EU directives). Moreover, there are more people involved (often more MEPs, but also ministers and perhaps a Commissioner), which means that ad hoc and personal contacts might not suffice to keep everyone up to date. Additionally, governing parties are also more sensitive to the risks of discordance between the position they take at different levels and in different institutions. As argued by several authors over the past decades, a cohesive parliamentary group is crucial in Western party government—without it, governments and governing coalitions would be unable to govern (Bowler, Farrell, & Katz, 1999). The importance of party cohesion for governing parties also shows in the many pressures on majority Members of Parliament (MPs) to vote in line with the government. Although this pressure somewhat diminishes when crossing over to the European level, much like MPs also MEPs are expected to support their ministers (or at least not embarrass their minister by explicitly voting divergently). This "dictate" of party government is absent for opposition parties (Epstein, 1980). That is not to say that opposition parties are not at all concerned about party cohesion, but rather in a less pressing way than governing parties are.

> H1: Governing parties will invest more in the internal dimension of vertical integration than opposition parties.

Second, parties of established transnational networks have more incentives to invest in external structures. European partisan networks are increasingly taking cen-

tre stage, with particularly the Europarties trying to serve as coordinating structures—much like the central offices of national parties (Crum & Fossum, 2009; Hix & Lord, 1997; Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2018). The Europarties, among other things, support their member parties with preparing the European elections, write common manifestos, organise meetings to discuss electoral strategies, provide a forum to prepare European Councils, and, more recently, decide on the *Spitzenkandidaten*. However, the degree of institutionalisation of these networks differs greatly. The traditional party families (Christian-democrat, socialist, and liberal) have a more institutionalised network with established decision-making procedures and structures, which can significantly reduce the costs of navigating the EU for national parties, while possibly increasing policy influence and office rewards. By contrast, a disorganised network cannot ensure its people are put in top jobs, nor can it weigh on EU decision-making in a coordinated way. For example, a Christian-democratic party can significantly punch above its weight in terms of defining European policies if it is actively involved in the EPP. Much more so than, for example, a green party, given the difference in clout between the EPP and the EGP. As such, in terms of rational goal-seeking behaviour, it makes more sense for a Christian-democratic party to invest in such a network than it would for a green party, given the differences in the return on investment for both parties.

Of course, parties will have more difficulty seeing the added value of a partisan network if there is low congruence between their positions and those of the Europarty. Even from a rational choice perspective, there is little to gain from being an active member of a network if that network strives towards policy goals you disagree with. Recent research has shown, however, that on the dominant left–right dimension this congruence is quite high for the 'traditional' parties, while somewhat lower for the 'new' parties, such as the EGP and the ECR (Lefkofridi & Katsanidou, 2014). This thus reinforces the expectation that members of established networks have more incentives to invest in external structures.

H2: Parties of established Europarties will invest more in the external dimension of vertical integration than parties of new Europarties.

4. Method and Data

This article assesses the multilevel organisation of national political parties by analysing how they interact with the EU level. In line with the typology outlined above, it measures the vertical integration of parties by looking at internal and external common governance structure. The focus is on 'formal' decision-making procedures and 'informal' coordination regarding policy positions. While formal procedures are usually put down in statutes, informal processes are more difficult to capture. For that reason, the article adopts a strongly qualitative approach, relying heavily on semi-structured in-depth interviews with party elites. 20 interviews have been conducted in total with five of the main Flemish parties (Table 1), with respondents selected in such a way as to ensure a diversity of perspectives. The radical right Vlaams Belang, although an interesting case, was not included in this study because the party declined to participate in the interviews for data gathering. Because nearly all respondents requested anonymity, citations will be referenced as 'personal communication'.

This article explains variation by looking at two variables on the party level—the Europarty of which the party is a member and whether it is in government or opposition. For that reason, it will focus on parties in one particular environment: Flanders. This narrow focus allows us to control for domestic contextual variables, while maintaining sufficient variation between parties. Belgium's largest region of Flanders was selected as a most-likely case, as many of the factors that make the costs of investment so high are mitigated in the Flemish context. For one, with Brussels as its capital, Flanders can be found at the core of the EU, both in terms of policy-making and geography. It greatly depends on policy-making by the EU institutions, while the proximity of the EU institutions minimises the physical distance from the parties' central offices. Additionally, Belgium is a federated country with a highly complex institutional system. As such, Flemish politicians are accustomed to the complex situations and many compromises that EU decision-making requires. It is not a distant and complex system, but rather familiar and nearby. In fact, the only existing hurdle for Flemish parties to invest in coordination with their European agents is the total lack of politicisation of the EU issue in Flanders. With an average of 4.3 on a

Table 1. Flemish political parties.

Party	Europarty	EP Group	Party Family	Status
CD&V	EPP	EPP	Christian-Democrat	Government
N-VA	EFA	ECR	Conservative/regionalist	Government*
OVLD	ALDE	ALDE*	Liberal	Government
sp.a	PES	S&D	Social-Democrat	Opposition
Groen	EGP	Greens-EFA	Green	Opposition

Notes: * This article builds on data from 2018, before the Flemish nationalists left the Belgian federal government (December 2018) and before ALDE was reformed into Renew Europe (June 2019).

scale of 0 to 10, the salience of the EU issue in Flanders is significantly below the EU average of 6 (Polk et al., 2017). This situation allows us to isolate politicisation as a domestic contextual factor, which makes Flanders a rather suitable case to study the topic at hand.

Two additional characteristics of the Flemish parties need to be highlighted. First, the Flemish parties are not typical regional parties, nor are they regional branches of national 'Belgian' parties. For example, there are Flemish socialists and Walloon socialists, but no Belgian socialists. Moreover, Flemish parties have a clear federal outlook, as the national elections are first order. Second, Belgium is a prime example of a partitocracy (Dewachter, 2014). Political life and the intra-party power-balance is dominated by the party in central office. Particularly the party president provides overall leadership—responding to political crises, deciding on urgent party lines, maintaining party discipline, etc. (Dewachter, 2005). The central party leadership of Flemish parties thus tends to be highly involved in the internal coordination of the party and its mandatories.

5. Case Study: The Flemish Parties

Most Flemish party statutes go little beyond mentioning that their EP delegation is somehow represented in the party board. Moreover, not a single statute defines the relation with the Europarty—some do not even mention it at all. It is clear, then, that statutes are nowhere near a proper benchmark for parties' multilevel organisation vis-à-vis the EU. Based on interviews, however, Figure 2 shows that there is quite some variation. The remainder of this section will go deeper into this variation, addressing first the internal and then the external dimension of parties' vertical integration.

5.1. Internal Dimension

Overall, Flemish parties invest rather little in 'internal' vertical integration due to the overall electoral irrelevance of the EU: "Europe is the end of the line; first there are Flemish and federal issues, then EU issues…only when things become very, very acute is there a big discussion, for example on Brexit—but that is very rare" (personal communication). Indeed, far from a systematic interaction with their actors at the European level, national parties only invest in keeping up with the discussions and decisions at the European level when these are relevant in the domestic arena. Electoral gains thus generally outweigh other incentives when it comes to investing in internal coordination.

Nonetheless, there is variation between parties. Particularly the Flemish nationalists and Christian-democrats invest notably more in internal coordination. The Christian-democrats have over the years created an extensive system of coordination on European affairs that involves a wide range of actors: the party leadership, M(E)Ps, ministerial advisors, policy experts, and regular party members. The main spill of coordination is their internal working group on the EU. Whereas the leadership only gets actively involved on short-term high-salience issues, the working group serves as a forum to discuss the party's position on European issues and takes the lead in preparing the party's manifesto for the European elections.

The Flemish nationalists' leadership is more directly involved. N-VA developed strong coordination mechanisms, with formal structures supplemented by extensive informal exchanges. The party executive gathers information from all its parliamentary groups (including the EP delegation) through regular written reports,

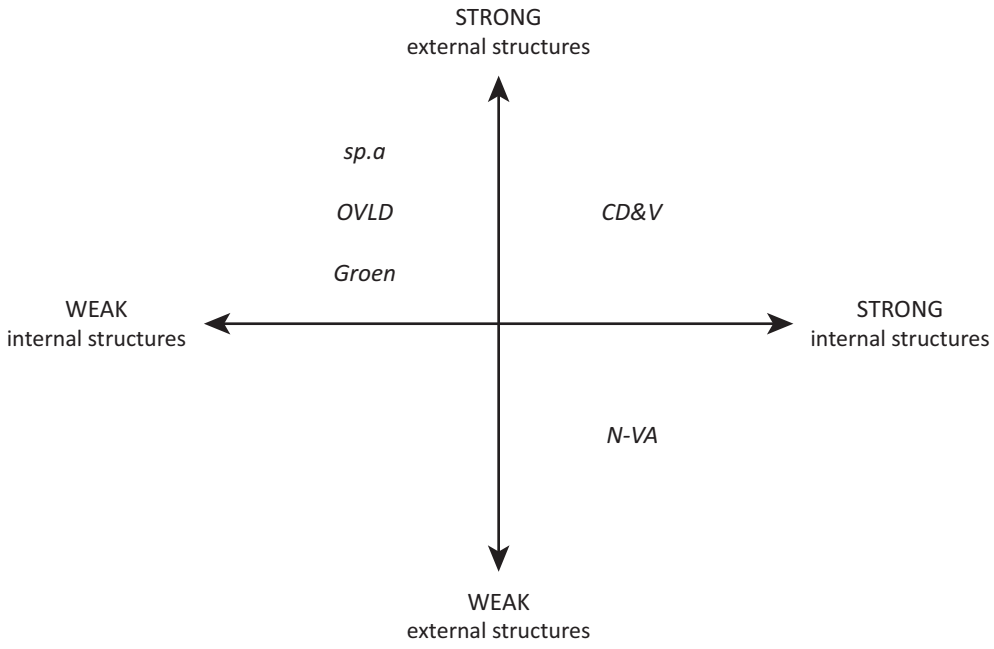

Figure 2. Flemish parties' vertical integration.

also keeping track of what its ministers are doing in the Council. Particularly the party's 'daily management'—a smaller group including the party president, vice-president, secretary, and spokesperson—wants to be continuously aware of all the ins and outs at all levels, with an eye on being able to make swift informed decisions when an issue pops up.

Both parties highlight the importance of internal coordination for being able to effectively pursue their preferred policies. As one respondent explained: "We work together very closely and we try to streamline as much as possible, in order to have an impact as strong and direct as possible" (personal communication). The Christian-democrats are Belgium's governing party *par excellence*, having been in nearly every government for the past five decades, and as such build on a long tradition of paying attention to the European dimension—it would be "unthinkable not to put the EU on the agenda" (personal communication).

The Flemish nationalists additionally stress that their ascension into federal government was the main catalysts for building these internal structures. The fact that they got into federal government means that their ministers actively participated in EU decision-making, which required the party leadership to keep a finger on the European pulse, which in turn was facilitated by the increased number of MEPs they have. It is up to the leadership to ensure that all these noses are pointing in the same direction: "Every vote can potentially cause trouble, as once you voted on something you can be attacked on it. So you want to be sure" (personal communication).

By contrast, the liberals—the third party in Flemish government—have few formalised structures and rely on informal, personal interaction to provide coordination: "We do not really have an organised structure for [multilevel coordination]. Of course that can happen ad hoc, and it is more a matter of a reflex that needs to exist with all people involved" (personal communication). The liberals do not see the point of investing in internal coordination. They are highly united in their EU position, which "means that there will be few accidents in the EP delegation and MEPs will stay within the limits of the liberal river, so to speak—no flood" (personal communication). Their internal cohesion thus obliterates any incentives they might have to invest in internal coordination.

Also, the greens and socialists invest fairly little in common governance structures with their internal actors. Both parties delegate most European issues to their EU specialists, with little involvement of those who are not directly involved. Only on the most relevant topics does the party leadership intervene. The reason they put forward is very clear: their MEPs can hardly offer anything that can help the party win elections, and winning elections is the main goal of opposition parties:

> The EP delegation works a bit in a bubble, but it is also true that the party does not invest a great deal in trying to break that bubble. The party has limited resources and a limited number of people and mandatories at its disposal, so it directs those resources to those issues that are politically useful—and preferably immediately so—to the detriment of EU issues which usually aren't. (personal communication)

Moreover, for both parties the EU issue is rather divisive. Although they are pro-EU generally, they have serious reservations about the policy direction in which the EU is heading. As such, neither leadership is jumping for joy to put the EU on the internal agenda.

Overall, functional goal-seeking, and particularly domestic vote-seeking, is the main driver for (the lack of) investment in the internal dimension of vertical integration. As such, government participation matters in the sense that not participating demolishes any investment incentives a party may have had. It simply does not pay off. However, once in government the image becomes more nuanced. Respondents have confirmed that government participation significantly increases the incentives to invest in coordination, both due to the policy opportunities and dissension risks. Yet, these incentives are mediated by other factors such as leadership style (N-VA), previous investments (CD&V), and internal cohesion (OVLD). While government participation thus seems to be a dependable overall predictor, it needs to be considered jointly with other party-specific factors.

5.2. External Dimension

With the notable exception of the Flemish nationalists, Flemish parties invest a significant amount of time and energy in the external dimension of vertical integration, i.e., cooperation and coordination with their respective Europarties and sister parties. The main incentives Flemish parties have to invest in them are the expected return in terms of office and policy. The Christian-democrats, for example, spend appreciable resources on interaction with the EPP. And with good reason: Investing in the EPP allows CD&V to "weigh on the course of the EPP and more broadly the EU far beyond what can otherwise be expected from essentially a rather small party" (personal communication). For one, EPP membership brought otherwise unattainable offices to key CD&V figures such as Dehaene, Martens, and Van Rompuy.

Similarly, the Flemish greens invest a great deal in the EGP, because the party believes the EGP "is the best way to communicate the green message in Europe" (personal communication). This is rather striking, however, given the fact that the EGP is nowhere near the level of institutionalisation of the EPP. As such, there is no immediate return on investment for Groen, as the EGP cannot offer them much high-ranking offices, nor does it have the organisational capacity to significantly weigh on EU policies. Groen's choice is thus both an ideological choice ('we are strongly pro-EU and thus want to see a strong EGP'), and a long-term rational investment ('one day a

strong EGP will yield the same returns as they see the EPP yielding today').

Also, the socialist and liberal parties invest considerably in respectively the PES and ALDE, yet they have mixed feelings about the return on their investment. They are active members of their Europarties because they expect those Europarties to take the lead on a number of policy areas that outgrew the national level, e.g., climate change or the eurozone. And while both Europarties are quite vested and have more or less robust internal procedures, the Flemish socialists and liberals are frustrated about the lack of leadership and coherence their Europarties deliver. The PES is considered "a real disaster…nothing but the sum of national parties" (personal communication), while the initiatives taken by ALDE are deemed "interesting, but of little use" (personal communication).

One of the main reasons why they still invest in their Europarties is that the costs to do so are very small compared to the (reportedly limited) benefits—for example, a photo-op with a French president during campaigning. Additionally, both parties also stress their leaderships' commitment to building transnational alliances, even though these do not seem to yield significant immediate gains. It is a matter of making a relatively small, but long-term investment that holds the possibility of high gains at a later stage, both in terms of office (e.g., Guy Verhofstadt) and policy.

The Flemish nationalists do not make this investment. Their comprehensive internal coordination is in stark contrast with the thrift with which they invest in external coordination. They pride themselves on not being coerced into positions by either the EFA party or the ECR group. Indeed, while the EFA is a weak Europarty that has little if anything to offer or demand, their choice for the ECR was both deliberate and imposed. Given how they felt they did not ideologically fit any of the existing groups, they purposely "chose for the ECR group because we were given the guarantee that we could pursue our own positions and not be forced by group pressure to go in one direction or another" (personal communication).

Their choice for the ECR that can thus be seen as a way of ensuring they are not forced into a straightjacket that is too far off from their own position, but also as an insurance policy: they would get the benefits of being part of the third-largest EP group (e.g., in terms of offices and speaking time) without the obligation to agree upon sensitive issues with much more radical parties like the Polish PiS or the Sweden Democrats. As such, the N-VA is a good example of how various goals intertwine, but simultaneously of how a party's prime concern is its position in the domestic arena rather than the European arena.

Overall, however, the Flemish parties spend no small part of their resources on their Europarties and maintaining transnational partisan networks. The main goal of this investment is to increase their (policy) influence in EU decision-making—and, perhaps on the side, to obtain some prestigious offices—by using the Europarty as a leverage. The Flemish parties are very well aware of their relative smallness in the European context: "All of us [Flemish MEPs] together is about half the number of MEPs the CDU has" (personal communication). Therefore, parties try to compensate this lack of direct influence by investing in indirect influence through the Europarty—even if this influence is deemed insufficient, as with the liberals and socialists. Only the Flemish nationalists concluded that due to the dissonance with most Europarties, the investment is not worth the yield. They gladly sacrifice influence at the European level to ensure their own coherence and independence, which in turn necessitates greater internal investment.

However, functional goal-seeking is only part of the explanation. Indeed, the strength of the partisan network does not seem to be a reliable predictor of the investment national parties make. Although the positive argument holds for the 'traditional' parties, both the greens and the nationalists disprove it in a negative sense. Groen has no clear functional incentive to invest in the EGP and yet it does, while it is far from clear that the nationalists would make the investment even if the ECR/EFA would become a more institutionalised network. Rather, ideological considerations—a pro-EU stance (Groen) and ideological congruence (N-VA)—seem to drive their organisational choices. While the immediate benefits a European partisan network can offer thus certainly matter, they need to be considered in tandem with less functionally oriented factors.

6. Conclusion

This article assessed the multilevel organisation of national political parties in an EU context. By describing and explaining the way Flemish political parties are organised vis-à-vis the EU, it provides meaningful insights into an at times neglected element of EU multilevel governance. This conclusion addresses two issues. First, to what extent does the proposed framework sufficiently capture and explain parties' choices for particular organisational strategies? Second, what do the findings tell us about multilevel democracy in the EU—do parties consider the EU a genuine political level, or are we living apart together?

This article builds on previous research that has shown that, while there is little to no 'control' of national parties over their EU-level agents, there are in fact significant amounts of contact between the domestic and European levels (Hix, Farrell, Scully, Whitaker, & Zapryanova, 2016; Jensen et al., 2013; Raunio, 2000; Senninger & Bischof, 2017). Looking more closely at the precise nature and structure of these contacts, the article presented a novel typology of multilevel party organisation in an EU context, based on the federal notion of vertical integration. By separating the external and internal dimensions of vertical integration, this approach allows for a holistic study of multilevel party or-

ganisation outside of the national and into the supranational context—an aspect which has not received a lot of scholarly attention so far. Moreover, this article bridges different strands of literature by adopting a rational choice institutionalist perspective to explain why parties would opt for certain types of organisation. It argues that parties are functional goal-seekers that choose their organisation based on a cost-benefit analysis, involving both party characteristics and the institutional context. It was hypothesised that a party's government participation and the Europarty of which it is a member would explain its organisational choices.

Overall, Flemish parties are hesitant to invest a great deal in their vertical integration vis-à-vis the EU level, particularly on the internal dimension. The EU's limited electoral relevance seems to be the main reason for this. Indeed, in the domestic arena the EU is little more than a political issue that needs addressing when (and only when) it is salient. The cost of investing in coordination with those actors 'outside' the national arena, such as parties' EP delegation, is thus generally too great compared to the possible gains made 'inside' that arena. Drawing attention to the dominance of the domestic vote-seeking behaviour of parties, this article supports earlier accounts of the non-Europeanisation of political parties (Ladrech, 2007; Poguntke et al., 2007) and of party behaviour in multilevel democracies (Däubler, Müller, & Stecker, 2018).

Still, although (short-term) interaction seems to fluctuate with media attention, there is notable variation between Flemish parties in terms of their overall approach. Internally, government participation is a reliable indicator, as it largely determines the goal-seeking behaviour of parties: While opposition parties are mostly interested in gaining votes and winning elections, governing parties are confronted more directly with policy expectations and are more acutely concerned about internal cohesion. Still, the organisational traditions of a party also play an important role, as the cases of CD&V and N-VA clearly show. Externally, the strength of a European network can in itself only somewhat explain the observed variation. All parties recognise the functional advantages of being part of a European network, but additional normative concerns—such as the EU position of the party (Groen) and congruence with the Europarty (N-VA)—play an important mediating role.

Both H1 and H2 can thus only partially be confirmed, triggering the conclusion that the overall framework requires more refinement. Particularly, the differences between the Flemish parties point out that functional goal-seeking is not the only logic at play. Parties' organisational traditions and normative considerations also play an important role in their assessment of costs and benefits. As such, to understand party organisation, the rational choice institutionalist 'logic of consequences' needs to be supplemented by the logics of appropriateness and path dependency. Investing in vertical integration might be considered the (in)appropriate thing to do, or be a compelling consequence of past investments, regardless of any concrete goal being achieved. While parties' rationality is thus not fundamentally in question, the case studies have shown that the cost-benefit analyses parties conduct also take into account norms and traditions.

As for the state of European democracy, these findings are not great news. Most Flemish parties largely separate their domestic and European activities, or confirm the dominance of the former over the latter. The EU is an issue that occasionally needs to be managed, but it is not a genuine polity of which parties recognise the political relevance (see also Braun, Hutter, & Kerscher, 2016). Yet, the meaningful translation of citizen preferences into EU decision-making requires intense cooperation both internally and externally. As such, the limited intra-party multilevel coordination significantly adds to the democratic deficit of the EU. Moreover, this study confirms the nation-state as the prime arena for public debate and democratic legitimacy. Considering the central role of parties therein, they have the responsibility to choose between pro-actively extending their activities to the European level—effectively breaking out of the nation-state—or to reconsider the democratic foundations of the EU as a collective of national democracies.

So, what can we learn from the Flemish case? These results simultaneously highlight the importance of EU politicisation in the domestic arena, while showing that norms and traditions can overrule functional imperatives. On the one hand, the variation between parties has shown the limits of rational goal-seeking behaviour as the chief explanation for parties' (multilevel) organisation. Parties, it would seem, have a wide range of specific incentives why (not) to invest in coordination with 'Brussels.' For example, as convincingly argued by Euchner and Frech in this thematic issue, the relationship between MEPs and national parties is highly complex and essentially questions the concept of parties as monolithic organisations (Euchner & Frech, 2020). Future research will thus need to look beyond domestic contextual factors, such as politicisation or proximity, and take a closer look at party-level factors to explain variation. Concurrently, the various incentives and motivations parties have to (not) invest in vertical integration, as well as the interplay between them, need to be qualified in more detail. Cross-country comparative research would add significantly to our understanding of the topic.

On the other hand, the case study has shown that politicisation matters greatly when it comes to multilevel coordination, particularly with parties' own EP delegation. The lack of domestic electoral relevance of what happens in the EP has led parties to maintain informal ad hoc contacts with their MEPs, rather than to invest in 'strong' coordinative structures. Although Belgium might have an exceptionally low politicisation, it is not by far the only country where the EU plays second fiddle. One can thus expect to find this overall result in most other EU member states: As long as the EU is not sufficiently politicised in the domestic arena, national parties will

have insufficient incentives to treat it as anything more than an issue. Until then, it remains most likely that we will be living apart together.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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Article

Interest Groups in Multi-Level Contexts: European Integration as Cross-Cutting Issue in Party-Interest Group Contacts

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Abstract
Policy-specific actor-constellations consisting of party- and group-representatives commonly drive the effective establishment of new policy programmes or changes in existing policies. In the EU multi-level system, the creation of such constellations is complicated because it practically requires consensus on two dimensions: the European public policy at stake and the issue of European integration. This means that, for interest groups with interests in particular policy domains, and with limited interest in the actual issue of European integration, non-Eurosceptic parties must be their main ally in their policy battles. We hypothesise that interest groups with relevant European domain-specific interests will ally with non-Eurosceptic parties, whereas interest groups whose interests are hardly affected by the European policy process will have party-political allies across the full range of positions on European integration. We assess this argument on the basis of an elite-survey of interest group leaders and study group-party dyads in several European countries (i.e., Belgium, Lithuania, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, and Slovenia) in a large number of policy domains. Our dependent variable is the group-party dyad and the main independent variables are the European policy interests of the group and the level of Euroscepticism of the party. We broadly find support for our hypotheses. The findings of our study speak to the debate concerning the implications of the politicisation of European integration and, more specifically, the way in which party-political polarisation of Europe may divide domestic interest group systems and potentially drive group and party systems apart.

Keywords
European integration; Euroscepticism; interest groups; political parties

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1. Introduction

There was a time in which EU decisions could be safely explained on the basis of intra-institutional bargaining between ministries and among the EU institutions. Multi-layered institutional complexity isolated the politics among these actors in such a way that they 'seem to deal first of all with each other and not with the demand side of politics, be that the interest groups or the European electorate' (Pappi & Henning, 1999, p. 279). Contemporary scholarship, however, does not assume or observe the full insulation of bureaucratic, narrowly scoped policymaking networks. It is far more sensitive to the circumstances that lead policymakers to be 'responsive' to political pressures in terms of public opinion, party politics, or interest groups (e.g., de Bruycker, 2017, 2019; Judge & Thomson, 2019; Rasmussen, Carroll, & Lowery, 2014; Rauh, 2019; Schneider, 2018). In addition, research interests not only relate to the potential implications of the broader saliency of policy issues on the EU agenda (e.g., Beyers, Dür, & Wonka, 2018; Hanegraaff & Berkhout, 2018) but also addresses the politicisation of the EU as a system or European integration as a process (e.g., de Wilde, Leupold, & Schmidtke,

2016; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019), most dramatically observed in contemporary British politics (de Vries, 2018a; Hobolt, 2016). The latter studies indicate a substantial reconfiguration of several party systems in Western Europe, with anti-EU positions featuring heavily on the 'new' cleavage (e.g., Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Marks, Hooghe, Nelson, & Edwards, 2006) and at least some sensitivity to contextual, 'demand-side,' political factors within narrow, public policy niches (e.g., Klüver, Braun, & Beyers, 2015). These circumstances merit a broad conception of EU multi-level politics as taking place in both domestic and European political arenas, affecting a broad range of policy topics and including various types of political actors and their relationships.

The more specific question central to this article is the extent to which opposing party-political views on European integration also affect the patterns of contacts between interest groups and legislative policymakers in domestic politics. Are EU positions a divisive (or decisive) factor in party-interest group contacts, in which interest groups avoid anti-EU parties? Or do interest groups align mostly with their closest, policy area-specific party allies regardless of their EU positions? The answer to this issue may indicate that EU-related party-political cleavages, and their broader salience in contemporary public and political debate, do not spill-over into policy-specific relationships with interest groups. Previous studies indicate that policy-specific elite actor constellations consisting of party- and group-representatives drive the effective establishment of new policy programmes or changes in existing policies (e.g., Grossmann, 2014). In the EU multi-level system, the creation of such constellations is complicated because it practically requires consensus on two dimensions: the European public policy at stake and the issue of European integration (e.g., de Vries, 2018b). In theoretical terms, this is a 'conflict of conflicts' within which actors have to decide 'which battle do we want most to win?' (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 65). We argue that interest groups will always stay close to their policy-specific interests rather than the broader issue of European integration. For interest groups with interests in particular policy domains, and with limited interest in the actual issue of European integration, this means that parties with favourable or moderate views on European integration must be their principal allies in policy battles. We hypothesise that interest groups with relevant European domain-specific interests will ally with parties that have favourable views on the European integration process, whereas interest groups whose policy interests are domestic in nature will have party-political allies across the full range of party-political positions on European integration.

Our article contributes to several debates. First, by focussing on the importance of EU positions of parties and interest groups, we start bridging the studies on (national) party system dimensionality, interest group networking, and (EU) public policy decisions. This research integration, in the longer term, potentially improves our understanding of the outcomes of national and EU public policy and facilitates the normative evaluation of those outcomes. Second, we theoretically further develop issue-specific explanations for party-group contacts (e.g., Berkhout, Hanegraaff, & Statsch, 2019). We argue that party-group contact is importantly shaped by the particular constellation of actors within (multi-level) policy fields in combination with the longer term, dimensional structuration of political conflict in the party system. More specifically, we assess what happens when party-political conflict on European integration crosscuts the (potential) group-party relations in multi-level or domestic policy areas.

The article is structured as follows. We first proceed with a further specification of our hypothesis and its relation to the 'standard model' of party-group ties. We subsequently present our analysis on the basis of the Comparative Interest Group (CIG) Survey of leaders of interest groups in Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Slovenia, and Lithuania. We estimate logistic regression models on a large number of party-group dyads to test our hypotheses. We conclude with a discussion of our findings and provide a pathway for future research.

2. Theory: The 'Conflict of Conflicts' and the Standard Model

Why do interest groups and parties interact with each other? We conceive of political parties and interest groups as policy-oriented organisations; parties attempt to influence public policy by means of winning elections and interest groups do so without aspiration to hold elected office (Bawn et al., 2012; Burstein, 1998; Farrer, 2014; Fraussen & Halpin, 2018; Jordan, Halpin, & Maloney, 2004). These conceptions heavily emphasise the shaping of the political agenda and policy decision-making rather than the electoral connection of parties or the membership base of interest groups. This implies that the relationship between these actors is largely observed in the concrete political battles on issues related to the operation of government. This conceptually (though not necessarily empirically) differs somewhat from studies of the organisational ties of interest groups and political parties (e.g., Allern et al., 2019). Through these political conflicts, in other words, parties and interest groups organise issues into politics and do so in a manner that reduces or enhances the issue-specific contacts between certain types of political parties and interest groups. This leads political parties and interest groups to be organised around relatively similar conflicts, attend to similar issues and have patterns of contact that follow from their issue-priorities and positions. We find this argument in theories of political conflict (parties are stronger) and of the policy process (issues are contagious).

Theories of political conflict posit that political parties are stronger than other actors and the party system agenda dominates all others. This is so because only representatives of political parties actually govern and

will, from that position, outperform others in 'structuring the world so you can win' (Riker, 1996, p. 9). This, as theorised by Schattschneider (1960, pp. 64–65), leads to a displacement of smaller conflicts in such a manner that 'every major conflict [among political parties] overwhelms, subordinates, and blots out a multitude of lesser ones [among other actors].' This 'contagiousness' of party-political differences on major dimensions of conflict such as European integration, must therefore affect 'small' conflict on particular policies. Political parties also 'freeze' conflict in the party system, subjecting historically established political oppositions and collaborations within and between parties to strong inertia (e.g., Mair, 1997). The ideological underpinnings of these cleavages guarantee a relatively strong organisational integration of the different agendas (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Most notably, this is the case for social democratic parties and trade unions (e.g., Allern & Bale, 2012). The nature of the party system also produces strong strategic incentives to avoid issues that may divide a government coalition or parties internally (e.g., Hobolt & de Vries, 2015; van der Brug & van Spanje, 2009). This, in turn, leads to a 'closed' political opportunity structure that necessitates interest groups align themselves with party-political friends (Beyers, de Bruycker, & Baller, 2015; Hall & Deardorff, 2006).

In more policy-related terms, a similarity in political focus may arise from parties and organised interests simultaneously working on the same political issues, or all being part of the same political 'bandwagon' (e.g., Baumgartner & Leech, 2001). Relatively central political actors provide 'cues' on their issue priorities and, similar to a herd of sheep, follow each other in distinct policy battles (Halpin, 2011). This provides opportunities for movements to successfully bargain over political resources with elite allies (e.g., Burstein, Einwohner, & Hollander, 1995; Císař & Vráblíková, 2019), or for groups to influence the agenda of political parties (Klüver, 2018). These mechanisms facilitate the 'contagion' of one issue with others and connect smaller policy oppositions to larger dimensions of (party-political) conflicts.

These arguments lead us to expect that the oppositions among political parties are replicated on any minor policy issue that may arise in the day-to-day business of government. Any change in the dominant dimension of conflict among political parties therefore must have implications for the infinite issues that potentially appear in the narrow venues of (multi-level) policymaking. As suggested in the introduction, such a change in the dimensionality of party politics seems currently on-going: Socio-cultural issues such as immigration and European integration have partially displaced socio-economic ones such as labour market policy and financial regulation in the composition of the main dimension of conflict in contemporary European party politics (e.g., de Vries, 2018b; de Vries, Hakhverdian, & Lancee, 2013; Hoeglinger, 2016; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; Marks et al., 2006; Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008; van Elsas & van der Brug, 2015). Left- and right-wing Eurosceptic parties dynamically and strategically connect to the distinct core issues on the agendas of European party systems (e.g., Braun, Popa, & Schmitt, 2019; Meijers & Rauh, 2016). We are dealing with party-based Euroscepticism that occurs when a political party expresses 'the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration' (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008; Taggart, 1998, p. 360). Several policy crises also seem to have produced a fertile ground for challenger parties to combine populism with anti-European integration positions, as noted by Pirro, Taggart, and van Kessel (2018, p. 388), 'the cocktail of anti-establishment populist parties with the increasing politicisation of European integration as an issue in domestic polities is an unmistakably powerful one.'

Given this change, we should observe that interest groups with long-term policy-specific priorities avoid parties voicing concerns on 'new' issues, most notably European integration, that crosscut their prime policy objectives. For instance, an environmental NGO may eschew a social democratic party which expresses an anti-EU sentiment as this may hurt their policy objective in the long term even if the party does express a pro-environmental position. The same applies to business associations. If their membership profits significantly from EU trade, such associations may exclude right-wing economic parties which express strong anti-EU positions. The benefit they may gain from any economic alignment on national politics may be surpassed by the effects of the anti-EU message of the party. This tension should become particularly pronounced in policy communities active in areas with strong EU policy competence and may subsequently affect contact between interest groups and parties (e.g., Rasmussen, 2012; Wonka, 2017). In less abstract terms, interest groups for whom relevant policy issues are addressed at the EU level, or in a multi-level fashion, will not have much contact with Eurosceptic parties because it makes their multi-level policy involvement difficult.

All this leads to the following hypothesis. First, we expect that interest groups for whom policies originating from the EU are of distinct importance, tend to prioritise contact with parties with a pro-EU position compared to other parties. Second, interest groups whose policy interests are predominantly domestic in nature maintain contacts with parties regardless of their position on European integration. In sum:

> H1: The more interest groups are affected by policies originating at the EU level, the more likely it is that they have contacts with political parties with relatively favourable views on European integration;

> H2: If interest groups are mostly affected by policies originating at the national level, views on European integration by political parties do not affect the contacts between interest groups and parties.

We control for what we label the 'standard model' for party-group contact (e.g., Berkhout et al., 2019). This 'model' is the result of a wave of recent studies on policy-specific contacts and long-term organisational exchange-relationships between political parties and interest groups (Allern & Bale, 2012; Allern et al., 2019; Beyers et al., 2015; Bolleyer, 2017; de Bruycker, 2016; Otjes & Rasmussen, 2017; Rasmussen & Lindeboom, 2013). To begin, interest groups are attracted to power and particularly aim to interact with parties or legislators that have the capabilities to influence the direction of public policy. This concerns both legislative and executive power (we expect the latter to be particularly attractive, given the relation to the bureaucracy). Furthermore, parties and groups whose political positions are close to each other are commonly found to have more frequent policy-specific contacts, as well as structural organisational relations (Allern et al., 2019). Finally, representatives of political parties are likely to appreciate interest groups capable of delivering relevant policy information across a diverse range of topics.

3. Data and Research Design

We use the CIG survey data (Beyers et al., 2016). In this project, national interest group populations were surveyed in Belgium, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Slovenia. Translated versions of the same online questionnaire were used to elicit answers concerning organisational characteristics, political activities, and strategies. Our dataset contains information on 2,067 interest groups and their interactions with the most relevant national parties (n = 38) in 2017 and 2018 (for more information on the details of the survey see www.cigsurvey.eu). Please note that more countries are included in this project, most notably Sweden. We do not include the Swedish data because several of the questions that we rely upon in our study were not asked. The countries included span Western (the Netherlands, Belgium), Eastern (Lithuania and Slovenia), and Southern Europe (Italy), and differ substantially in their institutional histories of state-society relations and the particular development of their party and interest-group systems. More particularly, these countries differ substantially in the extent to which European integration is a salient and polarised issue in party politics (see Supplementary Material for EU positions and salience for all parties included in the analyses). This diversity creates relatively high generalisability of our findings, particularly within the European context.

We reshaped our interest group-level data into a dataset in which group-party dyads (n = 16,514) form the unit of analysis (Hanegraaff & Pritoni, 2019). This dyadic data structure matches the relational nature of our explanandum (group-party contact) and allows us to simultaneously include interest group and party explanatory factors in a single model, most notably, interest groups' interest in policies originating from the EU and parties' positions towards European integration. In this dyadic data structure, our observations are clustered by groups and parties, and we therefore estimate all our models in a multi-level way with group- and party-level random intercepts.

As for our dependent variable, the CIG survey asks interest group representatives to indicate the frequency of contact between their organisation and relevant national legislative political parties over the previous 12 months. Respondents were presented with a list of parties and could indicate the frequency of their contacts on a five-point scale ('never' to 'at least once a week'). We recoded this variable into a dummy variable to indicate whether a group and a party had none (0) or any (1) contact. This binary contact indicator forms the dependent variable of our analyses and we estimate logistic regression models accordingly. This question covers contact on any type of issue; it may be about particular EU-related developments but in most cases is likely to refer to domestic legislative politics. This is a valid measure because we would like to know whether party-political pro- or anti-European integration positions affect interest group-party contact, and, given conflict contagiousness, whether it is plausible to affect any contact, rather than only those pertaining to EU policies or only those between EU actors.

Overall, 62% of the interest groups in our sample indicated that they had any contact with political parties over the previous 12 months. At the group-party dyad level, contact was established in 41% of the logically possible cases. These patterns of interaction are comparable with levels of contact with the national government (contacted by 64% of the groups), but much higher than contact with European institutions (European Commission: 21%; European Parliament: 29%). The 38% of the respondents without any party-political contact tend to be 'latent' groups whose political interests are only sporadically triggered by particular social or political 'disturbances' (Truman, 1951) rather than a structural feature of the organisation (as is indicated by the strong correlation between party contacts and government contacts: Spearman's $\rho = .6$; $p < .001$).

Our central independent variables are group-, party-, and dyad-specific. To begin with the group level, we measured interest groups' interests in EU public policies based on the responses to the survey question: 'Policies originating from the European Union have a different level of importance for different organisations. How important are these policies for your organisation?' (Beyers et al., 2016). Respondents could answer on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 = 'EU policies are of no importance whatsoever' to 4 = 'EU policies are the most important focus.' We combine the 'important' and 'most important' answer categories, since only 2% of our respondents used the highest category.

We derive the position on European integration of political parties from the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES; Polk et al., 2017). The variable EU position ranges from strongly opposed to European integration (1) to

strongly in favour of European integration (7). We assess our central hypothesis on the basis of an interaction term of our measures of groups' interests in EU public policy and parties' stance on the issue of European integration.

Patterns of contact between interest groups and parties are affected by many factors other than just the configuration of groups' and parties' interests related to Europe. We therefore control for an extensive list of potentially confounding factors, labelled 'the standard model' above. Concerning the interest group side we rely on the CIG survey to measure group resources (logged number of staff) and the breadth of a group's policy engagement (number of policy fields active in). These factors increase the likelihood of contact with political parties across the board. That is, staff resources enable interest groups to contact many parties and the breadth of a group's policy engagement signifies its overall interest in public policy. Our interest group survey includes questions that tap into similar or adjacent characteristics. However, to avoid multicollinearity between our factors we do not include these in the model. There are a small number of respondents whose central cause is directly related to supporting or rejecting the process of European integration, such as the country chapters of the European Movement International. We also control for different group types (adapted from the INTERARENA coding scheme, www.interarena.dk).

Regarding the party side, we control for the salience of the topic of European integration to disentangle the effects of positions and salience, based on CHES data (Polk et al., 2017). To account for interest groups' inclination to contact powerful parties, we include, first, the legislative seat share (in percentage points) that a given party held after the most recent election before the CIG survey was set out. Second, we indicate government coalition participation during the time of the survey and, last, party institutionalisation (logged age; based on Döring & Manow, 2018). Interest groups may prefer to interact with ideologically moderate parties in order to avoid dissensus among their (potential) members (e.g., Lowery & Gray, 2004, pp. 10–11; Salisbury, 1969). We therefore include measures of the ideological positions of parties along the general left–right (based on Volkens et al., 2017), and green-alternative-libertarian (GAL)–traditional-authoritarian-nationalist (TAN) dimensions (Polk et al., 2017), as well as their squared transformations. We also control for populist parties, which are less likely to be contacted by interest groups (Berkhout et al., 2019). Lastly, we include country dummies (fixed effects) to account for the different baseline probabilities of contact in our five countries of observation. Table 1 provides the summary statistics of all variables used for the 16,514 dyads included in our analyses.

Table 1. Summary statistics.

	mean	s.d.	min	max
DV: Contact	0.41		0	1
Independent variables				
IG interest in EU public policies:				
no importance whatsoever	0.18		0	1
less important	.46		0	1
important/most important	0.35		0	1
EU position	5.12	1.68	1.09	6.82
Party-level controls				
EU salience	5.23	1.73	2.87	8.86
Left–Right position	4.91	0.88	2.55	6.97
GAL–TAN position	4.92	2.63	1	9.44
Seat share	10.86	9.27	0	47.30
Government	0.35		0	1
Populist	0.17		0	1
Institutionalisation (Party age logged)	3.25	0.66	1.39	4.58
IG-level controls				
Breadth of policy engagement	3.27	3.35	0	22
Resources (#Staff logged)	1.08	1.38	0	8.99
Group Type:				
Business group	.44		0	1
Citizen group	.31		0	1
Institutional group	.06		0	1
Union	.04		0	1
Other	.14		0	1

Notes: N_{Dyads}: 16,514; N_{Groups}: 2,067; $N_{Parties}$: 38.

4. Analysis

Table 2 presents two logistic regression models testing our expectation regarding the interactive effects of interest groups' interests in European policies and parties' positions towards the EU on the likelihood of contact between groups and parties. In Model 1, we analyse the effects that each of these two variables have without explicitly including an interaction term between them. In logistic regression models, interactions between two variables may be present even in the absence of an interaction term in the model (Berry, DeMeritt, & Esarey, 2010). The model demonstrates that both interest groups' European policy interests and party EU positions matter for the likelihood of contact between groups and parties. Importantly, both of these effects are quite substantial: Keeping all other covariates constant at their mean or their reference value (for categorical variables), the model predicts groups for whom policies originating at the EU level are (the most) important to be 25 per-

Table 2. Mixed effects logistic regression explaining contact between interest groups and political parties.

	DV: Contact	
	(1)	(2)
IGinterest in EU public policy		
no importance whatsoever	Ref.	Ref.
less important	.34 (.27)	−.37 (.44)
important/most important	1.15 *** (.29)	.36 (.46)
Party EU position	.18 * (.11)	.04 (.12)
Interaction effects		
European policy less important for IG *Party EU position		.18 *** (.06)
European policy (most) important for IG *Party EU position		.19 *** (.07)
Control variables		
EU salience	.17 * (.09)	.18 ** (.09)
Left–Right position	.32 (.89)	.32 (.89)
Left–Right position ^{2}	−.01 (.09)	−.02 (.09)
GAL–TAN position	.45 *** (.17)	.44 ** (.17)
GAL–TAN position ^{2}	−.06 *** (.02)	−.06 *** (.02)
Seat share	.05 *** (.01)	.05 *** (.01)
Government	.10 (.27)	.13 (.27)
Populist	−.13 (.35)	−.14 (.36)
Institutionalisation (Party age logged)	.79 *** (.15)	.82 *** (.15)
Breadth of policy engagement	.20 *** (.03)	.20 *** (.03)
Resources	.64 *** (.08)	.63 *** (.08)
Group type		
Other group	Ref.	Ref.
Business group	.80 *** (.29)	.81 *** (.30)
Citizen group	.94 *** (.31)	.95 *** (.31)
Institutional group	1.80 *** (.47)	1.79 *** (.48)
Union	2.11 *** (.48)	2.31 *** (.48)
Country fixed effects		
Belgium	Ref.	Ref.
Netherlands	1.16 *** (.40)	1.17 *** (.40)
Lithuania	−.92 * (.48)	−.96 ** (.49)
Slovenia	−2.40 *** (.57)	−2.49 *** (.57)
Italy	.32 (.57)	.36 (.57)
Intercept	−10.33 *** (2.15)	−9.78 *** (2.17)
Group intercept variance	12.93	13.16
Party intercept variance	.20	.20
N_{Dyads}	16,514	16,514
N_{Groups}	2,067	2,067
$N_{Parties}$	38	38
Log likelihood	−6,606.05	−6,601.29

Notes: Entries are logit coefficients; * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$; standard errors in parentheses.

centage points more likely to contact a given party than groups for whom EU policy is not important. Likewise, parties who are strongly opposed to European integration are 15 percentage points less likely to have contact with a given interest group than parties who are strongly in favour of European integration.

These findings hold for our second model in which we include the interaction effect between groups' European policy interests and party positions towards European integration. When looking at Model 2, we notice that the main coefficients of groups' European policy interests are no longer significant and that both main effects included in the interaction substantially decreased in size. However, both interaction coefficients are different from zero ($p < .01$) which indicates that the two factors are indeed jointly affecting the likelihood of contact.

How do they do so? In order to gain a better understanding of the estimated effects of group interests in, and party positions towards, the EU, we computed the average marginal predicted probabilities of contact for all possible combinations of parties' EU positions, and groups' European policy interests. We plot these in Figure 1. To ease interpretability, we do not display combinations with groups for whom European policy is less important (our middle category).

As can be seen, the figure provides broad support for our two hypotheses. To begin, in line with H1, the steeply rising dotted line illustrates that interest groups whose policy interests are dealt with at the EU level are substantially more likely to have contact with pro-European parties than with parties that oppose European integration. Next, the figure reveals that groups for whom EU policy is an important or the most important focus become significantly more likely to contact a given party when this party is at least in favour of European integration, as compared to interest groups for whom EU policy is not important. When parties are neutral, or opposed to European integration, the largely overlapping confidence intervals indicate that there is no significant difference between interest groups.

Last, even though the predicted probabilities of contact between interest groups without substantive European policy interests rise marginally the more pro-European parties become, this increase is much smaller than for EU-interested interest groups and is not statistically significant. This means that, in line with H2, despite the fact that they are slightly more drawn to pro-European parties, groups without substantive European policy interests are not distinctly affected by party positions concerning European integration. Overall, the analyses lend broad support to our theoretical argument that interest groups whose long-term policy-specific priorities are related to issues addressed in the EU multi-level setting, avoid parties whose opposition to European integration crosscut their prime policy objectives.

Finally, considering the control variables, we note that while not all the explanations are significantly different from zero, they all point in the expected direction. We find that contact between interest groups and parties is more likely if European integration is a more salient issue for a party, if parties take left or moder-

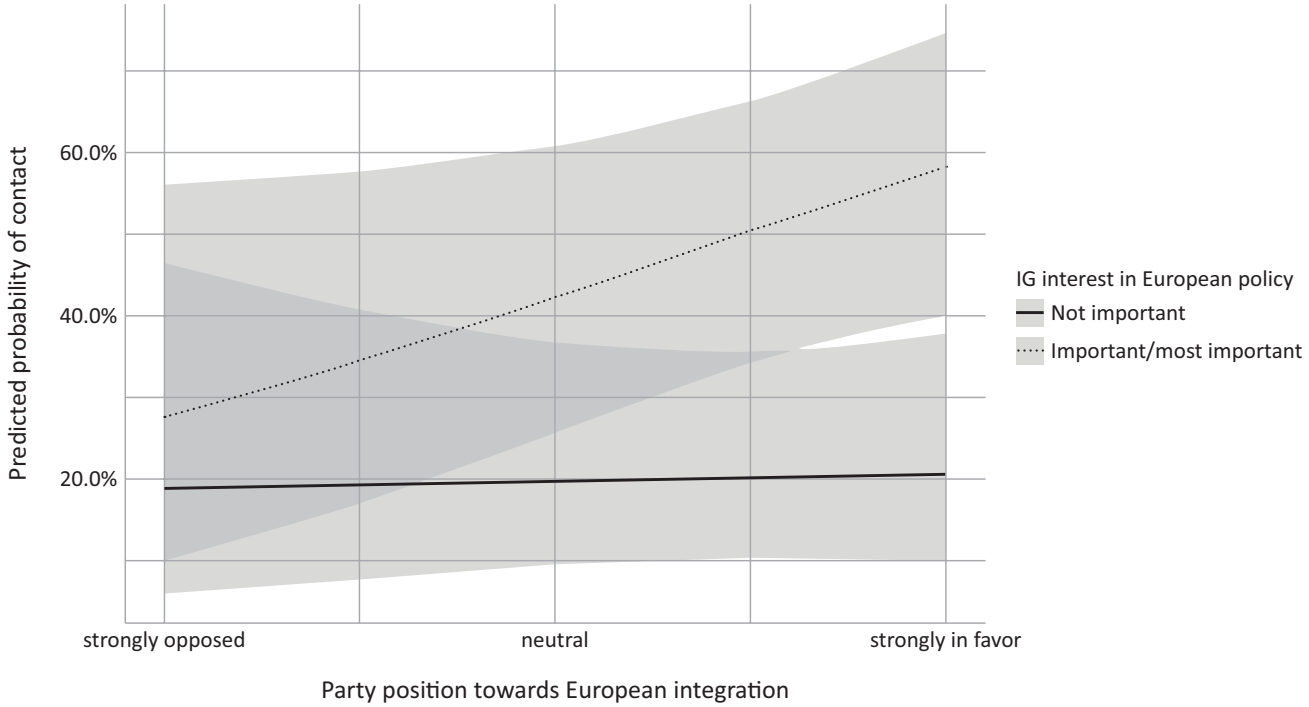

Figure 1. Interaction between groups' interest in EU public policy and parties' position towards the EU. Notes: The figure shows average marginal predicted probabilities with 95% confidence intervals, based on Model 2. Groups for whom European policy is less important are omitted from the graph to ease interpretation (full graph available from the authors).

ate positions on the GAL–TAN dimension, if they are larger in parliament, and if they are older. In contrast, ideological positions on the left–right dimension, government participation, or being populist does not affect the likelihood of contact. Perhaps these null findings are due to some collinearity between these measures and similar ones included in the model. However, it is also conceivable that parties with more extreme economic positions, for example, are simply less of a threat to groups' maintenance goals than anticipated. With regard to group-level variables, we find support for the assertion that groups capable of delivering relevant policy information and interested in a wide range of topics, i.e., groups with more resources and a broader policy engagement, are more likely to have contact with parties than groups with fewer resources or narrower policy interests. Less substantially important, but noteworthy nonetheless, there are differences between interest group types. We also note an interesting division between Eastern and Western European countries. Contact between interest groups and parties is generally less likely in Lithuania and Slovenia than in Belgium, the Netherlands, or Italy.

5. Conclusion

Our article contributes to a recent wave of studies on the substantive change in the meaning of the dominant cleavage in politics. These studies highlight that social-cultural positions related to the EU often supersede the 'classic' socio-economic positions of parties. The issue we sought to address is how much this shift has affected interest group-party relations in five EU countries and, more precisely, the extent to which parties' stances towards the EU determine whether interest groups have contact with them.

Our principal conclusion has two aspects. First, we find that 'the big game is the party game.' With this, we do not imply that legislators provide interest groups with their most important channel into politics (they, at least, share that position with executive actors). We mean that party-political conflict contaminates or even dominates the narrow issue conflicts in which interest groups are commonly involved. That is, if interest groups are affected by EU policies, a party's position towards the EU is one the most critical cues governing the willingness of interest groups to stay in contact, favouring pro-EU parties. Importantly, we find this after controlling for other factors, including the party's alignment on other critical issues such as socio-economic positions and other cultural-social stances. Our second contribution is more specific to the interest groups literature. We find that interest group-party relations are heavily structured by the policy instruments chosen. This is traditionally conceived of in terms of the so-called Lowi-Wilson matrix of the cost-benefit distributions of policies (Wilson, 1980). However, in this case, it refers to the shape of the 'policy terrain' (e.g., Hacker & Pierson, 2014, pp. 645–648) in terms of the particular distribution of policy competences between the EU and its members states. This particular multi-level distribution of competences within policy areas sets the contours of the political incentives to coalesce, oppose, support, and coordinate with other actors (for a similar assessment see Heinkelmann-Wild, Kriegmair, & Rittberger, 2020); particularly given the party-political politicisation of European integration as an issue. Our study suggests that we need a more precise understanding of how these policy area-specific dynamics are connected to broader political oppositions in the party system and beyond.

Our findings have several consequences. First, political parties that voice Eurosceptic political positions may represent particular sub-sections of the electorate but they burn bridges with many interest groups whose interests are affected by EU public policy. This makes it more difficult to take responsibility for substantive changes in public policy by means of networks of contacts with interest representatives. This potentially splits party systems throughout Europe between parties who meaningfully voice legitimate Eurosceptic positions, but who can or do not take government responsibility, and political parties who avoid the EU issue, or take pro-EU positions and retain viability as responsible officeholders (this adds to the incentives in the same direction noted by Lefkofridi, 2020). This contributes to what Mair (2009) identified as the 'bifurcation of party systems.' Future studies could assess whether such bifurcation actually occurs and how it varies across countries.

Second, due to the multidimensionality of party conflict and the multi-level nature of decision-making in Europe, it becomes increasingly difficult for interest groups and parties to find natural allies and establish long-term contacts among each other. One could argue that this is beneficial as it leads to more open, perhaps more democratically legitimate, decision-making. Nevertheless, there are also disadvantages, as it potentially also leads to more opportunistic coalitions of parties and interest groups focussed on short-term gains, rather than long-term stability (Mizruchi, 2013, p. 4; Olson, 1982). It could also result in the representation of only those interests which manage to vertically and horizontally venue-shop along favourably deposed political environments. Future studies may assess such implications for political outcomes.

This bring us to our third consideration: It is not yet clear who are the winners and losers in the interest group community due to the changes outlined above. Does this enable more opportunities for wealthy, business-like organisations, or do other types of interests gain more? For instance, one could argue that business groups lose if EU scepticism trumps economic reasoning in policymaking. Brexit, which has been fiercely opposed by the majority of the businesses in the United Kingdom, is perhaps the most apparent example. Yet, on other issues, it may also increase opportunities for the business community as the debates about the distributional consequences of policies are deprioritised in favour of political debate

concerning socio-cultural issues. For instance, important competing firms can easily free ride on NGO opposition to trade agreements such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Future studies should therefore seek to explain how party relations affect policy output, thereby assessing the primary winners and losers of political conflict.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

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

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Part III.

Legislative and Executive Actors in the EU Multi-Level System

COGITATIO

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Article

Candidate Selection and Parliamentary Activity in the EU's Multi-Level System: Opening a Black-Box

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Abstract
Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have a multitude of parliamentary duties and, accordingly, have to prioritize some parliamentary activities over others. So far, we know comparably little about this prioritization process. Based on principal–agent theory, we argue first, that MEPs' parliamentary activities are systematically determined by the "visibility" and usefulness of parliamentary instruments for their key principal; second, we expect the exclusiveness of candidate selection procedures of an MEP's national party—the nomination and the final list placement—to determine her/his key principal (i.e., elites or members of national parties). Combining multi-level mixed effects linear regression models and expert interviews, we show that MEPs who are nominated and whose final list placement is decided by an exclusive circle of national party elites prioritize speeches, whereas MEPs who are nominated or whose final list placement is decided by more inclusive procedures prioritize written questions and opinions or reports. In other words, speeches seem particularly useful to communicate with national party elites, while other activities are used to serve larger groups of party members. These findings open up the black-box of the "national party principal" and illustrate how a complex principal–agent relationship stimulates very specific parliamentary activity patterns in the EU's multi-level system.

Keywords
candidate selection; European Parliament; multi-level system; principal–agent relationship; parliamentary activity

Issue
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1. Introduction

Legislators have a large number of duties but only a limited amount of time. Therefore, they have to prioritize some parliamentary activities over others. This is a particularly severe problem for the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). They act in a multi-level setting, have to bridge large geographical distances and to serve multiple principals on different political levels. MEPs mainly operate between their European Party Group (EPG) and their national party (e.g., Hix & Høyland, 2014). The national party nominates candidates for (re-)election to the European Parliament (EP) and is also instrumental in elections for future domestic positions; the EPG controls a range of offices and benefits within the EP, including committee membership, chairmanships, positions in the party group hierarchy, rapporteurships and speaking time, and is therefore key to political success in parliament (Koop, Reh, & Bressanelli, 2018, p. 563; Kreppel, 2002). To disentangle this complex principal–agent relationship and its influence on MEPs' prioritization strategy in terms of parliamentary activities, we study the

candidate selection procedure of national parties, which is known to affect parliamentary activity in national settings (Fernandes, Won, & Martins, 2019; for an overview see Hazan, 2014). In doing so, we distinguish between two steps—the nomination and the final decision on list placement—in the candidate selection procedure of a national party, and ask: Which parliamentary activities do MEPs prioritize and how does the specific candidate selection procedure (including nomination and final list placement) of national parties influence MEPs' prioritization strategy?

Based on the principal–agent theory, we argue that MEPs' prioritization strategy in terms of parliamentary activities depends on the exclusiveness of candidate selection procedures the MEPs' national party employs and, thus, on the key principal the MEP serves (i.e., party elites, party members). The main reason for this is that activities vary in their "visibility" and their utility to facilitate the interests of different principals (Klüver & Spoon, 2015). Some parliamentary activities are more suitable to "cultivate a personal vote" and thus, to communicate national or individual interests than others. Which specific interests an MEP wants to serve is determined by two components of the candidates selectin procedure: (1) the nomination of candidates; and (2) the decision over the final list placement of candidates. Thus, both components have an effect into the same direction, and their combination determines the overall effect size of candidate selection procedures on MEPs' prioritization strategy in terms of parliamentary activities.

We explore this novel argument based on a new and comprehensive dataset that includes four important but very different parliamentary activities (i.e., speeches, written questions, written opinions, and reports) of all MEPs, their personal characteristics and offices within the 7th legislative period of the EP (2009–2014), as well as expert interviews.

Overall, we find considerable support for our theoretical expectations: The choice to prioritize some parliamentary activities over others varies significantly with the exclusiveness of candidate selection procedures of national parties and thus, with the key principal a MEP serves. In detail, if candidate selection processes are organized exclusively, MEPs tend to prioritize speeches; if they are organized rather inclusively, MEPs tend to engage more in written questions, opinions, or reports. Furthermore, we show that exclusiveness of candidate selection sometimes varies across the two stages of the selection process, namely nomination and decision on final list placement. Accordingly, it is essential to take both stages into account when evaluating the impact of candidates' selection procedures on MEPs' parliamentary activities.

In consequence, this study contributes to key questions in two larger literature steams: First, it opens up the black-box of the "national party principal" in the EP by exploring how variations along the inclusion–exclusion dimension in parties' candidate selection procedures influence the type of activity MEPs engage. Thus, it clearly speaks to the increasing "politics turn" in EU studies (Braun, Gross, & Rittberger, 2020). Second, it speaks to a growing comparative literature analyzing the link between candidate selection procedures in political parties and legislative behavior. The focus of our research is, therefore, a relevant one for both EU studies and Comparative Politics. Finally, this is one of the first empirical studies to comparatively investigate the consequences of party recruitment procedures on the prioritization of parliamentary activities, namely across different political parties in EU member states. The EP offers an ideal testing ground, since elections are held simultaneously across the 28 EU member states but feature a broad variety of different electoral rules. More importantly, all MEPs face similar procedural rules with regard to each parliamentary activity, facilitating the comparison of parliamentary engagement.

The next section reviews the existing literature and elaborates the theoretical framework. Subsequently, we describe the measurement, data, and research design. Next, we provide a descriptive overview of the dataset and the most important relationships. Finally, we discuss the results and provide some conclusions.

2. Prioritization of Parliamentary Activities in a Multi-Level Setting: Exploring the Role of Political Parties' Selection Procedures

EU studies have extensively discussed the principal–agent problems of MEPs. Many scholars who explore the dilemma of managing two or more principals with different interests focus on roll-call votes and, hence, on an instance in which MEPs explicitly have to take a position and where shirking this responsibility may lead to sanctions imposed by one or the other principal (Faas, 2003; Hix, 2004; Koop et al., 2018; Lindstaedt, Slapin, & van der Wielen, 2011; Meserve, Robbins, & Thames, 2017). These scholars illustrate that MEPs and especially EPGs behave in a more cohesive manner during recorded votes than their party manifestos or expert surveys would predict (Hix & Høyland, 2013, p. 181). However, when the EPG and the national party have different standpoints, MEPs are more likely to vote in line with the position of their national party, particularly if electoral rules promote a close relationship between the latter actors (Faas, 2003; Hix, 2004; Meserve et al., 2017).

Even though research on the effect of multiple principals on voting cohesion is extensive, we have little detailed information on how this dilemma of serving multiple principals and the pressure to prioritize some tasks over others affect MEPs' parliamentary activities in earlier stages of the legislative process. The few exceptions focus mainly on speeches and written questions (Font & Pérez Durán, 2016; Jensen, Proksch, & Slapin, 2013; Proksch & Slapin, 2011; Slapin & Proksch, 2010; Wonka & Rittberger, 2014), while other parliamentary activities are largely disregarded (e.g., reports, opinions, motions

for resolution). Speeches and written questions are usually exercised on an individual basis and therefore, require a relatively limited effort of coordination and time compared to more substantial activities such as reports or opinions. The latter activities are not only more time-consuming but also more difficult to prioritize on an individual basis as the allocation of reports (and opinions) follows a very complex procedure and requires strong inter- and intra-party coordination (cf. EP, 2014, Title V, Chapter 3–5). Beyond the comparably limited number of studies exploring the principal–agent dilemma of MEPs with regard to earlier stages of the legislative process, no study so far—at least to our knowledge—offers a broader overview of MEPs' parliamentary activities and hence, allows us to understand how this dilemma plays out in MEPs' prioritization strategies in terms of parliamentary tasks and especially how it is related with the candidates selection procedures of national parties.

The literature on legislative behavior in national settings is very inspiring in that regard, as a growing number of scholars analyze the link between the candidate selection processes of political parties and legislative behavior (for an overview see Hazan, 2014). Although this community tends to concentrate on roll-call votes, it devotes more attention toward individual parliamentary activities and thus, provides a more fine-tuned picture of the motives driving MPs' individual behavior (for written questions, see Martin, 2011; Rozenberg & Martin, 2011; for speeches see Bäck & Debus, 2016; Fernandes et al., 2019). A general finding is that the more inclusive the candidate selection process, the lower the level of party unity because legislators are not only liable to party leaders but also to a larger group of party members. Moreover, candidate selection procedures seem to predict legislative behavior more precisely than electoral rules (Hazan, 2014, p. 219).

These insights provide valuable theoretical ground for conceptualizing the effect of candidate selection procedures on different parliamentary activities in the multilevel system of the EU: our overarching argument is that the exclusiveness of candidate selection procedures of national parties determines MEPs' prioritization strategy in terms of parliamentary instruments. In detail, we first propose that some parliamentary activities are more suitable to "cultivate a personal vote" and thus to communicate national or individual interests than others. The main reason is that we assume parliamentary activities to vary in their "visibility" and utility to respond to the interests of different principals (Klüver & Spoon, 2015). The contact of national party actors to the European level is often ad hoc in nature (see Pittoors, 2020) and, therefore, these actors are in general less attentive towards European parliamentary activities than the EPG. We assume that this attentiveness varies among national party elites and national party members. National party elites might be much better informed over legislative processes in the EP due to the constant influx of EU legislation and the extensive formal and informal coordination between the national party and its representatives on the EU level. Members of national parties, by contrast, may find it much more difficult to monitor EP legislation and might be more interested in very specific topics affecting their electoral districts. However, this does not mean that MEPs cannot directly serve national party members; written questions, for instance, are a useful tool to gather very specific but also very valuable information for a large group of party affiliates. Accordingly, we assume that not only the visibility but also the utility of parliamentary instruments to communicate with national principals vary systematically across elites and individual members of the national parties. This leads us to argue more generally that the exclusiveness of candidate selection procedures of a national party should affect MEPs' prioritization strategy in terms of parliamentary instruments.

Second, we argue that the exclusiveness of candidate selection procedures should be captured along two steps: (1) the nomination of candidates, and (2) the decision on list placement (cf. Fortin-Rittberger & Rittberger, 2015). Both steps are integral parts of the candidate selection process, might be organized more exclusive or inclusive in manner and thus, determine the overall identity of the principal and the power the national party exercises in its role as principal over MEPs. Hence, the effect of both stages goes into the same direction and the combination of both determines the overall effect size of the exclusiveness of candidates' selection procedures. For instance, MEPs could be nominated by the party executive and the party executive could also take the decision on the final list placement. Under these circumstances, the candidates' selection procedures are very exclusive and thus, the incentive for MEPs to serve elites of the national party is very strong. Alternatively, MEPs could be nominated by the party executive but the decision on the final list placement could be taken by many party delegates. In this case, the overall exclusiveness of candidates' selection procedures is intermediate in nature and thus, MEPs may try to communicate with both, party elites and party members (for more details on the coding of the respective variables, see Section 3).

In the following, we develop three specific expectations, theorizing in more detail on how the exclusiveness of the candidate selection procedures of national parties affects MEPs' prioritization of specific parliamentary activities (i.e., speeches, written questions, and reports/opinions).

First, we expect candidate selection procedures within national political parties to impact on the speech-making activity of MEPs. MEPs use speeches not only to present policy plans in the plenary, but also to explain positions that deviate from either their EPG group or their national party (Slapin & Proksch, 2010). Slapin and Proksch established that speeches are a common instrument to demonstrate national loyalty because MEPs may use this parliamentary instrument to "explain their national party's position to other members of their EP

political group, and to create a positive record for themselves in the eyes of the national party to serve their own re-election" (Slapin & Proksch, 2010, p. 333).

For creating such a positive record in the eyes of the national party, however, two questions are important: (1) Who is listening to these speeches? ("visibility"); and (2) who is able to substantially shape re-election within the party? ("closeness" to the principals). First, one could expect that political elites such as party leaders or the executive committee are much more informed about EU politics and especially about the activity of the MEPs of their own party through different coordinating committees (e.g., *Verbindungsbüros*) than ordinary party members. If these party elites have a strong say in the candidate nomination procedure, meaning that the process is rather exclusive, then it is highly likely that MEPs would attempt to send positive signals to their national principals through legislative speeches in order to increase their chances of re-nomination. If the candidate selection process is organized more inclusively, meaning that many individual or selected members are involved in re-nomination and decision making over candidate lists, then it is rather unlikely that the messages sent via speeches in the EP will reach the intended recipients. Accordingly, MEPs aiming to communicate with individuals or selected groups of members should be more likely to engage in other activities than speeches. Based on these reflections, we expect the following:

> Expectation 1: The more exclusive the candidate selection process for European elections within a national political party, the more likely it becomes that MEPs prioritize speeches over other parliamentary activities.

Furthermore, we argue that the candidate selection procedure also impacts MEPs' prioritization strategies in terms of written questions. Specifically, we expect that the more exclusive the candidate selection process, the less likely it becomes that MEPs systematically prioritize written questions over other parliamentary activities. Scholars detected that written questions serve national parties that are in the opposition by collecting valuable information from the European Commission (Wonka & Rittberger, 2014) or by alerting the European Commission to failures of national governments in implementing EU policy issues. Similarly, we argue that written questions are a valuable tool also for individual MEPs. Written questions can be used to raise important concerns or gather very specific information being of local interest or relevant for specific subnational groups. Hence, they are useful to serve in particular individual members of national parties or selected groups of party members. The targeted (local) principal does not need to be a fully attentive expert on EU politics when it comes to parliamentary questions. The MEP or her/his assistant can selectively disseminate the gathered information. Moreover, written questions are hardly controlled by EPG leadership or the leadership of the national party in the EP, unlike most other activities. Furthermore, they are particularly useful to capture individual prioritization strategies of MEPs as proposing such questions requires a certain amount of resources and time (e.g., a staffer must research the question, format it appropriately, submit it, await a reply, and communicate this accordingly; Martin, 2011, p. 263). Accordingly, we hypothesize:

> Expectation 2: The more exclusive the candidate selection process for European elections within a national political party, the less likely it becomes that MEPs prioritize written questions over other parliamentary activities.

Finally, we do not expect the candidate selection procedures of national parties to systematically affect MEPs' prioritization strategy in terms of opinions and reports. The allocation of opinions and reports follows a very complex procedure, influenced by the power of individual MEPs but also other factors such as expertise, party group size, or seniority (Hix & Høyland, 2013, 2014, p. 600). Thus, the prioritization of reports and opinions is by no means an individual choice. Moreover, reports and opinions might be visible to both the EPG and the elites of the national party and, more importantly, it is very difficult to push through specific national or party interests, as both reports and opinions require the support of MEPs from other countries and national parties (except if the national party is very large in number; Mamadouh & Raunio, 2003). Similarly, obtaining a powerful position within the EP (e.g., committee chair) requires support from the EPG and thus, an engagement with European ideas instead of national party-specific interests. In others words, if we would expect any relationship between the candidate selection process of national parties and the time dedicated to reports or opinions, then this relationship should be negative because other instruments are less time consuming and may be more effective to serve national principals (i.e., elites of a national party or party members). However, because of the complex allocation procedure we do not expect any systematic relationship:

> Expectation 3: Candidate selection procedures for European elections within a national political party are not systematically related to MEPs' prioritization strategies in terms of opinions and reports.

3. Research Design, Data, and Methods

This article analyzes the parliamentary activities of the members of the 7th EP (2009–2014) and asks why MEPs prioritize some activities over others. Accordingly, we are interested in MEPs' prioritization strategy in terms of parliamentary activities and not in the parliamentary productivity of individual MEPs, nor do we compare the parliamentary productivity across MEPs. Instead, for all par-

liamentary activities we measure the share of the respective activity of the total number of activities an individual MEP engages in: speeches in plenary, written questions, opinions, and drafted reports. We select these four activities because they represent two "extremes" of classical parliamentary instruments: (1) Speeches and written questions, for instance, encompass more "symbolic" engagement, while following different logics, they can be implemented on an individual basis, are less time consuming and hence, useful for cultivating an individual profile that links up to national principals (Slapin & Proksch, 2010); (2) opinions and reports, by contrast, represent more "substantive" activities (in terms of impact on the legislative outcome), requiring a large effort of coordination and time. Because of their political importance, the allocation of opinions and reports follows a highly complex and political procedure (cf. EP, 2014, rules 49–56). Hence, the activities in focus are very different in nature and require a different workload. However, we argue that MEPs behave rationally and weigh all activities against each other when they distribute their time (e.g., one report instead of many written questions). For this reason, the dependent variable calculates the share of each specific activity relative to the total amount of all four activities. As a robustness check for this specific selection, we run additional analyses using the activities' share of all major activities documented by the EP (this includes motions for resolutions and written declarations additionally to the four activities mentioned; see results in Table A7 in the Supplementary File). We obtained the activity measures for 692 MEPs of the 7th EP (2009–2014) from Vote Watch (2015).

In the following paragraphs, we summarize the central independent variable, provide information on the control variables and conclude with some descriptive statistics (see Table 1). Our central independent variable, "exclusive selection," captures the exclusiveness of the overall candidate selection process, including (1) candidate nomination (who nominates?), and (2) the decision over the final list placement of candidates (who decides?). The exclusiveness of both components of candidate selection is measured in ordinal variables using the following values: 1 (individual members); 2 (subset of members); 3 (committee); and 4 (executive). Next, we integrate both components, assuming that the identity of the selectorate taking the final decision on list placement is more important to the MEP than the nominating selectorate (to test the impact of this assumption, we check a different operationalization of the variable, results are in Table A8 in the Supplementary File). So, the key dependent variable, "exclusive selection," takes the value of: 1 if nomination and decision are inclusive; 2 if nomination is exclusive but the decision inclusive; 3 if only the decision is exclusive; and 4 if decision making is in both stages is exclusive. The data has been collected and shared by Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger (2015). For an additional robustness check, we create dummy variables of both components of the candidate selection process: 1 if nominated/placed on the list by a committee or the party executive; 0 if nominated/placed on the list by individual or a subset of members. The results of this test are in Table A5 in the Supplementary File. Parties' candidate selection rules may distinguish between the formal right to propose a candidate—often the right of every party member—and the right to propose a certain order or list placement of the candidates—mostly done by a party committee. To control for potential biases that could arise from this, we leave out category 1 (individual members) in the nomination variable (see result of this robustness check in Table A6 in the Supplementary File).

To take the multi-level structure of our data into account, we run multi-level mixed effects linear regression models with random intercepts at the level of the party and of the EU member state. As our dependent variables (shares) are bounded between zero and 100, a linear regression model could therefore possibly suffer from non-normal errors and heteroscedasticity because of potential out-of-sample predictions. As a robustness check, we run a fractional logit model (Papke & Wooldridge, 1996) that was developed for the analysis of percentages (for these results see Table A4 in the Supplementary File).

As the prioritization of some parliamentary activities over others is influenced by many more factors, we include a large number of control variables. One of the main control variables includes the electoral system of a country, which is often used to identify power of the national party over the MEP. Specifically, we distinguish between "closed electoral systems," where voters can only vote for an electoral (party) list (1) and other systems (0; see also Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005). We gathered this data from Pilet et al. (2009). National opposition parties might use their activities in the EP to control the domestic agenda (Jensen et al., 2013). Hence, we include a variable capturing how often the national party of the MEP was not part of the national government ("Share in National Opposition"), which is calculated by using the number of government memberships of a party from 2009–2014 divided by the total number of governments in the given time span (2009–2014), and subtracted from one. Data on the composition of national governments in Europe originate from the ParlGov database (Döring & Manow, 2019). It has been shown that national parties value MEPs from more powerful committees in European elections (Frech, 2018). Therefore, we also control for "Committee Power." This variable captures whether a MEP was part of a more powerful legislative committee within the EP during the term (1) or not (0). The classification of parliamentary committees as more or less powerful is taken from Yordanova (2009; see Table A1 in the Supplementary File). Some legislative activities, speeches most importantly, are more likely to be held by MEPs with certain offices. Hence, we expect "Committee Chairs" and other "EP Leadership" to be more active in plenary sessions and therefore control for these offices. "Committee Chair" is a binary variable that takes the value of one if the MEP was chair of any

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of key variables.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
(Share of) Speeches	692	62.90	21.65	3.13	100
(Share of) Written Questions	692	32.97	21.35	0	96.88
(Share of) Opinions	692	1.97	3.73	0	56.99
(Share of) Reports	692	2.15	3.98	0	46.51
Nomination (1 = 66, 2 = 89, 3 = 264, 4 = 79)	496	2.72	0.89	1	4
Decision List Placement (1 = 73, 2 = 129, 3 = 79, 4 = 298)	579	3.04	1.12	1	4
Exclusive Selection (1 = 91, 2 = 80, 3 = 54, 4 = 245)	470	3.02	1.19	1	4
Closed List (1 = 394)	691	0.57	0.495	0	1

Source: Authors' calculations.

EP committee at any time during the legislative term and "EP Leadership" takes the value 1 if the MEP was at least a member of the conference of presidents or the EPs Bureau during the term. Chairs of powerful committees are more active than chairs of less powerful committees and potentially write more reports. Therefore, we also include an interaction between committee power and the committee chair.

The "Participation Rate" of an MEP in plenary tells us something about the ability of an MEP to engage in certain activities: A person who is absent during the plenary sessions on a regular basis has less time for speeches, but has potentially more time to write reports. When calculating the participation rate, MEPs who participated in less than 10% of all plenary sessions are omitted. The variable "EPG Left–Right Position" is an ordinal variable that captures the ideological position of the EPG from left (1) to right (7). The order is: European United Left–Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), Progressive alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), Greens-European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA), Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), European People's Party (EPP), European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), and Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD). We control for the EPG's ideological position on the left–right spectrum to determine whether left-wing party groups are more active and whether their members engage in different kinds of activities. Further control variables are "Party Size," "Eurosceptic Party," "Female," "Age," and "Seniority." "Party Size" captures the total number of MEPs who are members of the same national party during the 7th legislative term. "Eurosceptic Party" is a dummy variable that captures whether or not the national party of an MEP is considered Eurosceptic (coded 1 if the party strongly opposes or opposes European Integration according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey [Polk et al., 2017]; a list of Eurosceptic parties can be found in Table A3 in the Supplementary File). "Seniority" is measured by the number of legislative periods the MEP previously served in the EP. All information on personal characteristics of MEPs we obtained from Hoyland, Sircar, and Hix (2009).

Finally, we conducted nine semi-structured expert interviews to deepen our understanding of the underlying dynamics linking MEPs' prioritization strategies in terms of parliamentary activities and candidate selection processes in national parties (for details, see Table A2 in the Supplementary File). We interviewed MEPs from the Greens (very inclusive nomination) and from the Christian Democratic Party as well as the Social Democratic Party in Germany (more inclusive candidate selection procedures). We also interviewed members of the Socialist Party in France and the Liberal Party in Germany (rather exclusive selection/nomination procedures).

4. Empirical Analysis

Overall, we observe that MEPs nominated by the national party executive speak more (66 speeches on average) than MEPs nominated through a more inclusive process (MEPs nominated by selected party members or delegates speak 62 times on average). Also, the average number of written questions provides the first piece of evidence that supports our second expectation: MEPs nominated by the individual party members ask 33 questions on average, while MEPs nominated by the party executive only prepare 30 written questions. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis of the data shows that the prioritization of parliamentary activities varies across groups of MEPs: Female MEPs are more active in writing opinions (1.70 for male MEPs vs. 2.47 for female MEPs), and the members of the right-wing Eurosceptic EPG (EFD) on average ask the most written questions (44 in total) but are significantly less active in more substantial activities (about 0.34 opinions and 0.36 reports on average). While German MEPs for example draft more than four reports on average, Estonian MEPs write only 0.68 reports.

These descriptive insights are further substantiated and supported by the results of several multi-level mixed effects linear regression models that analyze the effect of the overall exclusiveness of the candidate selection procedure a party employs (see Table 2) and the effect of the two stages (i.e., nomination and decision on final placement decision) of the selection procedure separately (see Table 3). Models 1 and 5 focus on the prioritization of speeches relative to other parliamentary activities and show a positive and significant effect of the parties' candidate selection process as a whole as well

Table 2. The effect of exclusive candidate selection on activities in the EP (2009–2014).

Model:	1	2	3	4
Dep. Var.:	Speeches	Written Questions	Opinions	Reports
Exclusive Selection	3.957**	−2.986*	−0.453**	−0.514**
	(1.331)	(1.258)	(0.175)	(0.183)
Closed List Systems	6.506	−4.618	−0.277	−0.456
	(5.517)	(5.756)	(0.476)	(0.504)
Share in	−13.24***	13.23***	0.359	−0.930
National Opposition	(4.006)	(3.732)	(0.707)	(0.753)
Eurosceptic	−8.441	8.051	−0.804	−0.467
	(6.445)	(5.971)	(1.182)	(1.266)
Party Size	−0.329+	0.181	0.0464+	0.0379
	(0.179)	(0.162)	(0.025)	(0.026)
Female	−0.442	−0.132	0.968*	−0.279
	(1.590)	(1.582)	(0.384)	(0.420)
Committee Power	−3.119+	2.090	−0.174	1.315**
	(1.619)	(1.611)	(0.393)	(0.431)
Committee Chair	−2.160	−4.549	−0.0330	5.791**
	(6.525)	(6.508)	(1.610)	(1.766)
Com. Chair * Power	−3.587	2.712	6.735***	−4.447*
	(7.789)	(7.759)	(1.921)	(2.106)
EP Leadership	20.12***	−17.29***	−0.457	−1.820*
	(3.426)	(3.407)	(0.824)	(0.902)
Participation Rate	0.249**	−0.164+	−0.00488	−0.0580**
	(0.086)	(0.085)	(0.020)	(0.022)
Seniority	0.778	−0.755	−0.362+	0.347+
	(0.802)	(0.795)	(0.185)	(0.201)
Age	−0.0697	−0.0249	0.0425*	0.0346+
	(0.078)	(0.078)	(0.018)	(0.020)
EPG Left-Right	0.389	−0.0919	−0.0295	−0.140
Position	(0.714)	(0.662)	(0.127)	(0.134)
Constant	42.19***	48.32***	1.612	6.614**
	(10.991)	(10.807)	(2.253)	(2.447)
N	456	456	456	456
ll	−1924.7	−1921.8	−1260.0	−1301.3

Notes: Coefficients of multilevel linear regression models with random effects at the level of the national party and at the EU member state. Standard errors are in parentheses. leg.: legislative. Significance levels: + $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

as of both stages. In detail, the more elite-dominated the candidate selection processes of MEPs within a national political party, the more time MEPs dedicate to speech-making activities. Figure 1 illustrates this pattern graphically by disentangling the relationship between the exclusiveness of candidate nomination procedures and speech-making activity. Our models predict 58 speeches for MEPs that are nominated by a large number of individual party members and a mean of almost 69 speeches for MEPs being nominated by a very exclusive cycle. These strong findings support our first theoretical expectation, proposing that speeches are particularly useful to communicate with the national party (Slapin & Proksch, 2010) and, specifically, more effective for a small group of party executives than a large number of party members.

Our second expectation, proposing a systematic relationship between candidate selection procedure and MEPs engagement in written questions, also finds support. Models 2 and 6 show that the more exclusive the candidate nomination procedures within national parties, the fewer written questions MEPs of these parties tend to propose. However, only the second stage of the candidate selection procedure, namely the exclusiveness of the decision on the final list placement of candidates, shows an effect that is statistically significant. These results are supported by evidence from the interviews. One interview partner, who is a member of the Social Democratic Party in Germany, whose candidate nomination and selection process is quite inclusive (a subset of members nominates and decides over nomination), explains:

> [I] submit written questions, if I am asked for by anybody; especially, local actors or groups. For instance, that was the case with Opel. As Opel wanted to relocate a factory [from Germany] to other European countries, I should prepare a written question to

Table 3. The effect of nomination and list placement decision on activities in the EP (2009–2014).

Model:	5	6	7	8
Dep. Var.:	Speeches	Written Questions	Opinions	Reports
Nomination List	2.633+	−1.889	−0.459*	−0.337
	(1.453)	(1.370)	(0.233)	(0.249)
Decision List Placement	3.057*	−2.255+	−0.290	−0.507*
	(1.320)	(1.264)	(0.197)	(0.208)
Closed List Systems	4.756	−3.377	−0.0402	−0.393
	(5.730)	(5.954)	(0.511)	(0.540)
Share in	−12.60**	12.75***	0.233	−0.900
National Opposition	(4.128)	(3.873)	(0.727)	(0.773)
Party Size	−8.139	7.691	−0.640	−0.386
	(6.486)	(6.031)	(1.194)	(1.274)
Eurosceptic Party	−0.321+	0.175	0.0476+	0.0467+
	(0.185)	(0.169)	(0.026)	(0.027)
Female	−0.518	−0.0585	0.948*	−0.290
	(1.586)	(1.579)	(0.384)	(0.421)
Committee Power	−2.906+	1.910	−0.191	1.271**
	(1.618)	(1.610)	(0.393)	(0.431)
Committee Chair	−2.121	−4.588	−0.0272	5.814***
	(6.517)	(6.502)	(1.610)	(1.764)
Com. Chair * Power	−3.812	2.904	6.820***	−4.396*
	(7.780)	(7.755)	(1.920)	(2.103)
EP Leadership	20.08***	−17.24***	−0.418	−1.773*
	(3.429)	(3.414)	(0.825)	(0.902)
Participation Rate	0.251**	−0.165+	−0.00715	−0.0601**
	(0.086)	(0.085)	(0.020)	(0.022)
Seniority	0.775	−0.756	−0.338+	0.337+
	(0.802)	(0.795)	(0.187)	(0.203)
Age	−0.0713	−0.0235	0.0416*	0.0358+
	(0.078)	(0.078)	(0.018)	(0.020)
EPG Left-Right	0.270	−0.00524	−0.0464	−0.131
Position	(0.725)	(0.674)	(0.130)	(0.136)
Constant	38.72***	50.53***	2.573	7.495**
	(11.556)	(11.358)	(2.403)	(2.608)
N	456	456	456	456
Ll	−1924.5	−1921.8	−1259.9	−1300.9

Notes: Coefficients of multilevel linear regression models with random effects at the level of the national party and at the EU member state. Standard errors are in parentheses. leg.: legislative. Significance levels: + $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

> the Commission, asking whether Opel has already requested project funds for the construction of a new plant in other European countries. [I prepare written questions to the Commission], if I am addressed from outside: "Can you even check with the Commission if this and that is the case?" (Interview 07)

In other words, written questions seem to be an important instrument for MEPs who serve a larger group of selected members within their national party because written questions can be used to gather very specific but still highly important information for this specific group. The idea that written questions can be used to serve individual or a particular group of members is also graphically visible in Figure 1b: The predicted effects for the relative share of written questions MEPs propose is higher for more inclusive selectorates.

Models 3 and 7 as well as 4 and 8 display the effect of the exclusiveness of candidate selection procedures on the share of opinions and reports drafted by MEPs. Overall, highly exclusive candidate selection procedures in national parties seem to hamper the prioritization of opinions and reports, (see for a graphical overview Figures 1c, 1d). Looking at both stages of selection separately, we observe a more nuanced pattern. While nomination has a larger, significant effect on drafting opinions, the placement decision stage has a clear effect on reports. One of our interview partners explains the general phenomenon as follows:

> But look, you can secure your re-election in such a party, by profiling yourself almost only party politically; [you] can knit your network in a way you will definitely get higher in the next election, although you

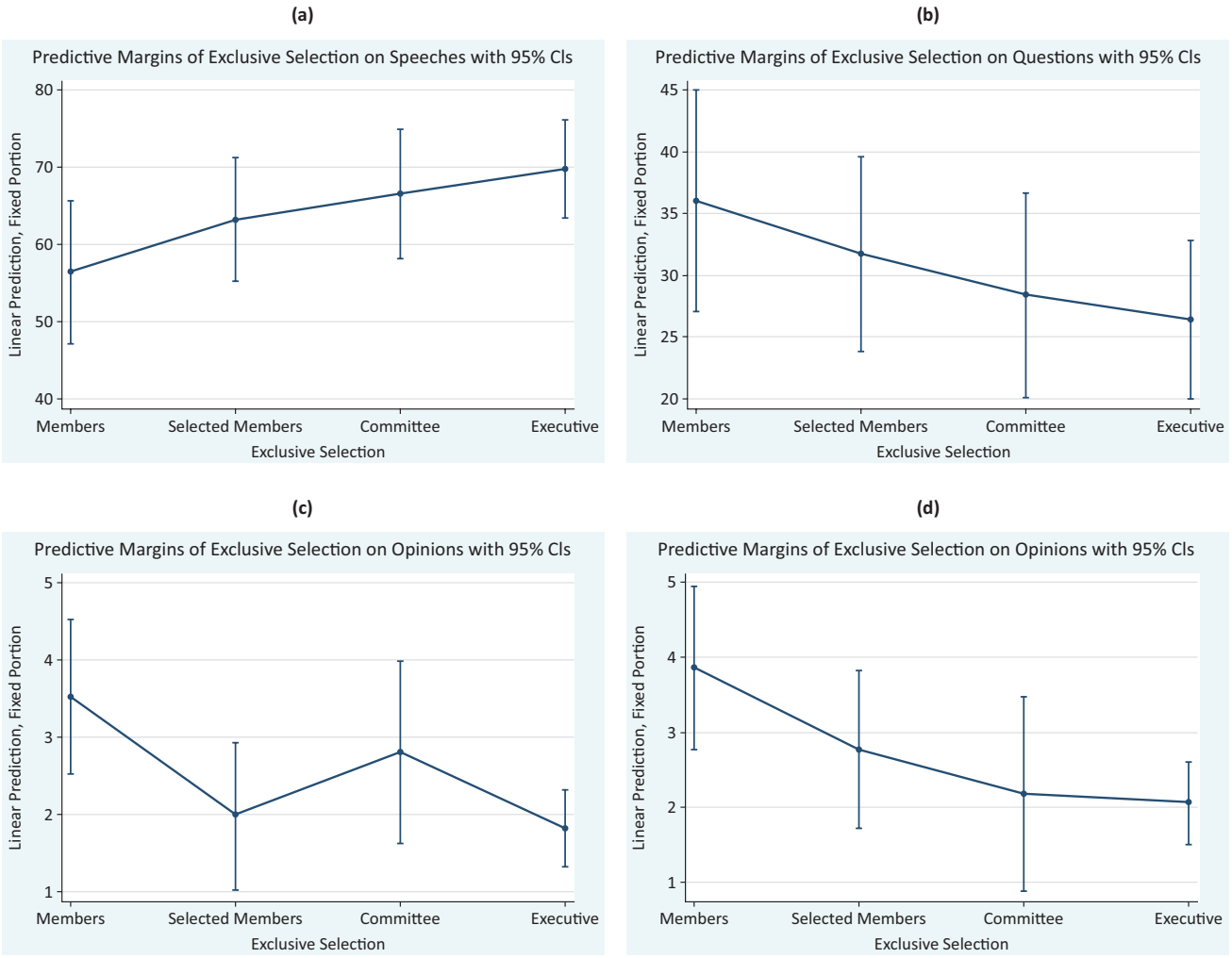

Figure 1. Predicted effects of exclusive candidate selection on the prioritization of different activities. **(a)** Predictive margins of exclusive selection on speeches with 95% confidence intervals, **(b)** Predictive margins of exclusive selection on questions with 95% confidence intervals, **(c)** Predictive margins of exclusive selection on written opinions with 95% confidence intervals, **(d)** Predictive margins of exclusive selection on reports drafted with 95% confidence intervals. Source: Authors' predictions; data on national parties' candidate nomination procedures from Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger (2015).

> do not work so much content-wise [i.e., drafting reports or opinions]…Or you are strategically smart and just make one report, that brings a lot of public attention…Then you have to do something, but not so much. (Interview 01)

In other words, if an MEP is elected in a national party that organizes its nomination and list placement process exclusively, the national party elite is the key principal for the MEP and, thus, a large number of reports and opinions might not be the most effective way to serve the key principal (cf. Interview 02). Instead, it seems wise to take over relevant tasks in Strasbourg, for instance, organizing the communication between national party elites and MEPs on different policy issues. The EPG is a central gatekeeper for report allocation (Hix & Høyland, 2013, p. 182) and, thus, another principal that might challenge the implementation of the specific interests of individual national parties. However, MEPs that are used to accommodate the preferences of diverse national party colleagues due to very inclusive candidate selection procedures are perhaps better prepared and may find more freedom in negotiating policy deals with colleagues in Strasbourg, which is key for the formulation of reports. The assistant of a Spanish MEP explained in that regard:

> It is like that "Ok, you will get the report, but please take into account what I am going to tell you in the coming month" or something like that. It is trying to find a way to work together and to get a good result. (Interview 09)

In addition to the exclusiveness of candidate selection procedures in national parties, other control variables affect outcomes. For instance, committee power and committee chairing are highly important for the prioritization of reports. For the prioritization of written questions, the opposition status of the national party is key and thus,

again, a variable that has been detected as relevant by other studies (Jensen et al., 2013; Wonka & Rittberger, 2014). Interestingly, members of the national opposition prioritize speeches less systematically than other MEPs, indicating that speeches in the EP are less useful to follow a blaming strategy directed at national governments (for more details on blaming strategies of opposition parties in the EU multi-level system, see in this issue Heinkelmann-Wild, Kriegmair, & Rittberger, 2020). Furthermore, individual speech-making activity is additionally stimulated by the power position and participation rates of MEPs. As MEPs can only speak or vote while sitting in plenary, it is not surprising that the participation rate in plenary is positively associated with the prioritization of speeches but hampers the engagement in other activities. Additionally, more senior MEPs do not necessarily follow other priority patterns than less experienced MEPs. However, our results reflect that seniority is important for the distribution of opinions and reports. Lastly, MEPs elected in countries with a closed-list system are likely to give a relatively large share of speeches but propose a comparably low share of written questions. Although the effects are not significant, the finding is in line with the basic argument of this article as well as the findings of previous studies using closed-list systems as a proxy for a close relationship between MEPs and national parties (Slapin & Proksch, 2010).

In sum, these results provide support for our general argument and for the two specific expectations in terms of speeches and written questions. Different than proposed in Expectation 3, however, candidates' selection procedures of national parties indeed seem to influence MEPs' prioritization strategies in terms of reports and opinions in a negative way. This finding supports the general idea that MEPs have to prioritize parliamentary tasks and if they face an exclusive selection procedure, they are more likely to shift their focus away from reports or opinions towards activities that are more visible and suitable to serve the national or party leaderships´ interests. However, these findings might be influenced by many more factors, as the allocation of reports and opinions follows a complex process. Yet in sum, our general argument finds strong support: The candidate selection processes of national parties seem to determine the key principal MEPs serve and, thus, MEPs' prioritization strategy in terms of parliamentary instruments because some parliamentary activities are more "visible" and suitable to "cultivate a personal vote" and to communicate national or individual interests than others.

5. Conclusion

The question of how European legislators deal with multiple principals and a variety of parliamentary tasks is highly interesting because it concerns central standards of modern democracies, namely political representation and responsiveness. MEPs are the key actors in transmitting the interests of European citizens to the supranational level and thus, may substantially increase the legitimacy of EU decisions. Hence, an analysis of MEPs' prioritization strategy of parliamentary activities and how this process is linked with candidate selection procedures of national parties is highly fruitful as it allows us to disentangle the complex principal–agent relationship in the EU's multi-level system and to understand how electoral rules in political parties shape political responsiveness. Moreover, these findings are essential for the current political plans of building up a transnational party system (cf. this issue Lefkofridi, 2020).

We discover that the more exclusive (i.e., elite-centered) candidate selection procedures of national parties, the more likely it becomes that MEPs prioritize speeches over other parliamentary activities; conversely, the more inclusive (i.e., member-centered) the candidate selection procedures, the more likely it is that MEPs prioritize written questions as well as opinions and reports. A main reason for these differences is the varying "visibility" of parliamentary activities to different principals (Klüver & Spoon, 2015) and thus, the varying utility of parliamentary activities to serve the different principals. Furthermore, our analysis discovers that it is worth distinguishing between two steps of candidate selection in national parties, namely nomination and decision on the final list placement because both steps may vary in their degree of exclusiveness and may therefore both affect the overall closeness of MEPs to their specific national party principals (i.e., party elites or party members).

Our insights complement existing studies in two innovative ways: (1) theoretically, by conceptualizing national parties *not* as "monolithic" principal but as conglomerations of groups of party members with different preferences; and (2) empirically, by focusing on the EP, which offers an ideal testing ground to compare candidate selection procedures and parliamentary activities, since elections are held simultaneously across the 28 EU member states but feature a broad variety of electoral rules and, more importantly, all MEPs face similar procedural rules with regard to parliamentary activity, facilitating any comparison.

Besides these innovative findings, our study also faces some weaknesses. We detect a systematic relationship between candidate selection rules and the prioritization of parliamentary activities of MEPs, and explain it with the visibility to and utility of certain actions for specific selectorates. Even though we have some evidence for this explanation from the expert interviews, a future article will have to prove the visibility of each legislative instrument to the different selectorates in more detail. Furthermore, we note a point related to the operationalization of the dependent variables, which measure the relative share of each type of activity of the total number of activities engaged in by MEPs: this is a strictly quantitative approach that does not consider the content nor the relative time required to prepare each activities. Moreover, it disregards activities of MEPs

outside the parliamentary arena (i.e., organizing events at the state/local level for their constituencies or party members) which also might be used to serve elites or members of their national parties. Capturing this extra-parliamentary activity in a systematic way would be highly promising to push this research agenda ahead. Finally, it would be fruitful to explore our argument in depth for Eurosceptic parties as their core-topics are European integration and European immigration, which might stimulate party members to be more attentive towards their representatives' activities in the EP and similarly, bias MEPs' prioritization strategies towards parliamentary activities that are most compatible with populist communication strategies.

Overall, however, this article makes an important contribution as first, it opens up the black-box of the "national party principal" in the EP by exploring how variations along the inclusion–exclusion dimension in party candidate selection procedures influence the type of activity MEPs engage. Second, it speaks to a growing comparative literature analyzing the link between party candidate selection procedures and legislative behavior. Besides this cross-cutting scientific relevance, this study is also of societal relevance as it illuminates the channels through which national and sub-national party interests could enter EP politics and thus, increase the legitimacy of EU policy-making.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

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

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Article

The EU Multi-Level System and the Europeanization of Domestic Blame Games

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Abstract
Blame games between governing and opposition parties are a characteristic feature of domestic politics. In the EU, policy-making authority is shared among multiple actors across different levels of governance. How does EU integration affect the dynamics of domestic blame games? Drawing on the literatures on EU politicisation and blame attribution in multi-level governance systems, we derive expectations about the direction and frequency of blame attributions in a Europeanized setting. We argue, first, that differences in the direction and frequency of blame attributions by governing and opposition parties are shaped by their diverging baseline preferences as blame avoiders and blame generators; secondly, we posit that differences in blame attributions across Europeanized policies are shaped by variation in political authority structures, which incentivize certain attributions while constraining others. We hypothesize, inter alia, that blame games are Europeanized primarily by governing parties and when policy-implementing authority rests with EU-level actors. We test our theoretical expectations by analysing parliamentary debates on EU asylum system policy and EU border control policy in Austria and Germany.

Keywords
blame attribution; blame-shifting; European Union; multi-level governance; parliamentary debates

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1. The Politics of Blame in the European Union

A central feature of politics is that vote-seeking politicians engage in blame games, attributing blame for contested policies to one another. The opposition-government divide has traditionally structured blame games in domestic politics (Hansson, 2017; Weaver, 2018). EU integration and the concomitant political authority wielded at the EU-level has introduced additional political actors to the policymaking arena, but also created ample opportunities for blame attribution to external EU actors, such as EU institutions or foreign EU member state governments (Gerhards, Roose, & Offerhaus, 2013, pp. 110–112; Hood, 2011, p. 83; Rittberger, Schwarzenbeck, & Zangl, 2017). As EU policies are increasingly entering the arena of mass politics, they are becoming more salient and contested in the wider public (Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Hutter, Grande, & Kriesi, 2016; Kriesi et al., 2006). As a consequence, EU policies become focal points for the domestic politics of blame. How, then, does EU integration affect the dynamics of blame games and hence blame attributions among domestic actors?

Two literatures have, so far, touched upon this question. First, the literature on blame attribution in multi-level governance systems suggests that blame games between government and opposition are, at least partially, Europeanized as politicians from governing parties can take advantage of the complex EU multi-level governance system and shift blame for neg-

ative outcomes onto external EU actors (Gerhards et al., 2013; Heinkelmann-Wild & Zangl, 2019; Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Kumlin, 2011; Roose, Scholl, & Sommer, 2018; Schlipphak & Treib, 2017; Sommer, 2019; Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou, & Exadaktylos, 2014). Conversely, the Europeanization of policymaking offers the opposition more points of attack vis-à-vis governing parties, since the latter are directly involved in EU policymaking as members of the Council, but only partially control EU policy choices and are thus likely to fall short of their proclaimed goals (Novak, 2013).

Second, the literature on EU politicisation is, inter alia, interested in the salience of EU issues and suggests that the frequency with which national politicians address EU policies generally depends on the conflict potential these policies carry for their parties' constituencies. Opposition politicians, and particularly those from challenger parties, have a heightened interest in politicizing EU issues in order to drive a wedge through mainstream government parties. As a consequence, politicized EU policies are likely to be the focus of heightened blame activities by the opposition. Conversely, politicians from governing parties will seek to avoid and depoliticize EU issues in order to prevent intra-party divisions, voter alienation, and avoid being the target of frequent blame attributions (de Vries & Hobolt, 2012; Hobolt & de Vries, 2015; Hutter & Grande, 2014; Hutter et al., 2016; van de Wardt, 2015; van de Wardt, de Vries, & Hobolt, 2014).

Both literatures have their merits: The blame attribution literature develops expectations about the direction of politicians' blame attributions, while the politicisation literature derives expectations about the frequency with which politicians engage in blame attributions. While the issue saliency literature has difficulties to explain why governments do, at times, address contested EU policies rather frequently (Braun, Hutter, & Kerscher, 2016; Rauh & de Wilde, 2018), the blame attribution literature has difficulty to account for the observation that governments sometimes refrain from shifting blame to external actors (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014), and that opposition parties, at times, blame EU-level actors (Vasilopoulou et al., 2014, p. 396).

Drawing on and addressing the limitations of existing explanations, the main ambition of this article is analytical. To better understand the Europeanization of domestic blame games, we develop expectations about political parties' blame attribution behaviour for EU policies, taking into consideration both the direction as well as the frequency of blame attributions (Section 2). We argue that differences in the direction and frequency of blame attributions can be accounted for by two factors. First, governing and opposition parties hold different baseline preferences, the former being blame avoiders and the latter blame generators. Secondly, blame attributions are shaped by the policy-specific distribution of policymaking authority, which incentivizes certain attributions while constraining others: Whether implementation of a contested EU policy is conducted by national-level or EU-level actors affects the direction and frequency of politicians' blame attribution. We test our theoretical expectations by conducting a content analysis of blame attributions by members of parliament (MPs) from governing and opposition parties in the Austrian Nationalrat and the German Bundestag for two publicly contested EU migration policies: the EU's asylum system policy and EU border control policy (Section 3). We conclude by summarizing our findings and contributions to the literatures on blame attribution, politicisation, and EU accountability (Section 4).

2. Explaining the Direction and Frequency of Political Parties' Blame Attribution Behaviour

Who do national politicians blame for negative EU policy outcomes and how intensely do they engage in attributing blame? We start from the assumption that vote-seeking politicians are boundedly rational actors who are concerned with the costs and benefits associated with their actions. This includes the decision on whether or not to blame another political actor in public for contested policies. Politicians have to decide whether to "speak up" or keep a low profile (frequency of blame), and whether to blame domestic or external actors and thus Europeanize the domestic blame game (direction of blame). We first theorize how being member of a governing or opposition party shapes blame strategies—blame avoidance or blame generation—and thereby differences in blame frequency and direction. Second, we explore how the policy-specific authority structure shapes blame frequency and direction across EU policies.

2.1. Government and Opposition: Blame Avoiders and Blame Generators

The institutional position of a political party in the political system—whether it is in government or opposition—is a central determinant for its "blame preferences." Drawing on Weaver's (2018) differentiation between blame avoidance and blame generating strategies, we conceptualize the distinct blame motivations of government and opposition parties. While government parties tend to be blame avoiders, opposition parties tend to be blame generators. This difference has distinct implications for both the frequency and direction of political parties' blame attributions.

2.1.1. Governing Parties as Blame Avoiders

Since governing parties exercise policymaking authority, they are prime targets for blame attributions. The motivation of governing parties is therefore to avoid or at least minimize blame for contested policies. Governing parties thus typically engage in a strategy of blame avoidance and thus of 'minimizing their responsibility for unpopular actions taken' (Weaver, 2018, p. 260; see also,

Hood, 2011; Weaver, 1986). Once policies are adopted, the most important tool of blame avoidance are presentational strategies, 'attempts to deflect, avoid or mitigate blame through public rhetoric, argument or news management' (Hood, Jennings, & Copeland, 2016, p. 543). Most prominently, policymakers seek to downplay their own responsibility for contested policies while emphasizing the responsibility of other actors through blame-shifting, i.e., 'deflect[ing] blame by blaming others' (Weaver, 1986, p. 385; see also, Gerhards et al., 2013; Hood, 2011, pp. 50–53; Sommer, 2019). As regards the direction of blame attributions, the direct involvement of governing parties in EU policymaking means that they have strong incentives for avoiding blame for contested EU policies by downplaying their own responsibility and emphasizing the responsibility of others. The EU's multilevel system provides them with ample blame-shifting opportunities as they share policymaking responsibility with EU institutions (the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Court of Justice, the European Central Bank, or EU agencies) and foreign EU member state governments (Gerhards et al., 2013, p. 114; Roose et al., 2018, pp. 49–51; Sommer, 2019). Governing parties will thus direct blame for contested EU policies to external EU actors.

Regarding the frequency of blame attributions, governing parties face a trade-off between actively engaging in the blame game or maintaining a low profile. Engagement in public blame attributions comes with risks and might even have 'reverse effects' (Hood, 2011, p. 65). For instance, frequent blame attributions can come with a 'retribution risk' (Weaver, 2018, p. 270) as they might attract the opposition's attention and thereby escalate into a 'blame showdown' (Boin, Hart, & McConnell, 2009, p. 89). Similarly, the politicization scholarship on issue saliency points out that emphasizing EU issues is a risky strategy for politicians from governing parties in general (van de Wardt, 2015). As decisions in the EU are characterised by compromise, EU policymaking outcomes stray from the governing parties' ideal points (Rauh & de Wilde, 2018, p. 199). What is more, when domestic constituents are Eurosceptic or divided on EU issues, governing parties are expected to downplay the agreed upon policy outcomes to avoid electoral costs (Heinkelmann-Wild, Kriegmair, Rittberger, & Zangl, 2019; van de Wardt et al., 2014, p. 988). The benefits of blame-shifting might thus be outweighed by its (potential) costs and prompt governing parties to maintain a low profile (Hood, 2011, pp. 58–62; Hood, Jennings, & Dixon, 2009, p. 715). This strategy of non-engagement 'deal[s] with blame by saying as little as possible' and 'sit[ting] out a blame firestorm until it passes over and public attention comes to be focused on something else' (Hood, 2011, p. 59). Hence, governing parties tend to be blame avoiders since the putative costs of frequent blame attributions normally outweigh the benefits. They prefer, all else equal, to keep a low profile and engage in blame attribution rather infrequently and only when responding to blame attributions from other political actors. When they do engage in blame attributions, they prefer blaming external EU actors, such as EU institutions, and foreign EU member state governments over national authorities.

2.1.2. Opposition Parties as Blame Generators

Since opposition parties seek to challenge the government of the day, one prime motivation of opposition parties is to stick blame to the government. They therefore typically engage in a strategy of blame generation, 'generat[ing] negative messages against other politicians' in order to inflict political costs on the target, for instance, by inducing 'defections among members of the audience who would otherwise support the target' (Weaver, 2018, pp. 267–268). By generating blame, opposition parties also signal to their constituents that they fulfil their main task of holding public officials accountable and that they possess superior problem-solving competence. Regarding the direction of blame attribution, opposition parties are likely 'seeking to frame policy failures as the responsibility of current officeholder…targets' (Weaver, 2018, p. 283). They prefer to attribute blame to "their" national government as well as subordinated public actors (Hansson, 2017, p. 1; Roose et al., 2018, p. 51).

Regarding the frequency of blame attributions, opposition parties generally benefit from "speaking up" since they have much to win and little to lose. While opposition parties might also face costs from frequent blame attributions, such as a backlash from their own supporters, they should be less risk-averse than governments (van de Wardt, 2015, p. 94). In addition, by engaging in blame attributions for negative EU policy outcomes, opposition parties may benefit from merely emphasizing an issue. Even if not targeting the government directly, increasing the salience of an issue can drive a wedge through government parties' constituencies when it is divided on EU integration in general or on the issue at hand in particular (van de Wardt et al., 2014, p. 988). Hence, opposition parties are likely to attribute blame more frequently than governing parties, and they prefer blaming their national government over external EU actors.

In sum, all else equal, governing parties are more likely than the opposition to direct blame to external EU actors. Moreover, opposition parties are generally more inclined to engage in blame attribution behavior than their counterparts in government. While government parties tend to be blame avoiders and opposition parties blame generators, we argue, in the next section, that these blame attribution motivations are affected by the policy-specific political authority structure in the EU's multi-level system:

> H1: The share of blame attributions directed at external EU actors is higher for governing parties than for opposition parties;

H2: Governing parties engage in blame attribution behaviour less frequently than opposition parties.

2.2. Political Authority Structure: Blame Plausibility and Blame Pressure

In this section we argue that the policy-specific authority structure, in particular the level of government where policies are implemented, affects political parties' ability to pursue their preferred blame strategy in two ways.

2.2.1. Distribution of Political Authority Limits Plausible Blame Targets

First, political authority structures lend plausibility to specific blame targets and thus shape the direction of blame attributions. The institutional structure governing a particular issue area incentivizes or constrains blame attributions to certain actors and not to others, even if this contradicts political parties' baseline preferences for blame attribution. Claims about the responsibility for contested policies need to remain plausible: Parties can attribute blame according to their baseline preferences only in so far as their blame attributions are able to maintain the 'illusion of objectivity' (Kunda, 1990, pp. 482–483). Specifically, the direction of blame attributions is circumscribed by the institutionalised responsibilities in the policymaking process (Heinkelmann-Wild & Zangl, 2019; Schwarzenbeck, 2015, p. 37).

EU policymaking generally increases the number of potential blame targets and its overall complexity obfuscates the clarity of individual policymakers' responsibility (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014, p. 45; León, Jurado, & Garmendia Madariaga, 2018, p. 661). Recent literature suggests that the complexity of EU policymaking puts one set of actors in the spotlight: implementing authorities (Heinkelmann-Wild, Rittberger, & Zangl, 2018; Rittberger et al., 2017). When a political actor is clearly responsible for "on the ground" implementation, she is likely to be identified with a policy outcome and becomes focal in the public domain. The EU's political authority structure thus incentivizes blame attributions to be directed at implementing actors, since blame attributions to non-implementing actors tend to be less plausible (Heinkelmann-Wild & Zangl, 2019). If policy-implementation authority is squarely located at the EU-level, governing and opposition parties have a heightened incentive to attribute blame for negative policy outcomes to a specific group of external EU actors: implementing EU institutions. Conversely, if EU policies are implemented by national-level authorities, governing parties can shift blame onto other EU member states and their respective domestic implementing authorities, while opposition parties can stick blame to "their" national government in line with their baseline blame attribution preferences. While opposition parties are thus likely to Europeanize blame solely in the case of EU-level implementation, the governing party can plausibly shift blame to external EU actors. Hence, all else equal, if a policy is implemented by EU-level actors the overall share of blame attributions directed at external EU actors by governing and opposition parties is higher than when EU policies are implemented by national-level actors.

2.2.2. Distribution of Political Authority Impacts Blame Incentives

Second, the policy-specific political authority structure not only affects the direction, but also the frequency of blame attributions. When the responsibility for implementing an EU policy rests with national-level authorities, opposition parties can plausibly blame their preferred target: "their" national government. The frequency of opposition parties' blame attributions should thus be higher compared to situations characterized by EU-level implementation.

National-level implementation therefore puts blame pressure on governments. When blame is predominantly targeted at a particular actor, she cannot remain inactive but seeks to deflect blame by blaming others: 'Higher levels of blame will be likely to lead to active attempts to reduce or remove it than "do nothing" or "no comment" responses' (Hood et al., 2016, p. 544). When under blame pressure, governing parties thus have an incentive to mount their blame attribution activities to avoid electoral costs (Traber, Schoonvelde, & Schumacher, 2019, pp. 3–4). When the responsibility for implementing an EU policy rests with national-level actors, the blame pressure on the government is thus likely to prompt governing parties to enter the blame game more forcefully—either in anticipation of their focality as implementing actors, or in evasion of responsibility once they become focal in the opposition's blame attributions. Conversely, if an EU-level actor carries responsibility for policy-implementation, blame pressure on governing parties will be more moderate and they will be less inclined to engage in blame-shifting, hiding out behind the complexities of EU policymaking. Hence, if a policy is implemented by national-level actors, the overall frequency of blame attributions by all parties is higher than when EU policies are implemented by EU-level actors.

In sum, all else equal, we expect that EU-level implementation increases the overall share of blame attributions to external EU actors. At the same time, we expect the overall frequency of blame attributions to be lower when a contested policy is implemented by EU-level actors compared to national-level actors:

H3: If EU-level actors implement an EU policy, the share of blame directed at external EU actors is higher than if it is implemented by national-level actors.

H4: If EU-level actors implement an EU policy, the frequency of blame is lower than if it is implemented by national-level actors.

Table 1 summarizes all expectations about the direction and frequency of blame attributions in the EU's multi-level system.

3. Blame Attributions in EU Multi-Level Politics

To test our theoretical arguments empirically, we analyse the blame attributions of German and Austrian opposition and governing parties in two cases of contested EU migration policy. We first introduce our case selection and describe the procedure of data collection and coding. We then present our empirical findings on the direction and frequency of blame attributions.

3.1. Research Design

We evaluate our hypotheses by comparing political parties' blame attributions in the Austrian Nationalrat and the German Bundestag in two instances of EU migration policies. The focus on parliamentary debates permits an analysis of the direction and frequency of blame attributions by government and opposition parties. Parliamentary debates are a likely venue for blame attributions since they pit governmental and opposition parties against each other. They are also relevant for the broader public due to their communicative function with regard to EU policies (Auel, 2007; Rauh & de Wilde, 2018).

We selected two EU policies that are prominent and highly contested in the public to ensure sufficient coverage in the parliamentary debates (Hood, 2011, p. 8; Weaver, 2018, pp. 282–283). First, the EU asylum system policy regulates which EU member state is responsible for administering asylum claims by people entering the EU and defines minimum standards for reception conditions and procedures. It was heavily criticised for a long row of dysfunctions (Rittberger et al., 2017). Second, EU border control policy has been designed to save lives at sea, to strengthen the EU's external borders and to disrupt the business of traffickers and human smugglers. It was criticised, inter alia, to have resulted in the deaths of thousands of migrants crossing the Mediterranean on their way to the EU (Rittberger et al., 2017). We collected parliamentary debates from the German Bundestag and the Austrian Nationalrat starting with the official decision to adopt the respective policy. Since neither of the two policies under analysis has been discontinued or replaced, the data collection ends with the initiation of the coding process on 13 August 2018.

The structure of policy-implementation varies across the two cases: The EU asylum system is implemented by EU member states, while EU border control policies are primarily implemented by an EU actor (i.e., Frontex). Moreover, the cases display similarities which allow for the control of possible confounding factors across policies and countries. First, the two policies belong to the same issue area, i.e., the EU's migration regime. Second, their policymaking structures are similarly complex: Following a proposal by the Commission, the Council decides on the respective policy and the EP is involved either through co-decision or consultation procedures. Third, Austria and Germany are both considered destination states of migration movements and were thus similarly affected by the two policies (Biermann, Guérin, Jagdhuber, Rittberger, & Weiss, 2019).

To gauge the blame attributions of governing and opposition parties, we coded the blame attributions voiced by individual MPs in parliamentary debates, which we subsequently aggregated to the level of governing and opposition party. To analyse MPs' blame attributions, we combined automated data collection with a qualitative content analysis. Previous studies have mostly engaged in qualitative content analysis to identify politicians' blame attribution (e.g., Gerhards et al., 2013; Hobolt & Tilley, 2014, pp. 100–119; Mortensen, 2012, 2013). A common pitfall of these studies constituted the reliable identification of rare responsibility statements in large text corpora (e.g., Gerhards, Offerhaus, & Roose, 2007, pp. 117–118; Schwarzenbeck, 2015, pp. 78–82). Inter-coder reliability tests often show low levels of agreement with regard to the identified statements. Contrariwise, once a blame statement is identified, agreement between coders is usually high regarding the components of a specific blame attribution such as its sender or target.

Our approach combines automated and manual coding procedures and thereby helps to overcome the twofold challenge of identifying relatively rare statements in large text corpora and, at the same time, accounting for their context-sensitivity. Using a blame-related dictionary, we first automatically coded potential blame attributions within text segments that referred to the

Table 1. Expectations about the direction and frequency of blame attributions.

	Institutional position of blame sender (government vs. opposition)	**Policy-specific authority structure** (national-level vs. EU-level implementation)
Direction of blame (share of blame to external EU actors)	Gov senders > Opp senders (H1)	National-level < EU-level (H2)
Frequency of blame (absolute blame attributions)	Gov senders < Opp senders (H3)	National-level > EU-level (H4)

two policies. Based on the pre-selected sample, we then manually coded blame attributions that comprised three criteria:

- Blame object, i.e., a contested policy for which blame is attributed. For the purposes of this article, the policies under consideration were the EU border control policy and the EU asylum system policy;
- Blame sender, i.e., an actor that attributes blame for a policy failure. For the purposes of this article, we focus on MPs. Blame senders are assigned to one of the two categories: (i) MPs from a governing party; or (ii) MPs from an opposition party;
- Blame target, i.e., the actors to whom blame is attributed. For the purposes of this article, blame targets are assigned to one of two categories: (i) external EU actors, such as EU institutions (i.e., the Commission, the Council and EU agencies like Frontex) and foreign EU member state governments and their representatives; or (ii) domestic public actors (i.e., representatives of the national government or national MPs).

Overall, we identified 558 blame attributions in 390 debates (for an overview, see Table A.1 in the Supplementary Material).

3.2. Assessing the Direction of Blame Attributions

With regard to the direction of blame attributions, we expected that the share of blame attributions from governing parties targeting external EU actors is higher than for opposition parties (H1); and that the overall share of blame attributions directed at external EU actors is higher in the case policies implemented by EU-level actors than for policies implemented by national-level actors (H3). To evaluate these expectations, we display the share of blame attributions that target domestic actors and external EU actors respectively for MPs from governing and opposition parties in the two cases. The overall pattern of MPs' blame attribution lends supports to our expectations (see Figure 1).

First, the share of blame targeted at external EU actors is higher for governing parties than for opposition parties in both cases. In the EU asylum system case (see Figure 1a), the predominant share of governing parties' blame attributions (60%) targeted external EU actors, while a minority of their attributions assigned blame to domestic actors (40%). Conversely, only a minor share of opposition party MPs' blame attributions targeted external EU actors (33%). They predominantly directed their blame to domestic actors (67%). In the EU border control case (see Figure 1b), the predominant share of blame attributions by governing parties was again directed at external EU actors (86%) while only one statement targeted a domestic actor. While opposition parties also predominantly assigned blame to external EU actors (70%), their share of blame to external actors is lower than that of governing parties. A minor share of their blame attributions targeted domestic actors (30%).

Second, irrespective of a parties' institutional position in the political system, the overall share of blame attributions directed at external EU actors is higher in the EU border control case, where policy-implementation is carried out by an EU-level actor, compared to the EU asylum system case, where policy-implementation is in the hands of national-level actors. The share of blame attributions targeting external EU actors from governing parties (86%) and opposition parties (70%) is higher in the EU border control case than the respective shares from governing parties (60%) and the opposition (33%) in the asylum system case.

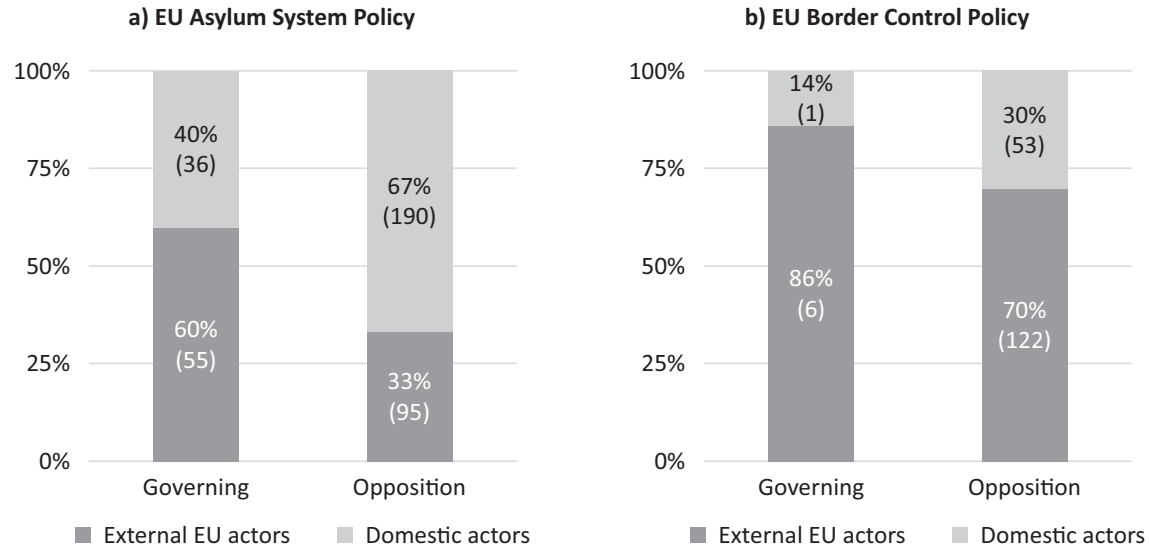

Figure 1. Direction of blame attributions: a) EU asylum system policy, b) EU border control policy.

3.3. Assessing the Frequency of Blame Attributions

With regard to the frequency of blame attributions, we expect that, overall, blame attributions from governing parties are less frequent than those from opposition parties (H2). We also expect that blame attributions are overall less frequent when an EU policy is implemented by EU-level actors than when it is implemented by national-level actors (H4). To evaluate these expectations, we display the average number blame attributions from governing and opposition parties per 100 debates. The overall pattern of blame attributions again lends supports to our expectations (see Figure 2).

First, governing parties attribute blame less frequently than opposition parties in both cases. In the EU asylum system case, opposition parties attributed blame 129 times per 100 debates while the governing parties only attributed blame 41 times per 100 debates (see Figure 2a). Similarly, in the EU border control case, opposition parties attributed blame 104 times per 100 debates while governing parties only attributed blame four times per 100 debates (see Figure 2b).

Second, blame attributions are less frequent in the EU border control case, where policy-implementation rests with an EU-level actor, than in the EU asylum system case, where policy-implementation is carried out by national-level actors. The overall frequency of blame is higher in the EU asylum system case than the EU border control case for both the opposition ($129 > 104$) and the government ($41 > 4$). Moreover, we find that the difference in blame frequency between the two cases is larger for the government (700%) than for the opposition (24%). This finding tentatively suggests that increased blame pressure on the government has a stronger influence on the frequency of blame attributions than the heightened incentive for opposition parties to plausibly blame their preferred target. However, further data is necessary to substantiate this conclusion.

3.4. Discussion

The observed blame attribution patterns for the contested EU policies corroborate our expectations about the direction and frequency of national parties' blame behaviour. Blame to external EU actors is most prominent in the attributions by governing parties, and when policies are implemented by EU-level actors. Yet, the frequency of blame attributions in these instances is comparatively low. Overall, opposition parties attribute blame more frequently than governing parties. Moreover, the frequency of blame is higher in cases of national-level implementation than in cases of EU-level implementation.

The statistical tests included in the Supplementary Material substantiate our argument that there is a significant relationship between our two independent variables (institutional position of the blame sender and policy-specific implementing authority) and the direction and the frequency of blame attributions. Specifically, we calculated chi-square tests for the direction of blame (see Supplementary Material, Tables A.4–7) and Wilcoxon rank-sum tests for the frequency of blame (see Supplementary Material, Table A.12). In addition, the findings still hold when we analyse the blame attributions in the Austrian Nationalrat and in the German Bundestag separately. Despite minor differences, the blame attribution patterns are not only similar and in line with our expectations, but we can also reject the null hypothesis about a random match on this level of analysis both for the direction of blame (see Supplementary Material, Tables A.8–11) and the frequency of blame (see Supplementary Material, Table A.13). We are thus confident that the results are not driven by our selection of countries. In sum, these results bolster our confidence that the position of a party in the political system, as well as the policy-specific authority structure shape the direction and frequency of national parties' blame attributions.

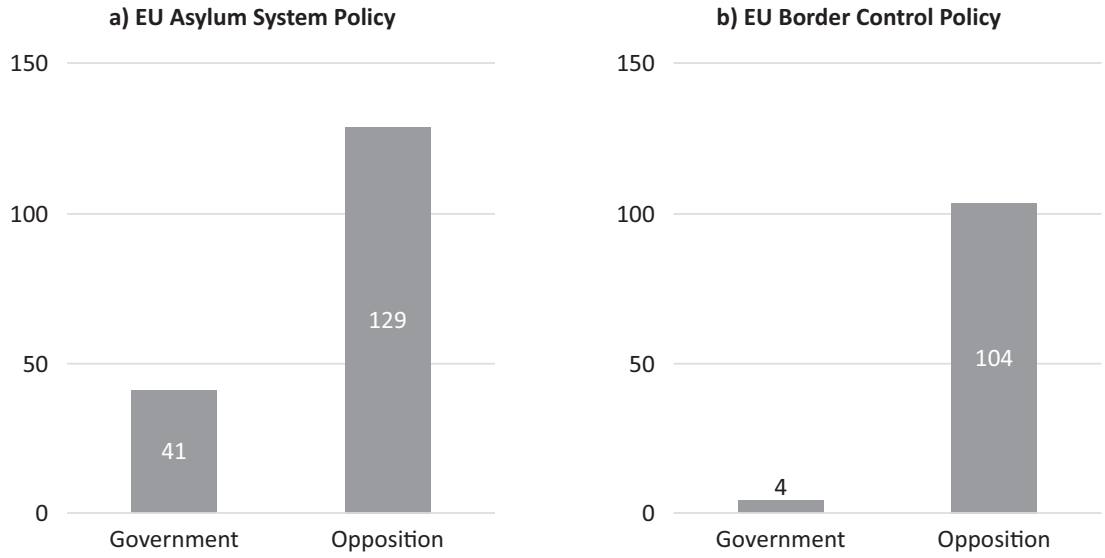

Figure 2. Frequency of blame attributions per 100 debates: a) EU asylum system policy, b) EU border control policy.

4. Conclusion

In this article we argued that variation in the frequency and direction of blame attribution for contested EU policies can be explained by a political party's government or opposition status and by the policy-specific authority structure. Our article contributes to a better understanding of policy-specific political conflict and elite communication in the EU's multi-level system. In particular, the findings allow us to inform claims from three different literatures.

First, the EU politicisation literature holds that governing parties tend to restrain themselves from "speaking up" on EU issues in order to avoid putative electoral costs that come from their politicization. Yet, we find that frequent blame attributions are by no means limited to opposition parties. Government parties frequently attribute blame (to external EU actors), especially when the government holds policy-implementation authority and when the blame pressure on the governing parties is thus high.

Second, the literature on blame attribution in multi-level governance systems posits that policymakers are rather unconstrained in attributing blame to EU-level actors. Yet, we find that governing parties only engage in frequent blame-shifting when policies are implemented by national-level actors and they are consequently exposed to high blame pressure. Otherwise, they prefer to hide out in the complexities of EU multi-level policymaking. Moreover, opposition parties even refrain from directing blame to "their" government when EU-level actors are policy implementers.

Finally, the EU accountability literature diagnoses a national "opposition deficit" (Rauh & de Wilde, 2018, p. 210) with regard to EU policies (Auel, 2007; Kiiver, 2006; O'Brennan & Raunio, 2007; Raunio, 2011). Indeed, we find that governing parties can successfully "duck and cover," avoid the opposition's blame and thus evade accountability when policy-implementation authority rests with EU-level actors. By contrast, when domestic executive agencies hold policy-implementing authority, governing parties are unable to avoid the opposition's blame, but—rather than owning their mistakes—they shift the blame directed at them to external EU actors. In this sense, blame attribution patterns re-produce the EU's much-lamented democratic accountability deficit.

Our findings come with two caveats. First, since our focus is on two cases of highly contested and salient EU policies, we cannot conclude that less contested policies come with similar blame attributions patterns. Future research should thus look at cases that vary in salience and across issue-areas. A second and related caveat pertains to the affectedness of the public by a particular policy issue. As destination states with high migratory pressure, both Austria and Germany were directly affected by the EU's asylum policy (Biermann et al., 2019), whereas the effects of the EU border control policy were more distant. The selected cases are thus not suitable to rule out a link between the degree of affectedness of the analysed countries and the frequency of blame attributions. Future research should look into cases that vary in their degree of affectedness while controlling for the political authority structure. The insights presented above are, therefore, only a starting point for the analysis of blame attribution behaviour in the EU multi-level system.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Supplementary Material

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

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Article

Politicized Transnationalism: The Visegrád Countries in the Refugee Crisis

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Abstract
Existing research on the evolution of European integration has pitted economic against identity issues. In the economic sphere, governments are arguably able to pursue their preferences more independently. If, however, identity issues become politicized this is supposed to suggest that governments lose their dominant position in integration and gradually become agents of Eurosceptic parties and/or electorates. This article looks at a phenomenon neither the intergovernmentalist nor the postfunctionalist perspective can fully explain: the emergence of the Visegrád Group (V4) as a collective actor in European politics in early 2016. This emergence occurred in the wake of the refugee crisis during which the identity issue of migration was politicized. However, there was no coherent partisan composition uniting V4 governments. Based on a sequence elaboration of all press statements of meetings of the V4 Prime Ministers since their EU-accession in 2004, we show that what at first sight appears to be informed by anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic sentiments may in fact display a more ambivalent position towards regional integration. The post-refugee crisis V4 appears as a case of politicized transnationalism—that is, cooperation to achieve transnational interests under the condition of politicization. This transnational interest not only comprised opposition to a relocation of migrants, but also the maintenance of a core transnational freedom within the EU, namely free movement under the Schengen acquis. We conclude that, under the condition of increasing politicization, identity issues help to forge government alliances of governments pursuing economic preferences.

Keywords
European integration; politicization; refugee crisis; transnational cleavage; transnationalism; Visegrád Group

Issue
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1. Introduction

Migration in general and the so-called refugee crisis in particular can be regarded as the most important incident of the politicization of Europe. In combination with traditional Euroscepticism (Szczerbiak & Taggart, 2008), opposition to immigration allowed right-wing populist parties to poll new record shares of the vote throughout Europe (e.g., Börzel & Risse, 2018). At the same time, analyses of post-2015 European politics hint at new regional alliances emerging in the EU, largely pitting countries affected and unaffected by immigration from outside Europe against each other (e.g., Biermann, Guérin, Jagdhuber, Rittberger, & Weiß, 2019; Zaun, 2018).

The perhaps best-known of these alliances is the Visegrád Group (V4), consisting of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Existing since 1991 as a forum aiming to collectively achieve EU membership, cooperation among V4 states hit rock bottom at the moment this goal was reached in 2014 (Nič, 2016, p. 283). However, in the wake of the refugee crisis, the V4 began to formulate common positions and in February 2016, they successfully vetoed the implementation of a relocation scheme for migrants within the EU. All of a sudden,

the V4 appeared as the "castle where a central European bloc was born" (Thorpe, 2016). This is even more remarkable since the newly revived cooperation outlived all changes to the partisan composition of V4 governments since then. The success of radical right-wing parties in East Central East European countries varies widely (Bustikova & Guasti, 2018). Both Poland and Hungary are currently governed by Eurosceptic nationalist and populist parties. In contrast, similar parties are in opposition in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia. Irrespective of the partisan composition of their governments, the V4 continue to refuse any compulsive relocation of migrants within the EU and, in March 2019, succeeded to take this topic effectively off the agenda of the EU Council meeting (see Beisel, 2019).

The question we ask in this article is whether the politicization of migration politics stemming from the refugee crisis has led to closer cooperation among V4 alliance. The puzzle underlying our case study of one of the allegedly most virulent transnational challengers of supranational integration is that neither integration theory occupied with incidents of deadlock is able to explain why the V4 were successful. At first sight, and in line with postfunctionalist assumptions (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, 2018), the newly revived V4 cooperation seems to be a typical consequence of the politicization of identity issues such as migration in the wake of the refugee crisis. But why then did it continue irrespective of the partisan composition of V4 governments, thus defying the electoral connection between government action and voter preferences postfunctionalism emphasizes? If V4 cooperation was less attached to electoral considerations and confined to the governmental arena, what was the economic interest liberal intergovernmentalism could base on this position-taking towards European integration (see Moravcsik, 1998)?

In order to explain why the V4 could become the 'castle' of the Central European bloc, we aim to elaborate the frequency, length, thematic focus on topics (especially those related of either identity or economics), and sequence of self-commitments to collective action on the top level of the V4 format, that is, the regular meetings of the V4 Prime Ministers. The press statements following these meetings are agreed on by all V4 governments. Despite being non-binding, they can be regarded as credible commitments on behalf of the V4. Our analysis suggests that the heads of the V4 governments did indeed increasingly commit themselves to pursue common policy goals after 2015. These goals were ambivalent towards regional integration. The V4 simultaneously aimed to avoid a relocation of migrants, but also to preserve one of the core transnational freedoms within the EU, namely free movement under the Schengen acquis.

Our analysis proceeds as follows: In the following section, we shed light on the peculiar relation between migration within and into the EU. Immigration from outside the EU is understood as a danger to a core achievement of European integration, the Schengen acquis that allows for free movement (that is, migration) within the EU. In the third section, we introduce the Visegrád format and assess incentives and disincentives for the V4 to cooperate. The fourth section illustrates that both intergovernmentalism and postfunctionalism have difficulties to explain increased V4 cooperation. For intergovernmentalism, the public still plays a marginal role in European politics. Its major actors are governments responding to (organized) economic interests (liberal intergovernmentalism) or, in the absence of these, security concerns (realist intergovernmentalism). From a postfunctionalist perspective, united action of governments with different partisan compositions is at odds with the existence of a transnational cleavage (Hooghe & Marks, 2018). The fifth section provides our empirical analysis of press statements following meetings of the V4 Prime Ministers since the EU accession of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia in 2004. From this analysis we conclude that, under the condition of increasing politicization, postfunctionalist identity issues can forge liberal intergovernmentalist alliances of governments pursuing economic preferences. We term V4 cooperation a case of politicized transnationalism—that is, cooperation to achieve transnational aims such as the maintenance of freedom of movement under the condition of politicization.

2. Migration within and into the EU

The need for a European regulation of an identity issue such as migration originally arose from economic integration. The free movement of goods reached in the Single European Act rendered it necessary to also regulate the movement of European citizens—that is, migration. Already the EU's 1951 founding Paris Treaty that established the European Coal and Steel Community included free movement provisions for workers in these industries. The right to free movement was initially granted to workers only but has since been extended across categories to become a more general right. The Schengen Agreement of 14 June 1985 brought France, Germany, and the Benelux countries together in a far-reaching attempt to abolish border controls. The Dublin Convention of June 1990 provided that an asylum seeker would be required to make an asylum claim in the EU state where she or he arrived. Since the 1999 Treaty of Amsterdam, the Schengen Treaty is part of EU law. So is the Dublin Convention since 2003. By 2014, 26 European countries were Schengen members and all new member states are required to join as a condition of membership.

The result of the increased regulation of migration at the EU level is the partial institutionalization of common migration and asylum policies. The Dublin system is the main pillar of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS). The CEAS encompasses several different regulations that were adopted between 1999 and 2005. There is still no general EU admission policy, but there are EU laws covering asylum, the return and expulsion of

third country nationals, family migration, the rights of migrants who are long-term residents, highly qualified migrant workers, seasonal migrant workers, and a single permit directive linking work and residence (Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 146). The 2009 Lisbon Treaty finalized the creation of a common migration and asylum policy with Qualified Majority Voting, co-decision on legislation between the Council and the European Parliament, and full jurisdiction for the Court of Justice of the EU (Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 152). In sum, the member states remain central actors, but they now share power with each other and with other actors, most notably EU institutions.

The Schengen principle of open internal borders with compensating security measures at EU borders can be regarded as "one of the most prestigious EU projects" (Biermann et al., 2019, p. 253). Once people are in the Schengen area—and have cleared immigration control in a Schengen country—they can essentially move freely in all EU member states except Britain and Ireland, but including the non-EU member states Norway and Iceland. When people are asked what the EU means to them, it is common for the first answer to be 'free movement.' This is also reflected by the self-perception of EU actors (see Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 151).

Rather than migration within the EU, immigration into the EU has recently become the most pressing issue warranting regulation in the wake of the so-called refugee crisis. There were some 435,000 applicants for asylum in the EU in 2013. This number rose to over 960,000 in 2015 (Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 156). Increasing immigration led to a de facto suspension of the Dublin system that was no longer enforced. In sum, the Schengen acquis was effectively suspended. In the summer of 2015, Hungary constructed a fence at its borders with Serbia and Croatia to stop onward movement of migrants who had entered the EU in Greece. When Germany reintroduced temporary controls on its border with Austria in September 2015, this caused a domino effect unleashing a wave of unilateral border closings and caps for asylum seekers throughout Europe. In November 2015 the Dutch, Austrian, and German governments even launched the idea of narrowing 'Schengen land' to only those countries really willing and able to control their external border (Geddes & Scholten, 2016, p. 154).

The European Commission proposed three policy packages over the course of 2015 in order to maintain the Dublin system and preserve the Schengen acquis. As Biermann et al. (2019, p. 254) point out, all of these packages await decision-making or implementation or were substantially watered down. By 30 March 2017, a mere 15,000 refugees were relocated under the proposed voluntary ad hoc relocation scheme for 160,000 refugees (Börzel & Risse, 2018, p. 90). The suggested European Border and Coast Guard has so far only established incrementally. The only successful measure to contain immigration was agreed with a non-EU member, Turkey. According to this 6 billion Euro deal, for each 'irregular' migrant that Turkey takes back from Greece, the EU would resettle one Syrian refugee from Turkey. In the wake of this deal, the number of migrants dropped sharply in 2016. What is more, due to resistance by the V4 (and other reluctant member states), there is up to now no prospect for a viable agreement on any permanent relocation system for refugees.

3. Incentives and Disincentives to Cooperate within the Visegrád Format

This section illustrates that the emergence of the V4 as a transnational platform against further European integration was all but self-explanatory. Within the Visegrád format, the governments of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia cooperate with each other. The Visegrád countries owe their name from a scenic town in Hungary where the Presidents of Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary agreed to meet on a regular basis in February 1991. Originally, the V4 had hardly any common interest but EU accession. In contrast to the Benelux Group or Nordic Cooperation, there was no permanent Visegrád organization apart from a modest International Visegrád Fund (5 million Euros per year) devoted to sponsoring projects in education, arts/culture, and science and technology. Structural differences between the V4 prevailed. Poland as the largest country always possessed a variety of alternative diplomatic options the smaller Visegrád countries lacked. The Czech Republic always valued its relationship with neighboring Germany as more important than that with any of its Visegrád allies (Nič, 2016, p. 288). Additionally, the relation between the Czech Republic and Slovakia were initially difficult once the latter broke away from the former Czechoslovakia in 1992.

Given the lack of common interests among the V4, the EU represented the most significant external power to influence their polities after 1989. V4 was one of the first sub-regional groupings to emerge in the post-cold war environment. It was modelled along the lines of the Benelux group and Nordic cooperation in the sense that it basically consisted of elite governmental meetings largely confined to the top-level political sphere. Three distinct phases of V4 cooperation are identifiable: 1990–1992, 1993–1998, and 1998–2004 (Dangerfield, 2008). In the first phase, cooperation focused on two key objectives: the dissolution of the Soviet-era security and integration structures and accession to the EU and NATO. For this reason, the V3 engaged in mutual trade liberalization. The second phase was characterized by an ice age due to split of Czechoslovakia into two countries and the ensuing Slovak flirt with authoritarianism under Vladimír Mečiar (1994–1998). Only in 1998, the V4 were able to agree on a common strategy for EU-accession again. At a meeting in Bratislava in 1999, the V4 countries defined the Visegrád format more thoroughly. From then on, there were to be two regular meetings per year of the

V4 Prime Ministers, two regular meetings per year of foreign ministers, meetings of other ministers as and when needed, and meetings of presidents and parliamentary representatives (Dangerfield, 2008, p. 645). Additionally, the "V4 plus" formula provided the framework for the V4 to cooperate, as a group, with third parties. In terms of its content, the V4 agreed to cooperate in eight policy areas (Strážay, 2014, p. 38).

However, relations between the V4 remained conflict-ridden. In 2002, a dispute between the Czech Republic and Hungary ensued about the question whether the Beneš decrees of the 1940–1945 period (during which Czechoslovakia was occupied by Nazi Germany) were compatible with future EU membership (Dangerfield, 2008, p. 647). In the same year, Poland departed from the common V4 line at an EU summit and, to the big disappointment of its partners, dropped its demand to significantly increase agricultural compensation payments in return for one billion Euro lump sum payment from EU. In return, the other Visegrád countries did not help the Polish government—that at the time was eager to play an active part in shaping major EU policies central to its own interest and ambitions—defending the Nice Treaty in 2004. Against this background, Visegrád cooperation was in dire straits at the moment of EU-accession (Nič, 2016, p. 283).

After EU-accession, there only remained two V4 goals: access to EU cohesion funds and Schengen membership (both of which the V4 achieved in December 2007). Free movement within the EU was particularly desirable for the V4 since their populations were most interested in migrating to other EU countries such as Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden in order to work there. Indeed, internal migration within the EU increased remarkably after 2007 (see Black, Engbersen, Okólski, & Panțîru, 2010). Once Schengen accession was completed in December 2007, new problems between the V4 arose (Nič, 2016, pp. 284–285). There were diplomatic spats between Slovakia and Hungary over the former's 2009 Language Law Amendment, followed by controversies over the nationalist agenda in Budapest when Viktor Orbán's Fidesz came to power in 2010. Poland's strong anti-Russia stance clashed with Hungary's privileged partnership with Moscow over the Ukrainian crisis in 2014.

The refugee crisis can be regarded as yet another disruption in V4 relations because, albeit being of primordial importance in recent elections throughout all Visegrád countries, it had different impacts on their respective party systems. In Hungary and Poland, populist far-right government parties benefitted from the crisis. In Hungary, the already governing Fidesz could further increase its vote share in 2018, not least by exploiting anti-immigrant policy positions. The 2015 elections in Poland demonstrated the potency of the refugee issue as an electoral asset for mainstream parties. PiS (Law and Justice Party) exploited public anger at the outgoing Civic Platform government—that had voted in favor of the refugee quotas for fear of being isolated in the EU—to increase its appeal to voters on the far-right and also to center-right voters whose concerns were rooted in fears about the consequences of immigration. In contrast, campaigning against refugees backfired on the establishment parties in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia, that lost votes to right-wing contenders in line with the logic outlined in the previous section (Bustikova & Guasti, 2018, p. 172).

Despite the different partisan composition of V4 governments, the recent elections did not necessarily produce an "illiberal axis" (Nič, 2016, p. 281) of Hungary and Poland against the more liberal Czech Republic and Slovakia. Public opinion in all V4 countries has been—and still is—strongly opposed to immigration from outside Europe. The background of this opposition is that the V4 have virtually no experience with immigration. It was only after 2004 that the new member states of the EU for the first time in their history became destination for migration. Therefore, non-native citizens still constitute a very small share of the populations of the Czech Republic (eight percent), Hungary, Slovenia, and Poland (less than five percent each; Kobierecka & Riegl, 2016, p. 21).

Given the reservations against immigration from outside Europe among the V4 countries, there are signs that their common rejection of relocation plans has trumped all other divides. On the one hand, it is true that only Poland and Hungary have so far refused to take any asylum-seeker under the EU scheme while Slovakia and the Czech Republic have taken in some refugees (Bustikova & Guasti, 2018, p. 172). On the other hand, the Slovak government joined its Hungarian counterpart in an (unsuccessful) attempt to dispute the EU refugee quotas at the European Court of Justice in May 2017. At the same time, Poland became increasingly isolated in Brussels (Nič, 2016, p. 287) and, accordingly, more than ever likely to rely on its V4 partners.

To conclude, there are both hindrances and incentives for the V4 to cooperate, that is to create mutual benefits, rather than merely coordinate their actions with the aim to render them more predictable (see Elster, 2007, p. 317). This raises the question: Which goal did their apparent cooperation in the wake of the refugee crisis aim to achieve? As we will see in the following section, intergovernmentalism and postfunctionalism would answer this question differently.

4. V4 Cooperation as a Case of Governmental or Partisan Transnationalism?

While the intergovernmentalist perspective emphasizes the governmental aspect of transnational cooperation, the postfunctionalist perspective focuses on partisan aspects. From an intergovernmentalist perspective, their common interest in free movement within the EU and access to cohesion funds trumped the V4's governments' partisan differences and experiences and gave rise to increasing levels of cooperation to fend off negative effects

of the refugee crisis and maintain the status quo. In contrast, from a postfunctionalist perspective, the politicization of migration in the wake of the refugee crisis has led to closer cooperation among the V4.

Intergovernmentalism regards differences in integration preferences and bargaining dynamics as sufficient to explain the variation in political reform outcomes. While the realist variant regards member states' security interests as primordial to explain the evolution of regional integration (Hoffmann, 1966), liberal intergovernmentalism emphasizes the importance of economic preferences as expressed by interest organizations (Moravcsik, 1998). Both forms of intergovernmentalism are compatible with each other if one assumes that whenever security interests are diffuse, economic ones prevail (and vice versa; see Schimmelfennig, 2018, p. 9).

Biermann et al. (2019) explain EU member states' responses to the refugee crisis from a liberal intergovernmental perspective. According to these authors, the uneven impact of the refugee crisis explained why some states supported the relocation scheme and others did not. Since the majority of member states were unaffected by the crisis, they had a better bargaining position and could maintain the status quo (of non-reform) since 2015 (see also Zaun, 2018). But what about the Hungarian position? Hungary clearly is an outlier to the explanation presented above as it has the second-highest number of asylum-seekers per 100,000 inhabitants after Sweden, so it can hardly be classified as non-affected but nonetheless expressed a clear preference for the maintenance of the regulatory status quo. Biermann et al. (2019) argue that Hungary is de facto unaffected because all asylum applications were turned down. This, however, itself warrants an explanation. So why did the V4 cooperate in the wake of the refugee crisis despite the latter's different impact and the variation in bargaining power among V4 partners? From an intergovernmental perspective, we would expect shared economic (liberal intergovernmentalism) or security interests (realist intergovernmentalism) among V4 partners to explain their cooperation.

Postfunctionalism provides an alternative approach to explain V4 cooperation. Just like intergovernmentalism, postfunctionalism also starts from assumption that member states are central actors in European integration. However, postfunctionalism puts more emphasis to an identity approach. Given the increased salience of a transnational cleavage, the conflict between green-alternative-libertarian (GAL) and traditional-authoritarian-nationalist (TAN) values arguably plays an increasingly more important role that the utilitarian conflict of economic preferences emphasized by liberal intergovernmentalism (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, 2018). According to postfunctionalism, territorial identity serves as "perhaps the most powerful source of mass political mobilization" (Hooghe & Marks, 2018, p. 113).

There certainly is empirical evidence for an increasing importance of the GAL vs. TAN conflict. Even prior to the refugee crisis, Euroscepticism has always been linked to exclusionist nationalism (de Vries & Edwards, 2009). After the refugee crisis, right-wing parties arguably were the major beneficiaries of this politicization (Börzel & Risse, 2018; Geddes & Scholten, 2016). In general, support for right-wing Eurosceptic and populist parties across Europe is driven by exclusive nationalism and culturally based anti-immigrant attitudes (Werts, Scheepers, & Lubbers, 2013). What is more, established parties fail to respond adequately as they are, more often than not, deeply divided internally over European integration. Against this background, the refugee crisis could well be regarded as a critical juncture increasing the politicization of migration within the EU.

Politicization is a core concept of postfunctionalism that explains the shift from a permissive consensus (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970, p. 41) to a constraining dissensus on European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 5). The result of this process is a newly dominant cleavage that Hooghe and Marks (2018, p. 110) term transnational "because it has as its focal point the defense of national political, social and economic ways of life against external actors who penetrate the state by migrating, exchanging goods or exerting rule." Politicization has three dimensions: salience (visibility), mobilization (beyond the mere sphere of elites), and polarization (intensity of conflict; Grande & Hutter, 2016, pp. 8–10). From a postfunctionalist perspective, V4 cooperation could be regarded as partisan in the sense that it serves as a means to express anti-immigration sentiments. Given the unanimous rejection of immigration from outside Europe among the V4 populations, the migration crisis as a critical juncture has arguably led to a "major shift in the relationships between the four Central European countries that make up the Visegrád Group" (Nič, 2016, p. 281) and caused them to cooperate.

However, the postfunctionalist perspective also leaves some questions open. Given the existence of a transnational cleavage, why would governments of different partisan compositions cooperate to express common positions on a highly politicized issue such as migration? In order to answer this question, we need to assess whether the V4 really claimed to respond to public concerns about immigration or aim to mobilize political support against immigration—or whether they emphasized shared economic or security interests (as intergovernmentalism posits). To do so, we engage in a sequence elaboration (Mahoney, Kimball, & Koivu, 2009) of press statements following the V4's most important event, the meetings of Prime Ministers after EU-accession in 2004. The term 'sequence' refers to connected events that unfold over time. Sequence elaboration can help to establish causal relations. From a temporal perspective, the closer the necessary conditions are to the outcome of interest in which they occur—here the establishment of the V4 as a "cohesive bloc" (Nič, 2016, p. 281) in early 2016—the more important they will be (see Mahoney et al., 2009, p. 132).

Our focus is on V4 Prime Ministers' press statements because these display voluntary commitments. For all these statements, we identified the topics V4 Prime Ministers committed themselves to. It did not suffice for a certain topic to be merely touched upon. Rather, the V4 Prime Ministers needed at least to briefly elaborate a common position on a particular topic such as a shared demand for action. The V4 Prime Ministers' press statements are particularly well suited for a sequence elaboration because they conventionally follow each of the half-yearly meetings of V4 Prime Ministers (sometimes there was even more than one statement related to a meeting). These press statements are drafted consensually. From this follows that if there is no willingness among V4 governments to enter any commitment, a topic is left out of our analysis.

We assert that several temporal aspects indicate that the causal relevance of a topic referred to in V4 Prime Ministers' press statements increases as a reason underlying transnational cooperation: a) the higher the frequency of press statements it is referred to in; b) the temporally closer the meetings occurred to the refugee crisis and especially V4 cohesion in early 2016; and c) the more detailed—that is, longer—these statements are. Against the background of the topics different theories of integration emphasize, the main question we ask in the following content analysis of V4 Prime Ministers' press statements is whether economic (liberal intergovernmentalism), security (realist intergovernmentalism), or identity issues (postfunctionalism) feature more prominently with respect to their frequency, temporal location, and elaboration. Our analysis is inductive which means that we take all topics mentioned in the press statements into consideration.

5. An Analysis of Visegrád Prime Ministers' Press Statements

We examined a total of 50 press statements originating from 35 meetings of Prime Ministers in the 2004–mid-2018 period. All these press statements are listed in the supplementary file available online. Our analysis in Table 1 starts with the frequency of meetings and topics over the whole 2004–2018 period, but also in the pre- and post-2015 periods in order to assess the impact of the refugee crisis that enrolled in 2015. The frequency of V4 Prime Ministers' meetings (see the last line in Table 1) changed remarkably before and after 2015. There was a total of 50 meetings equaling 3.4 meetings per year. Before 2015, only 2.5 meetings took place annually. This number rose to 6.6 after 2015. Put differently, the frequency of V4 Prime Ministers' meetings more than doubled after 2015. This suggests that the refugee crisis politicized the V4 and caused them to mobilize support.

Table 1. Frequency (per year) of topics mentioned in Prime Ministers' meetings' press statements (total numbers in brackets).

		2004–2018	2004–2014	2015–2018
Economic matters *		**1.9 (28)**	**1.3 (14)**	**4 (14)**
Of which on	*Schengen/freedom of labor market*	*0.9 (13)*	*0.5 (6)*	*2 (7)*
	cohesion funds/redistribution	*0.6 (9)*	*0.5 (6)*	*0.9 (3)*
	financial/Eurozone crisis	0.1 (2)	0.2 (2)	0
	other topics **	0.7 (10)	0.4 (4)	1.7 (6)
Security matters *		**1.5 (22)**	**1.3 (14)**	**2.3 (8)**
Of which on	*international crises related to migration ****	*0.3 (5)*	*0.2 (2)*	*0.9 (3)*
	international crises unrelated to migration ****	1 (14)	0.9 (10)	1.1 (4)
	defense cooperation *****	0.7 (10)	0.5 (6)	1.1 (4)
EU matters *		**0.6 (9)**	**0.5 (6)**	**0.9 (3)**
Of which on	enlargement	0.4 (6)	0.4 (4)	0.6 (2)
	integration/constitutional treaties	0.3 (5)	0.4 (4)	0.3 (1)
V4 specific matters *		**0.7 (10)**	**0.5 (6)**	**1.1 (4)**
Of which on	presidency	0.6 (8)	0.5 (5)	0.9 (3)
	Visegrád fund	0.6 (8)	0.5 (6)	0.6 (2)
Identity matters: Concern about immigration into EU		***1.2 (17)***	***0.1 (1)***	***4.3 (16)***
Total frequency of statements *		3.4 (50)	2.5 (27)	6.6 (23)

Notes: * Note that the references to the topics mentioned here do not add to the total number of press statements (neither for particular matters nor regarding all statements) since individual statements could include references to several topics; ** Food (2x), economic cooperation with third countries (Japan, Switzerland, France, South Korea, Egypt, Israel), transport cooperation, digitalization; *** Western Balkan (3x), Arab spring, Paris terrorist attacks; **** Ukraine (11x), Georgia (2x), Belarus; ***** Either among V4 or with other countries such as Japan, Switzerland, France, South Korea, Israel. Topics in italics are further analyzed as potentially explaining if and why the refugee crisis triggered a politicization of the V4.

A closer look at the topics covered reveals that V4 Prime Ministers indeed communicated on meaningful issues. Five broad categories played a substantial role (in bold in Table 1): economic; security; EU matters; identity matters; and those related to V4-specific matters. The last category only came second to last in overall frequency (before European matters that played a negligible role). This suggests that the V4 were not only occupied with themselves. All more frequently mentioned matters are related to potential causal factors mentioned in the previous section. The most important category is economic matters that are overall almost mentioned twice a year and four times a year after 2015. Security matters are clearly less often mentioned. Remarkably, identity matters—that is, immigration—are touched upon most often in the post-2015 period (4.3 times per year, more than any other topic). This further suggests that the refugee crisis politicized the V4.

It needs to be pointed out that not all economic and security matters referred to in the V4 statements could be linked to the refugee crisis. For this reason, we further subdivided these categories to separate those topics possibly related to the refugee crisis from those unrelated. For economic matters, all references to the integrity of the Schengen area and the maintenance of redistribution within the EU could be related to migration. As Table 1 illustrates, these issues were clearly more frequently mentioned than the Eurozone crisis and other issues. Similarly, their frequency rose after 2015. The same is true for security matters, among which, however, international crises related to migration were overall mentioned less frequently. Most security topics mentioned in V4 press statements were not related to the refugee crisis, notably the Ukraine crisis that enrolled in 2013.

We continue our analysis by further investigating the sequence of press statements referring to topics that are potentially related to the refugee crisis (displayed in italics in Table 1). As Figure 1 illustrates, these statements clearly cluster in the post-2015 period. Throughout the 2004–2018 period, V4 Prime Ministers regularly committed themselves to action in international migration-related crises and, in particular, to maintaining redistribution within the EU and free movement within the Schengen area. However, such commitments became more frequent once the refugee crisis broke out. During the July 2015 to June 2016 period, there was the (until then) exceptional number of four Prime Ministers' meetings that all aimed to develop a common position on the refugee crisis in preparation of meetings at the supranational level. As Figure 1 suggests, references to migration initially also corresponded with references to security concerns, but then became clearly associated with economic concerns since the second half of 2015 when the V4 became a brand. This suggests that, while economic and security commitments were always present, a politicization suggested by the post-2015 cluster of statements only occurred once immigration became a concern.

In line with our findings from Table 1 and Figure 1, the evidence presented in Table 2 also suggests that there were not only more statements after 2015, but also longer ones. This was especially true for economic commitments to Schengen and redistribution, on which statements with an average of 832 words were issued before 2015, a number that grew to 2,370 after the refugee crisis broke out. The single most important topic was immigration itself to which statements averaging 5,294 words per year were issued after 2015. The increasing length of press statements further suggests that V4 cooperation grew after 2015. EU-related and V4-specific matters clearly played a less prominent role than migration-related economic commitments. The only exception with respect to migration-unrelated issues is general security matters, press statements on which had an average length of 2,353 words after 2015. We relate this to the geographical proximity of the Ukraine crisis that almost paralleled the refugee crisis. However, the sharply rising length of press statements on immigration and immigration-related economic issues suggests that the refugee crisis either induced governmental or partisan transnational cooperation.

In order to further assess whether the apparent politicization of the V4 went back to governmental economic interests as posited by liberal intergovernmentalism or partisan motivations to mobilize against immigration as suggested by postfunctionalism, we take a

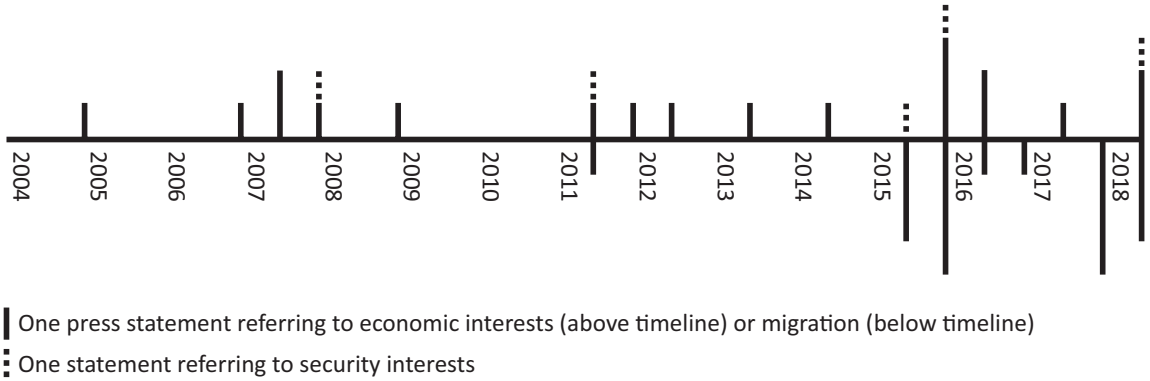

Figure 1. Timeline of V4 Prime Ministers' meetings' press statements, 2004–2018.

Table 2. Annual number of words devoted to topics in Prime Ministers' meetings' press statements (annual number of statements multiplied by average words in brackets).

		2004–2018	2004–2014	2015–2018
Economic matters *		**1,804**	**1,059**	**4,148**
		(1.9 *934)	**(1.3 *832)**	**(4 *1037)**
Of which	*related to migration*	*1,224*	*832*	*2,370*
		*(1.3 *934)*	*(1 *832)*	*2.3 *1037*
	on other topics	954	633	1,963
		(0.8 *832)	(0.5 *1160)	(1.7 *1145)
Security matters *		**1,520**	**976**	**3,365**
		(1.5 *1002)	**(1.3 *767)**	**(2.3 *1472)**
Of which	*related to migration*	*327*	*93*	*1,062*
		*(0.3 *948)*	*(0.2 *511)*	*0.9 * 1239)*
	on other topics	1,245	968	2,353
		(1.2 *1003)	(1.2 *805)	(1.4 *1647)
EU matters		492	369	879
		(0.6 *793)	(0.5 *677)	(0.9 *1025)
V4 specific matters		769	489	1,650
		(0.7 *1115)	(0.5 *896)	(1.1 *1444)
Identity matters: Concern about immigration		*1,376*	*94*	*5,294*
		*(1.2 *1150)*	*(0.1 *1029)*	*(4.6 *1158)*
All statements *		**2,793**	**1,576**	**6,617**
		(3.4 *810)	**(2.5 *642)**	**(6.6 *1007)**

Notes: * Note that the page numbers for the topics mentioned here do not add to the total number of pages (neither for particular matters nor regarding all statements) since individual statements could include references to several topics. Topics in italics are further analyzed as potentially explaining if and why the refugee crisis triggered a politicization of the V4.

closer look at the arguments and commitments the V4 Prime Ministers presented after 2015. Immigration was initially conceived of as a security problem: "In the South, a belt of weak and destabilized states now stretches from North Africa via the Horn of Africa to Iraq and Yemen, creating an environment conducive to challenges like unprecedented migration flows" (V4 Prime Ministers, 2015b). Against this background, the V4 Prime Ministers criticized that the European Council proposal "fails to address and find adequate solutions to migration pressure from and via the Western Balkan route as well as the Eastern route" because any mandatory redistribution of migrants would serve as a "pull factor" of further immigration only to be countered by the "effective return" of immigrants without a status as asylum-seekers (V4 Prime Ministers, 2015b; see also V4 Prime Ministers, 2017e).

However, this conclusion already suggested an economic perspective, because it was work immigration that the V4 were most critical of. In a simultaneous meeting with France, the V4 Prime Ministers concluded that "V4 and France consider the free movement of workers and freedom to provide services as fundamental principles of the internal market and important factors for economic growth" (V4 Prime Ministers, 2015a). The V4 Prime Ministers did not further elaborate on these arguments during the first of their chain of extraordinary meetings beginning in the second half of 2015. Rather, they expressed their full "solidarity" with Hungary (V4 Prime Ministers, 2015c) and developed ideas how to fend off immigration: In September 2015, V4 Prime Ministers began to refer to the need to manage the "root causes" of migration and to create hotspots to register and, if possible, return irregular migrants. Together with their emphasis on the "voluntary nature of EU solidarity measures," this created the impression that the V4 Prime Ministers primarily aimed to mobilize support against immigration into the EU as such (V4 Prime Ministers, 2015c).

However, before the V4 clearly emerged as a brand in early 2016, this line of argumentation was augmented economically. The V4 December 2015 Statement clarified the common benefit of anti-immigration cooperation beyond identity politics: Whilst acknowledging that "allocating adequate financial resources in the European Union budget" was necessary to deal with the refugee crisis, the V4 Prime Ministers emphasized that "other essential European policies, namely growth-oriented instruments such as cohesion policy, must not be affected" (V4 Prime Ministers, 2015d). In line with this, they continued to emphasize that:

> Schengen remains a key practical and symbolic achievement of European integration. We reaffirm our determination to preserve Schengen so that European citizens and businesses continue to fully enjoy its benefits. We underline the need for respecting Schengen rules and declare our openness to discuss how to best improve them. A proper functioning of

> Schengen and the preservation of free movement is not a divisive issue but must remain the key objective for all Member States and the European Union institutions. (V4 Prime Ministers, 2015d)

Remarkably, it was at this stage that the V4 Prime Ministers apparently attempted to mobilize support for the first time when they expressed their willingness to extend their cooperation and organize like-minded member states in a group of "Friends of Schengen" (V4 Prime Ministers, 2015d). This suggests that the V4 refusal of irregular immigration in general and mandatory relocation of migrants in particular primarily aimed to maintain the principle of free movement within the EU. As mentioned above, it was at this time that the Dutch, Austrian, and German governments launched their proposal to narrow the Schengen area since the free movement principle had effectively been suspended by then. Against this proposal, the V4 emphasized the need to "preserve Schengen" including a "call on all true friends of Schengen to join this effort towards a conclusive debate on the key proposals tabled by the European Commission in this respect" (V4 Prime Ministers, 2015e). Yet another appeal to the friends of Schengen and, remarkably, only then the at that time usual suggestions to deal with migration proper such as border controls and the creation of hotspots with detention capacity (V4 Prime Ministers, 2015e). In a similar vein, the V4 in 2017 refused Commission plans to complicate the posting of workers within the EU (V4 Prime Ministers, 2017a). This suggests that in the immediate run-up to the emergence of the V4 as a brand, their primary preferences were economic ones—in line with liberal intergovernmentalist assumptions. However, the V4 only politicized this preference once they could simultaneously politicize an identity issue—as suggested by postfunctionalism.

After 2016, the pattern which had by then emerged continued: V4 publicly denounced the Commission's plan to relocate migrants (V4 Prime Ministers, 2016, 2017d; 2018a; 2018c) and ultimately justified this with economic reasons, primarily the need to maintain the Schengen acquis. In meetings with or letters to other heads of governments, be it from Egypt (V4 Prime Ministers, 2017b), Israel (V4 Prime Ministers, 2017c), or Italy (V4 Prime Ministers, 2017d), the V4 emphasized the need to address the "root causes" of migration which for them apparently was economic despair. In line with this, the V4 continued to call for returning all merely economically motivated asylum seekers outside EU territory. The nexus between identity and economic issues became even more apparent when the V4 Prime Ministers stressed that only well-protected external borders allowed for internal freedom of (work) migration: "We need to be able to fully protect the external borders of the European Union. At the same time, we need to remove internal border controls" (V4 Prime Ministers, 2017e). In 2018, they became even more explicit about this nexus:

> We must restore the proper functioning of Schengen, as well as regaining full control over the external borders. Equally we must protect and further develop the Single Market based on four fundamental freedoms, including the free movement of workers and services. (V4 Prime Ministers, 2018a)

The economic reasons for the V4 Prime Ministers' continuous rejection of immigration were not exclusive confined to the maintenance of work migration and the Schengen acquis. As the frequency, sequence, and elaboration of issues emphasized in their press statements suggested, the V4 also emphasized the beneficial impact of EU cohesion policy as "very efficient in reducing disparities among the regions" (V4 Prime Ministers, 2018c). With the exception of border controls, the V4 accordingly opposed any allocation of EU money to migration policies at the detriment of cohesion policy. In contrast, direct links between security and migration issues remained rare after 2016 (see for instance the joint statement with the Austrian Prime Minister, V4 Prime Ministers, 2018b).

6. Conclusion: Opposing Immigration to Maintain Migration

The question underlying this article was whether politicization in the EU has led to closer cooperation among the V4 as a subgroup of EU member states against the backdrop of the refugee crisis. We could indeed link the emergence of the V4 as transnational challengers of supranational integration to both the refugee crisis and the process of politicization this triggered. However, our findings partially contradict the doctrines of both liberal intergovernmentalism and postfunctionalism. In contrast to postfunctionalist assumptions, governments appeared as the main actors of politicization irrespective of their partisan composition and primarily focused on economic rather than identity issues. As we have seen, the emphasis on maintaining intra-EU migration under the Schengen acquis was temporally most proximate to—and, accordingly causally most relevant for—the emergence of the V4 as a brand. However, the fact that V4 governments did engage in politicization by means of publicly calling on "Friends of Schengen" (V4 Prime Ministers, 2015d, 2015e) and did only successfully do so when simultaneously politicizing identity issues contradicts the assumptions of liberal intergovernmentalism.

From this we conclude that the "politics turn" (Braun, Gross, & Rittberger, 2020, p. 1) in research on the EU is indeed justified. We suggest that an emphasis on politics should aim to synthesize intergovernmental and postfunctionalist explanations (see also Schimmelfennig, 2018): Under the condition of increasing politicization, postfunctionalist identity issues help to forge classic liberal intergovernmentalist alliances of governments. This suggests that the recent politicization of the EU is more ambivalent than often assumed: It gives rise

not only to far-right parties benefitting from (and promoting) Euroscepticism, but also to economic preferences to maintain core achievements of European integration such as free movement within the EU. Since the pattern of transnational cooperation fitted neither the governmental nor the partisan assumption, we regard the post-2015 V4 cooperation as a case of politicized transnationalism—that is, cooperation to achieve transnational aims such as the maintenance of freedom of movement under the condition of politicization.

It needs to be pointed out that our sequence elaboration fell short of a fully-fledged process-tracing analysis. For this reason, we could only tentatively contribute towards a causal mechanism explaining V4 cooperation that requires to be further fleshed out based on a broader empirical basis. However, our sequence could serve not only as the starting point for such process-tracing analyses, but also for other analyses of other member states' responses to the refugee crisis. Admittedly, a politicization of economic issues was easier to achieve in Central and Eastern Europe, where economic and GAL vs. TAN conflicts are not cross-cutting, but mutually reinforcing (Hooghe & Marks, 2012, p. 844). However, it seems promising to expand our focus beyond Central and Eastern Europe and investigate how other transnational forums such as the Nordic Council, the six founding members of the EU, the Franco–German alliance, and the so-called Mediterranean club have responded to the critical juncture of the refugee crisis. In the wake of the refugee crisis, we should expect governments to increasingly respond to widely shared sentiments of their electorates irrespective of partisan composition.

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Supplementary Material

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

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