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How Different Were the European Elections of 2014?

Editors

Wouter van der Brug, Katjana Gattermann and Claes H. de Vreese

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Editorial

Introduction: How Different Were the European Elections of 2014?

Wouter van der Brug¹, Katjana Gattermann^{2,3} and Claes H. de Vreese²

¹ Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam, 1018 WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands;
E-Mail: W.vanderBrug@uva.nl

² Amsterdam School of Communication Research, University of Amsterdam, 1018 WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands;
E-Mails: k.gattermann@uva.nl (K.G.), C.H.deVreese@uva.nl (C.H.V.)

³ Amsterdam Centre for Contemporary European Studies, University of Amsterdam, 1018 WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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Abstract

This issue brings together papers that focus on the question of whether and in which ways the 2014 European Parliament elections were different from previous ones. This is important from the point of view of emerging scholarship on changes in the EU and from the point of view of the self-proclaimed ‘This time it’s different!’ slogan from the Parliament. The papers centre around three themes: 1) the role of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, 2) media and voters, and 3) electoral behaviour.

Keywords

campaigns; elections; European Parliament; media coverage; media effects; parties; Spitzenkandidaten; voting behaviour

Issue

This editorial is part of the issue “How Different Were the European Elections of 2014?”, edited by Wouter van der Brug, Katjana Gattermann and Claes de Vreese (University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands).

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1. Introduction

European Parliament elections are in several ways different from national elections (e.g., Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999; Thomassen, 2009; Van der Brug & de Vreese, 2016; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996; Van der Brug & Van der Eijk, 2007). For one thing, national elections do, to some extent, provide voters with the opportunity to hold incumbents accountable for their past actions and provide representatives with an electoral mandate to take decisions on their behalf. Yet, the complex multi-level governance of the EU makes it less likely that European Parliament (EP) elections can function in the same way as national elections. Up until 2014 there was no connection between the outcome of EP elections and the composition of the prime executive agent at the EU-level, the European Commission. Moreover, some of the most important EU decisions are ultimately taken

by a majority vote of the heads of state in the European Council, who are in turn accountable to the *national* parliaments.

Thus, up until recently, EP elections did not enable voters to hold politicians directly accountable for EU policies. In addition, parties hardly ever discuss the contents of European policies during the campaigns, thus making it difficult for voters to give an electoral mandate for those policies. Previous research on European elections has demonstrated that voters, faced with elections that do not serve a clear purpose (e.g., Franklin, 2014), treat these as second-order national elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). According to this view, voters either use these elections to express loyalty to a *national* party, or they use them as a referendum on the performance of the *national* government. When dissatisfied with the current national government they are more likely to cast a protest vote than they would at national elections (e.g., Van der Eijk, Franklin, &

Marsh, 1996). Even though the second-order election thesis has been challenged (e.g., Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Hobolt, Spoon, & Tilley, 2009), it is still a dominant perspective on European elections. However, there are three reasons why one could expect the 2014 EP elections to be different.

Firstly, the 2014 EP elections were the first in which frontrunner candidates of the five largest European political party families were put forth as the candidates for chairing the European Commission after the elections (the so called *Spitzenkandidaten*). This was done explicitly in order to show to the voters that executive power would also be at stake this time. The *Spitzenkandidaten* participated in several debates catering—at least in theory—to a pan-European audience. In this way, the prime executive figure in the Commission could claim to have an electoral mandate and this would ideally render the outcome of the elections more important. The EP campaign slogan ‘This time it’s different!’ made it clear that the EP sought to make voters aware of its new powers, which it claimed on the basis of the Lisbon Treaty.

Secondly, the 2014 EP elections were held in the midst of a severe financial and economic crisis, which changed the nature of European collaboration as the EU had launched major rescue packages, introduced oversight mechanisms, and established a European semester system in the budget mechanism of member states. At the same time, EU citizens stridently protested against tight austerity measures across Europe, for which many people in the Southern countries held the EU (at least partially) responsible. Moreover, a growing number of EU citizens has been opposing further EU integration, such as the Euro rescue funds, a common immigration policy, or extensions to the freedom of movement. Even if this did not impinge directly upon the nature of European elections per se, one could expect these events to increase the interest of media and voters in European politics in general.

Thirdly, the 2014 EP elections were held during a period when Eurosceptic parties at the left and right end of the political spectrum were doing very well in the polls. Many of these parties campaigned with Eurosceptic messages and the anticipated success of these parties was therefore considerable. At the very least, one might expect there to be increased politicization about the European project.

Even though there are thus some reasons to expect the 2014 EP elections to be less second-order than previous ones, we do not know whether this was indeed the case. If voters were unaware of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, this new arrangement will not have had much effect. Some voters may have been dissatisfied with the austerity measures the ‘troika’ imposed on Southern European member states, but even in the current setup of the EU there are few possibilities for them to use EP elections to hold anyone accountable

for those policies. This issue brings together papers that focus on the question of whether and in which ways the 2014 EP elections were *different* from previous ones.¹ This is important from the point of view of emerging scholarship on changes in the EU and from the point of view of the self-proclaimed ‘This time it’s different!’ slogan from the Parliament. The papers centre around three themes: 1) the role of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, 2) media and voters, and 3) voting behaviour. We will briefly discuss each of these.

2. Theme 1: New Features of the Elections: The Role of the *Spitzenkandidaten*

The first theme concerns the key new feature of the 2014 EP elections, namely the role of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. The underlying question of those papers in this issue that focus on their role is whether and how the personalisation of the campaigns and the fact that executive power was at stake (to some extent) changed the nature of the EP elections. Prominent theories on the EU’s democratic deficit would have expected this to be the case: Føllesdal and Hix (2006) as well as Hix (2008) have long suggested that open and rival candidacies for Commission President would, among other things, enhance electoral contestation; and electoral contestation would in itself ‘allow a greater connection between voters’ preferences and coalitions and alignments in the EU institutions’ (Føllesdal & Hix, 2006, p. 553). Enhancing electoral contestation would thus contribute to overcoming the EU’s democratic deficit. Moreover, such a contest could also provide citizens with the necessary information to hold EU representatives accountable in EP elections and therewith alleviate the EU’s accountability deficit (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014). Elections in which candidates are up for re-election provide the most obvious possibilities to hold politicians accountable for their actions in the past. Since none of the *Spitzenkandidaten* had been an EU Commissioner in the past, it is unlikely that the accountability deficit could have been resolved in the 2014 EP elections. Yet, the fact that the *Spitzenkandidaten* were candidates for an important executive position, can be

¹ The plan for this issue originated at a workshop entitled ‘The European Elections of 2014’, which took place in Amsterdam on March 12 and 13, 2015. It was organised and funded by the Amsterdam Centre for Contemporary European Studies (ACCESS EUROPE), a centre jointly organised by the University of Amsterdam and the Free University Amsterdam. The issue brings together papers that were presented at this workshop, as well as papers that came in as a response to an open call. All papers were peer reviewed. We thank all authors, reviewers, the editors of *Politics and Governance* and the participants of the ACCESS EUROPE workshop for their collaboration and substantive input. The order of authors is alphabetical and reflects our equal contribution, both to this introduction as well as to the editorship of this special issue.

expected to strengthen the electoral connection of voters and the European Commission.

This resonates with the motives of the European Parliament to foster the campaign context during the 2014 elections. In its resolution of November 22, 2012 it ‘urge[d] the European political parties to nominate candidates for the Presidency of the Commission’.² With this procedure, the EP had the intention to increase its own legitimacy as a parliament ‘by connecting their respective elections more directly to the choice of the voters’. Moreover, the candidates were expected to ‘play a leading role in the parliamentary electoral campaign, in particular by personally presenting their programme in all Member States of the Union’, which implies that the EP expected the campaigns to raise the awareness and interest of European voters.

Against this backdrop, studying the role of *Spitzenkandidaten* becomes particularly important because it was the first time in the history of EP elections that the major European party families nominated top candidates for Commission President. For that reason, the consequences of the *Spitzenkandidaten* nomination were not yet known during the campaigns. The Lisbon Treaty gave the European Council the right to put forward their preferred candidate by prescribing that, ‘[t]aking into account the elections to the European Parliament and after having held the appropriate consultations, the European Council, acting by a qualified majority, shall propose to the European Parliament a candidate for President of the Commission’ (Art. 17.7 TEU). Although the treaty only manifested the EP’s right to elect the Presidential candidate—which it had de facto exerted since 1994 by its own interpretations of the Maastricht Treaty (see Hix, 2002)—the Parliament interpreted the new provisions as allowing it to nominate its own candidate, namely the *Spitzenkandidat* of the largest political party family. Remarkably, the heads of state in the European Council hardly commented on this procedure; and it was not clear during the campaigns whether they would even accept the Parliament’s initiative (see also Hobolt, 2014). It was only on June 27, 2014, i.e., one month after the elections, that the Council ‘agreed to propose Jean-Claude Juncker to the European Parliament as candidate for President of the European Commission’³. This uncertain yet politicised electoral context provided an exciting opportunity for scholars to study the nomination process, public perceptions of the *Spitzenkandidaten* as well as the electoral consequences of their campaigns.

The first contribution to this issue in this respect sheds light onto the candidate selection procedures

within the five European party families that put forward *Spitzenkandidaten* for the election campaigns. By relying on party documents and semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders, Put, Van Hecke, Cunningham and Wolfs (2016) argue that the novelty of the phenomenon also presented new opportunities and challenges for the European party families. The fact that the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure was unprecedented and its outcome uncertain would explain why the Europarties largely relied on existing and more general intra-party decision-making procedures in the absence of specific rules. The various Europarties thus exhibited varying degrees of candidacy requirements, decentralisation, inclusion of the selectorate, and voting procedures. Yet Put et al. (2016) argue that the Europarties made use of the new tool to strengthen their own position at the EU level and expect that selection procedures will be further professionalised in the future.

While much of these internal selection procedures might have gone unnoticed by the public, the European media are crucial for informing European citizens about what is at stake in EU elections. This is why Schulze (2016) investigates the extent to which the *Spitzenkandidaten* were visible in major British, French, and German newspapers during the campaigns. She conducts a quantitative content analysis of the 2014 EP election campaign coverage in several broadsheets and tabloids. In order to comprehend how the *Spitzenkandidaten* were reported on across countries and newspapers, Schulze (2016) positions her findings within a broader analysis of EU election news. She finds that the *Spitzenkandidaten* were most visible in the German press, followed by the French press, while British newspapers hardly paid attention to the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Generally, broadsheets reported on them more often than tabloids. However, she argues that the *Spitzenkandidaten* did not contribute substantially to a personalization of news coverage during the three weeks before the 2014 EP elections, although the extent to which this happened differs across countries.

Ultimately, information is essential for the extent to which citizens can make sense of the *Spitzenkandidaten*: Gattermann, de Vreese, and van der Brug (2016) investigate the preference formation of Dutch citizens towards the three main contenders Juncker, Schulz, and Verhofstadt. They argue that regular news exposure and especially general information about the EU as well as campaign-specific information about the *Spitzenkandidaten* represent important pre-conditions for citizens to formulate a preference towards the candidates. Consequently, only few citizens actually provided their opinion; and only the most knowledgeable used cues of party identifications or ideological orientations in their evaluations of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. The authors argue that this might be due to the novelty of the procedure and warn that it should not be dismissed right away. Instead, they propose to increase

² European Parliament resolution of November 22, 2012 on the elections to the European Parliament in 2014 (2012/2829 (RSP)).

³ Conclusions of the European Council, June 26/27, 2014 (EUCO 79/14)

the extent and salience of the campaign activities during the next EU elections in order to make EU citizens more aware and therewith to contribute to alleviating the EU democratic and accountability deficits.

Finally, Maier, Rittberger and Faas (2016) assess one particular novelty of the *Spitzenkandidaten* procedure: the so-called Eurovision debate, the major pan-European televised debate in which five of the six candidates who were nominated by the major party families participated. The authors were interested in the effects of this debate on attitudes towards the EU and conducted a quasi-experiment with German students. Their results show that viewers of the debate generally became more favourable towards European integration and less frightened about the EU. Moreover, they find that respondents tended to provide positive feedback to the candidates' statements and that these positive evaluations also led to a shift towards more pro-European attitudes. Prior political knowledge, however, played no major role in the perceptions and evaluations of the debates. But this does not imply that the debates are not important for attitude formation and ultimately political behaviour. On the contrary, the authors recommend making such debates between the *Spitzenkandidaten* more attractive for voters across Europe in future EU election campaigns.

3. Theme 2: The Media and Voters

Looking at the second theme, 'the media and voters', the contributions to this issue analyse mediated party mobilisation efforts and media effects on EU attitudes and electoral behaviour. Traditionally, the literature on the media and voters has taken as a starting point the idea of the EU being a 'distant polity' removed from most people's daily lives. A sizeable body of literature, using both experiments, media content data, and (panel) survey data, has provided ample evidence for significant effects of media on citizens' attitudes towards the EU and their voting behaviour (see de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2016, for a recent overview). In more recent years, a shift can be noted in the research towards specifying the conditions under which media and information has an effect on public attitudes and electoral behaviour.

Using experimental evidence, exposure to framing EU enlargement news in positive and beneficial terms (versus negative and threatening terms) affects participants' support for the EU's future enlargement (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003; De Vreese, Boomgaarden, & Semetko, 2011; Maier & Rittberger, 2008; Schuck & De Vreese, 2006). Using survey-based studies, other research has demonstrated media effects on EU attitudes. For instance, De Vreese & Boomgaarden (2006) have shown how the tone of news media affects support for further EU enlargement by connecting media content and survey data in two different countries

(see also Azrout, van Spanje, & De Vreese, 2012). Recent studies stemming from the 2009 EP elections have also shown how exposure to news can affect both turnout (Schuck, Vliegthart, & de Vreese, 2016) and vote choice (van Spanje & de Vreese, 2014).

The first paper on the theme 'media and voters' in this issue deals with the impact of news coverage on changes in EU attitudes. De Vreese, Azrout, and Moeller (2016) test how public evaluations of the *performance* of the European Union changed in the run up to the elections in response to news coverage. They investigate the role played by the news media in shaping public opinion about EU performance by linking citizens' evaluations across time collected in panel survey data to the news media content they were exposed to. They show that public opinion has changed towards the more negative, but also how exposure to media coverage can help *improve* citizens' evaluations of EU performance.

Meijers and Rauh (2016) study patterns of partisan mobilisation on EU issues in the news in France and the Netherlands. Comparing the 2014 EP elections to the 2009 elections, on aggregate they find no significant differences regarding party mobilisation on EU issues. Their main focus is, however, on the ways in which visible mobilisation efforts of challenger parties affect those of other parties in the news. Their analyses show that while mostly mainstream and especially incumbent parties publically mobilise on European issues during both campaigns, the mobilisation efforts from 'radical' parties became more visible during the 2014 elections. Furthermore, the visibility of Eurosceptic parties exhibits significant contagion effects on mainstream parties' visibility in the news. But the extent of these short-term effects was lower in the 2014 campaign than it was in 2009.

Turning to vote choice, Kleinnijenhuis and van Atteveldt (2016) show how the European elections in 2014 were the first to be held after a long period in which EU-related news was dominant in the media. Their paper asks how vote choice was influenced by campaigning on EU related issues. A news effects analysis based on a content analysis of Dutch newspapers and television, and on a panel survey among Dutch voters revealed that EU issues functioned as wedge issues: the more strongly parties were associated in the news with the euro crisis and the Ukraine crisis, the *less* they succeeded in getting voter support.

Collectively, the three papers show both change and continuity vis-à-vis extant research. The 2014 EP elections were different in the sense that they took place after a period of time in which the EU was much more visible on the media agenda than in any earlier election. However much of this coverage was devoted to the EU's international role (e.g., in relation to the Crimea issue) or the economic developments in the EU and its member states. These are not necessarily topics that the EP elections address. The 2014 EP elections

were also different in the sense that they took place after a period of increasing politicization of EU politics. However, this increase did not per se improve the public debate about the EU and Europe. In terms of the effects of exposure to news content, the scoreboard, as seen from the EP, is mixed. On the one hand, exposure to information about the EU resulted in less negative evaluations of the performance of the EU. This is arguable good news for the EP as long as a sizeable share of EU citizens turns to mainstream news sources. However, it was also found that being associated with EU issues (albeit not all about the EP elections) was negatively associated with electoral success, that is to say, the EU is a topic on which parties can potentially lose votes.

4. Theme 3: Electoral Behaviour

The dominant paradigm in research on voting behaviour in EP elections is that these elections are second-order *national* elections. In short, the theory holds that voters are largely unaware of European politics, that it is unclear what is at stake at these elections, that there are no clear issues on the basis of which people can choose between parties. In this situation, voters may either decide not to vote, or if they vote, to use their knowledge of national politics and national parties as an information shortcut. So, voters who turnout at these elections, use them mainly to express a preference for national parties. According to Van der Eijk, Franklin, and Marsh (1996), compared to national elections, at which executive power is at stake, EP elections display fewer signs of strategic voting ('voting with the head') and more signs of sincere voting ('voting with the heart') and protest voting ('voting with the boot'). As a consequence of these different motivations, EP elections display low turnout, a relatively poor performance of mainstream and especially governing parties, and more support for smaller radical parties (e.g., Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999; Thomassen, 2009; Van der Brug & De Vreese, 2016; Van der Brug & Van der Eijk, 2007; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996).

Some studies in the last decade have questioned one of the main assumptions of the second-order perspective: that there are no clear issues at stake (e.g., Hobolt, Spoon, & Tilley, 2009), arguing that the process of European unification has itself become more politicised and that this issue could play a particularly important role in European elections. However, while this could conceivably be the case, it is questionable whether this would make EP elections less second order. Steps towards further European integration are decided at the national level, so that European unification is in many ways also an issue in domestic politics. This argument has been made theoretically (e.g., Mair & Thomassen, 2010; Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999) and it has also been shown empirically that the issue of European integration plays a role in national elections

(e.g., De Vries, 2009, 2010).

However, as we argued in the first section of this introductory paper, there were some elements of the 2014 EP elections, which had the potential to change its 'second-orderness'. As a result of the institution of *Spitzenkandidaten*, some executive power was now at stake, although it may not have been very clear to most voters. The austerity measures imposed on the Eurozone members that were rescued from bankruptcy, made visible how much sovereignty has been handed over by national states to the European level. Even if European elections offer little possibility to express policy preferences on these austerity measures—nor on other policies that are decided at the level of the EU—voters may become more aware of the importance of the EU and, hence, could be more motivated to participate in EU elections. The four contributions on these kinds of themes show, however, very little evidence that the EP elections of 2014 are less second order than previous ones.

To test the second order model, Kelbel, van Ingelgom and Verhaegen (2016) make use of the fact that the 2014 EP elections were held on the same day as regional elections in Belgium. As a consequence of the federalisation of Belgium, many important policies are decided at the level of the two regions Wallonia and Flanders, so that these regional elections can be considered to be (near) first order elections. The paper looks at motivations for split-ticket voting, to assess whether people employ different considerations when voting for representation at the different levels. Also, they compare 2014 and 2009, when EP elections also coincided with regional elections. The article shows that split-ticket voting cannot be explained by economic voting, European identity, nor by attitudes towards integration in 2014. The introduction of *Spitzenkandidaten* did enhance split-ticket voting for Flemish voters who could directly vote for the Flemish candidate Verhofs-tadt, while this did not increase split-ticket voting among voters who could only indirectly support the candidate (in Wallonia). This result thus suggests that the 2014 EP elections were still largely second order ones.

Boomgaarden, Johann and Kritzinger (2016) make use of panel survey data in Austria to study the motives to change one's party choice between a national and a European election. Looking first at aggregate level patterns in the switches, these are by and large in line with the second order framework. Citizens were less inclined to turnout at the EP election than in national elections, they switched away from government parties and smaller parties did relatively well. When looking at individuals' motivations for vote switching, they find that switches from government to opposition parties are largely driven by discontent with the national government. In line with Hobolt et al. (2009) they find Euroscepticism to be an important predictor of switches to anti-EU parties.

Okolijkj and Quinlan (2016) employ the European

Elections Studies (EES) data from 2009 and 2014 to assess economic voting in EP elections. Their study demonstrates that perceptions of the economy influenced voters in both election years. In 2009 this was an across the board effect, while in 2014 the effects of economic perceptions were conditioned by how much responsibility voters felt the national government had for the state of the economy. The study also reveals cross-country differences. In particular, the effects were stronger in the bailout countries compared to non-bailout countries. As the effects of economic perceptions are conditioned by perceptions of responsibility of the *national* government, these results clearly support the second order perspective on EP elections.

Schmitt and Toygür (2016) employ data from the EES 2014, as well as aggregate level data on election outcomes to test the second order model. As an alternative they test two hypotheses on whether consequences of the financial crisis explain the outcomes of the EP elections instead of the second order model. The authors analyse aggregate election results, both at the country level and at the party level and compare them with the results of the preceding first-order national election in each EU member country. All of the tests of the model, the bivariate as well as the multivariate ones are in line with the second order model.

5. In Conclusion

The 2014 EP elections were held under the slogan ‘this time it’s different’. The main idea was that, as a result of the introduction of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, executive power was at stake for the first time. Since there was more at stake, the elections would be ‘different’, meaning more first order in the perceived ranking of voters and parties. In this issue we posed the question whether this was true: ‘How different were the EP elections of 2014?’ Reviewing the eleven contributions in this issue, we can conclude that 2014 was not as different from previous elections as one might have expected given the different political and economic landscape and self-proclaimed relevance of the EP. Like in previous EP elections, turnout was low, and governing parties did not do well, while more radical Eurosceptic parties were rather successful. So, neither the introduction of *Spitzenkandidaten*, nor the increased politicisation around the EU, did much to change the second order nature of European elections.

One plausible reason for why the introduction of *Spitzenkandidaten* had little effect could be that only few voters were aware of the new element. Moreover, the role of these *Spitzenkandidaten* remained largely unclear during the campaigns. Especially if Juncker would be up for re-election in 2019, this would generate a very different type of campaign dynamic and would conceivably generate greater media attention across Europe. This, in turn, could potentially make Eu-

rope’s citizens more aware of the candidates and their party political affiliations (Gattermann et al., 2016) and affect voter attitudes towards the EU or specific policy positions (see Maier et al., 2016), which might become decisive for their electoral behaviour.

In addition to the *Spitzenkandidaten*, the political context of the 2019 EP elections will also matter. In the coming years, the EU is facing a number of big challenges, such as the refugee and ongoing sovereign debt crises, but also the possibility of a Brexit. These challenges will make EU affairs more salient in the public eye. Yet, the increased salience of ‘Europe’ will not by itself make EP elections less second order. That will depend on whether there is something at stake, such as the re-election of the Commission President, and whether voters are aware of what is at stake.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Prof. Dr. Wouter van der Brug

Wouter van der Brug is Professor and Chair of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam. His research interests focus on comparative research in collective political behaviour, in particular electoral behaviour, right-wing populism, political trust and support and political parties. He publishes regularly in various international Political Science journals. His most recent (co-authored/co-edited) books are *The Politicisation of Migration* (2015, Routledge) and *(Un)intended Consequences of European Parliament Elections* (2016, Oxford UP).



Dr. Katjana Gattermann

Katjana Gattermann is assistant professor of political communication and journalism at ASCoR and also affiliated with ACCESS EUROPE at the University of Amsterdam. She is founding director of the Erasmus Academic Network on Parliamentary Democracy in Europe (PADEMIA). Her research interests comprise political communication, political behaviour, public opinion and legislative behaviour in the EU. Her work has appeared in journals such as the *European Journal of Political Research*, *European Union Politics*, and *West European Politics*.



Prof. Dr. Claes de Vreese

Claes de Vreese is Professor and Chair of Political Communication at ASCoR at the University of Amsterdam. He is the founding Director of Center for Politics and Communication (www.polcomm.org). His research interests focus on political journalism, media effects, public opinion and electoral behaviour. His most recent (co-authored) books are *Political Journalism in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge UP) and *(Un)intended Consequences of European Parliament Elections* (Oxford UP).

Article

The Choice of *Spitzenkandidaten*: A Comparative Analysis of the Europarties' Selection Procedures

Gert-Jan Put, Steven Van Hecke *, Corey Cunningham and Wouter Wolfs

Public Governance Institute, University of Leuven, 3000 Leuven, Belgium; E-Mails: gertjan.put@soc.kuleuven.be (G.-J.P.), steven.vanhecke@soc.kuleuven.be (S.V.H.), corey.cunningham@europarl.europa.eu (C.C.), wouter.wolfs@soc.kuleuven.be (W.W.)

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

The selection of leading candidates by the political families, the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten*, is relatively groundbreaking as it is the first form of political recruitment organized at the EU level. The literature on candidate selection procedures has so far concentrated on national parties and their procedures. To our knowledge the analytical model has not yet been applied at the EU level. This article will fill this gap by examining the selection procedures of Europarties, more particularly for their EC presidency candidates, a novelty of the 2014 European Parliament elections. Based on the analysis of the procedures applied within the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE), the European Green Party (EGP), and the Party of the European Left (EL), one of the main findings of this article is that the procedures are largely copy-paste from the Europarties' internal procedures for selecting a president. This can largely be explained by the lack of time and experience their party elites had in the run-up to the 2014 elections. We therefore expect the Europarties to further professionalize their selection procedures and start the process earlier with more high profile politicians to stand as candidates in 2019.

Keywords

candidate selection; Europarties; European Commission; European elections

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1. Introduction

This article analyzes the Europarties' procedures for the selection of *Spitzenkandidaten* in the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections. In the run-up to these elections, Europarties organized internal selections to determine their candidate for the presidency of the European Commission (EC). According to Sartori (1976, p. 64), the selection of candidates is the core activity that distinguishes parties from other political organizations. The 2014 elections can therefore be considered a landmark in the history of these supranational organizations: the more loosely organized European party

federations have developed towards fully-fledged Europarties with their own internal decision-making procedures and the role they play in the EP elections. Moreover, it also meant a landmark for the EP elections as the *Spitzenkandidaten* made the 2014 campaign different from previous ones. For the very first time leading candidates with an official mandate from the Europarties campaigned and debated on behalf of and between their respective political families on a European Union (EU) wide scale. A vote in these EP elections therefore also became a choice for the next EC president (Hobolt, 2014).

For scholars of EU party politics, these selection

procedures form an interesting and unique research opportunity. First, the nomination of *Spitzenkandidaten* is the first political recruitment process that fully takes place at the European level. Since there is no EU-wide transnational constituency for the EP elections, candidate selection is traditionally organized by the national member parties while the members of the EC are appointed by their national governments (Wonka, 2007). Therefore, existing rules and mechanisms of elite recruitment at the EU level are still strongly influenced by national considerations and dominated by national political actors. Second, as it is the first time that Europarties organized these selection procedures, it would seem that their party elites started with a blank slate designing them. Self-evidently, these party organizations historically developed their own decision-making processes with, for instance, varying degrees of centralization and unanimity requirements. The main research question of this contribution is, then: to what extent is the design of novel candidate selection procedures of *Spitzenkandidaten* affected by existing intraparty decision-making procedures of Europarties?

This article aims to answer this question by analyzing the selection procedures for *Spitzenkandidaten* of five Europarties: the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE), the European Green Party (EGP), and the Party of the European Left (EL). As such, we follow a comparative approach, focusing on five party cases operating in the same complex EU institutional environment, but with different decision-making procedures and possible outcomes. The nature, course and outcome of their procedures will be examined using the seminal theoretical framework on intra-party candidate selection developed by Hazan and Rahat (2010). Party scholars have developed these frameworks focusing on national parties' procedures. In this article these theories will be adapted to supranational party organizations that operate at the level of the EU.

Europarties' selection procedures for *Spitzenkandidaten* will be analyzed on the basis of party documents (statutes, regulations) and semi-structured interviews with members of the various party elites. Two waves of interviews took place: the first during the parties' campaigns and selection processes preceding the elections, and the second wave four months after the elections to make a hindsight evaluation of the applied selection procedures. Respondents were selected based on their involvement in the design and implementation of these candidate selection procedures (see Appendix).

The article is structured as follows. The next section first presents the central theoretical framework by Hazan and Rahat (2010) for the analysis of candidate selection procedures, and discusses its applicability to the case of the Europarties. Afterwards, we examine the Europarties' existing decision-making practices by re-

viewing earlier literature on the internal organization of Europarties. With regard to other forms of political recruitment at the EU level, it was already mentioned that both the selection of MEP candidates as well as the appointment of European Commissioners is organized by national political actors. We argue that the selection of *Spitzenkandidaten* is relatively groundbreaking as it is the first form of political recruitment organized at the EU level. At the end of the section on political recruitment in the EU, we formulate a number of hypotheses on the expected differences in selection procedures among Europarties. Subsequently, the empirical section of this article analyzes and compares the Europarties' candidate selection procedures based on the analysis of party regulations and elite interviews. The conclusion puts the findings of this study in theoretical perspective.

2. Trespassing the Secret Garden: A Theoretical Framework for Candidate Selection

Party organizations bear the huge responsibility of nominating a set of competent and skilled candidates for parliamentary office. The quality of selected candidates directly determines the quality and strength of legislative assemblies and can, more generally, even affect the stability of representative democracies (Gallagher & Marsh, 1988). Therefore, it is not surprising that party scholars have produced a great deal of literature on this crucial function of party organizations.

From a theoretical point of view, the study of intraparty candidate selection is interesting for a variety of reasons. First, the nature of selection procedures offers one of the best instances to observe the distribution of power within the parties. After all, "he who can make the nominations is the owner of the party" (Schattschneider, 1942). As a result, authors often analyze these intraparty procedures to determine the true party elite or dominant faction at a given moment in time (Harmel & Janda, 1994).

Second, candidate selection is one of the main instruments for parties to enforce party discipline and control the legislative behavior of MPs (Bowler, Farrell, & Katz, 1999; Hazan & Rahat, 2006; Shomer, 2009). Since incumbent MPs rely on the party selectorate for reselection, they will be inclined to appease the party elite and toe the party line. This mechanism allows parties to reward loyalty or punish defection, for example by MPs who are building a personal reputation through personal vote-seeking behavior.

Third and lastly, the nature of candidate selection procedures has far-reaching consequences for crucial dimensions of representative democracy, such as intraparty competition, representativeness of candidate lists, participation levels of members and voters, and legislators' party responsiveness (Hazan & Rahat, 2010). It has been demonstrated, for example, that

some selection procedures lead to more representative candidate lists than others (Rahat, Hazan, & Katz, 2008). Some authors even argue that more inclusive participation enhances competitiveness (Cross, 1996), but this has not always been empirically confirmed (Kenig, 2009).

The seminal framework for comparative analysis of candidate selection procedures has been developed by Hazan and Rahat (2010). Their model disentangles four dimensions of candidate selection: candidacy, party selectorate, decentralization, and voting/appointment systems. *Candidacy* refers to who is entitled to be selected by the party. Aspirant candidates do not only need to demonstrate their eligibility through party loyalty and affiliation, but are usually expected to fulfill additional requirements as well (Kenig, 2009, p. 440). The degree of party inclusiveness can be evaluated by analyzing restrictions on candidacies. On the inclusiveness pole of the candidacy continuum, all citizens are allowed to put forward their candidacy. On the more exclusive end, some additional requirements may be added apart from mere eligibility. Examples of additional requirements are the need to pay a fee, to gather a fixed number of signatures, or to gain the support of an exclusive intra-party elite (Kenig, 2009, p. 440).

The *party selectorate* refers to a body that selects candidates. Rahat and Hazan (2001) propose a selectorate continuum where, at the one extreme the selectorate is composed of only one person, and at the opposite extreme it is constituted by the entire electorate. In this way, the continuum ranges from most exclusive selectorates to most inclusive ones. In between both extremes, various bodies might have the task to select the party leader: the party elite, a parliamentary party group, a selected party agency, or party members.

The dimension of *decentralization* refers to the influence of regional or local party branches in the candidate selection process. Political parties might have highly centralized candidate selection procedures, where the national party level has full control over candidate nomination. The opposite scenario is when local party organizations dominate candidate selection without any form of national intervention.

The fourth and final dimension deals with the *voting or appointment procedure*. Voting procedures obviously refer to systems where party candidates are nominated on the basis of a vote by the selectorate. Within a voting system, representation control is reduced as the party has less control over the outcome of the vote, and thus upon the person that will be chosen as candidate-designate of the party. Appointment procedures, on the contrary, are said to enhance representation control: the party wields greater control over the decision of the person it will put forward to represent the party (Rahat & Hazan, 2001, p. 307).

The literature on candidate selection procedures has so far concentrated on national parties and their

procedures. Is it possible to apply this analytical framework, which has largely been developed for national party organizations, to Europarties? How should the four dimensions of Hazan and Rahat's model be translated to the context of EU level party organizations? Arguably, some differences between national and European party organizations should be taken into account before this framework can be applied to the EU level. The actual threshold for being a candidate to lead the EC, for instance, will for obvious reasons be considerably higher than for being nominated as a candidate for national (or European) legislative elections. While there is only one candidate for the Commission presidency for each political family, a party organization usually has a lot of candidates when it comes to national legislative elections. From this point of view, the Europarty candidate selection procedures for the EC presidency are more comparable to intra-party selection procedures for party president (or state president) rather than for members of parliament.

The selectorate dimension can be applied in a comparable way as with national candidate selection procedures. Decision-making could, in theory, be limited to selected and non-selected party agencies, or might involve more inclusive selectorates such as delegate conferences or even party members. However, Europarties do not have members in the same way as national party organizations do: membership to individual party members of the various national member parties is only given in an indirect way. In fact, national parties are first and foremost the members of Europarties, not individuals (Hertner, 2014). This makes it practically more difficult to address these individual members and organize very inclusive selection processes such as primaries.

Concerning decentralization, Europarties are not characterized by the same spatial organization as national parties, which often have various subnational party branches (regional, local) with varying degrees of importance and competences in decision-making. For Europarties, national member parties represent the party on the ground (Bardi, 2002), and the level of decentralization should be measured by the influence of these 'sub-European' party branches in the Europarties' candidate selection procedures. Finally, voting and appointment systems relate to how and on the basis of what type of majorities these parties take decisions. This dimension can be applied in a similar manner to European party organizations.

3. Decision-Making Processes within Europarties

Answering the main research question of this article not only requires a concise analytical framework for the analysis of candidate selection procedures, but also an in-depth knowledge of the existing decision-making practices of Europarties. Existing research on European party federations deals with their historical develop-

ment, gradual enlargement towards new member parties and the relationship of these extra-parliamentary party organizations with the more important EP parliamentary groups. Only relatively recently, authors have shifted their focus to the comparative analysis of their organizational structures (Bardi, 2002; Gagatek, 2008; Hanley, 2008; Johansson & Zervakis, 2002).

The reasons for this delayed attention may be related to the subordinate character of party federations compared to EP parliamentary groups, which already started playing an important role since the first EP elections in 1979. Compared to these institutionalized, integrated and well-organized party groups, European party federations were organizationally weak (Hix, 2001). Moreover, these federations only have indirect links with civil society through their member parties. This has long been an excuse for scholars to ignore the formal structure and organizational aspects of party federations.

Since their foundation in the 1970s, the four largest party federations have become more integrated organizations with increasingly transnational characteristics (Pridham & Pridham, 1981; Van Hecke, 2010). The culmination point of this evolution is of course the new appointment system for the EC presidency, where every party federation organizes its own internal candidate selection process. In sum, Europarties are gaining relevance and the EU institutional model is becoming more partisan in nature, which makes the systematic examination of these party organizations more worthwhile. As their institutional environments are very similar, one could expect that the organizational structures of Europarties look very similar and evolve in a comparable manner. However, differing ideological backgrounds, organizational culture and decision-making practices may lead to differences in the organizational life of these transnational party families (Gagatek, 2008).

The available literature does not provide too many leads on the relation between ideological party family and organizational nature. In their review of party family typologies, Mair and Mudde (1998) disentangle four criteria by which party families could be categorized. While it was briefly mentioned that parties could also be compared in terms of their organization structures, their criteria only refer to the origin, policy and ideology, name, and transnational membership. In his classic work on the organization of political parties, Duverger (1954) was the first to argue that ideological party groups differ from each other in terms of their organizational nature. More specifically, socialist and social democratic parties would be more inclined to adopt centralized structures than their Christian democratic counterparts, who are known to give greater leeway for the existence of internal factions (Gagatek, 2008).

Based on Duverger's longstanding claim, we expect transnational party federations, who organize themselves according to party families or *familles spirituelles*

(Von Beyme, 1985), to have different traditions in terms of their organizational nature and decision-making practices. The question, then, is whether these differences also become apparent in the nature of Europarties' candidate selection procedures. In the remainder of this section, these organizational differences will be discussed based on an examination of Europarties' decision-making procedures. Specifically, we examine to what extent these procedures could be labeled as transnational or intergovernmental. A suitable indicator to answer this question would be the applied majority and voting systems. Analogous to decision-making in the EU institutional model, some intraparty decisions might be taken on the basis of simple, absolute or qualified majorities, while others require unanimity.

While Hix and Lord (1997) argue that parties usually take decisions based on general consensus, organization practice reveals substantial differences in voting procedures. The PES seems to have a unanimity tradition in decision-making (Gagatek, 2008). Only if general consensus seems impossible, PES will start working with qualified majorities to take political decisions. Additionally, if member parties had substantial formal reservations with regard to the outcome, the possibility to 'opt-out' of the decision could be applied, which was frequently used in all sorts of manifestos and political declarations (Hix & Lesse, 2002). According to Gagatek (2008), the opting-out procedure is still incorporated in PES statutes, but has recently not been used very frequently.

Analogous to their Socialist counterpart, the Liberal party federation also has the culture of working towards general consensus in decision-making. The ALDE has been very preoccupied with organizational reforms to achieve greater party cohesion and consolidation (Sandstrom, 2001). When ELDR, the forerunner of ALDE, was founded in 1976, it could immediately be called a federative party where decisions were taken with a qualified majority, and from 1991 onwards even with only a simple majority. However, there has always been a strong consensus culture in order to keep the highly diverse set of Liberal member parties aboard (Smith, 2014).

The European Greens, united by the EGP, are a third example of a strong unanimity based party model (Van De Walle, 2001). This party federation seems to work with less centralized party organs, but at the same time applies very strict qualified majority principles and, preferably, unanimous decision-making (Bardi, 2002). Based on the existing theories and literature on Green political parties, one might expect that the EGP would actually be the organizational outlier among Europarties. Green parties usually seek to establish grass-roots party organizations with principles of basic democracy (Müller-Rommel, 1989). But while some characteristics of this party type are present in EGP (e.g. rotation principle, no cumulation of offices), Van De Walle (2001) argues that the influence of the European institutional environment

is actually larger than the influence of typical ecological party culture. Moreover, the Green parties' anti-bureaucratic and decentralized approach has made them reluctant to give up national sovereignty in order to become more transnationalized (Dietz, 2000).

The same applies to the EL. The party subscribes to the rotation principle, emphasizes its popular basis, and brings gender equality into practice (50% share of women in all organs), but whereas (former) communist parties are traditionally highly centralized, their European party lacks integration (Hudson, 2012). One could even call the EL 'intergovernmental' (Hanley, 2008, p. 147), as national parties remain sovereign. In terms of voting, every member party is equal, irrespective of its size at the national level or its number of MEPs.

Of the five European party federations under consideration, the EPP is the actual outlier in terms of organizational characteristics. Compared to the other Europarties, the transnational character of the federation with the largest EP party group is considerably more outspoken. As early as the 1980s, the EPP identified the unanimity rule as the main factor hindering transnational development. Their statutes do not state anything about unanimity requirements, which points to a more integrated party structure compared to its competitors. Additionally, the EPP does not allow for opting-out of decision-making by any of the member parties or party actors (Gagatek, 2008).

A potential explanation for these differences in decision-making is the degree of intraparty homogeneity at the time of the parties' foundation. At first, EPP consisted of traditional, pro-European Christian democratic parties and had a considerably easier time coming to agreements on electoral manifestos compared to its competitors. There was a strong convergence in the way these parties thought of political integration in Europe, which directly influenced their ideas on further party integration (Pridham & Pridham, 1981). Even after the enlargement that brought on board more conservative member parties, the party continued that tradition and applied more integrative voting procedures.

The Liberal and Socialist party federations had considerably less internal cohesion at the start, which translated into giving greater importance to the unanimity principle. The Liberal party federation had been struggling to overcome internal dissent as early as the 1970s (Sandstrom, 2001). The CSPEC, forerunner of the PES, had considerably more difficulties in agreeing on electoral manifestos than the EPP (Gagatek, 2008). Finally, while it is often claimed that the Green party federation did not develop consolidated party structures compared to other Europarties (Bardi, 1994; Bardi, 1996; Jansen, 1996), they actually did succeed in building a more integrative and transnational party organization (Dietz, 2000). The strong heterogeneity in policy preferences of their member parties, however, continues to hinder decision-making on the basis of

majority principles rather than unanimity. The latter also applies to the EL, a party that is characterized by a wide range of opinions and attitudes (Hanley, 2008).

This paper examines the extent to which the Europarties' new candidate selection procedures—designed for the selection of EC presidency candidates—are affected by these existing decision-making practices. At this point, two elements required to answer the main research question have been discussed: the analytical framework on candidate selection, and Europarties' organizational practices. A combination of these two building blocks allows us to formulate a number of testable hypotheses for each of the candidate selection dimensions. In terms of candidacy, the reviewed literature does not give any reason to expect substantial differences between the Europarties:

H1. The candidacy requirements of Europarties do not significantly differ from one another.

With regard to the inclusiveness of the electorate, we already mentioned that green parties generally have a stronger tendency to apply democratic internal procedures than other party families. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

H2. The electorate of the EGP will be more inclusive than the electorates in the other Europarties' selection procedures.

The literature review revealed that the green party federation also stands out in terms of intraparty decentralization, in the sense that their party organs are less centralized compared to the other Europarties. As a result:

H3. The candidate selection procedure of the EGP will be more decentralized than the other Europarties' procedures.

Finally, the voting or appointment procedures of Europarties have received the largest amount of research attention. For this fourth dimension, the literature review shows that the EPP is the deviant case compared to the other Europarties, as they apply the unanimity rule considerably less in intra-party decision-making. Indeed, while the EPP has a strong tradition of majoritarian voting procedures, the other Europarties are strongly oriented towards decision-making by consensus:

H4. While the candidate selection procedure of the EPP uses a voting procedure, the other Europarties apply appointment procedures.

4. The Europarties' Candidate Selection Procedures for *Spitzenkandidaten*

Although the idea that Europarties should present their candidates for the EC presidency dates back to at least

2008 (Gagatek, 2009; Hix, 2008, pp. 155-163), the first time it was applied on a large scale was in the run-up to the EP elections of May 2014. In other words, Euro-parties engaged in nominating their own candidate through different selection procedures.

In its resolution of November 22, 2012, the European Parliament urged the Europarties to nominate candidates for the EC presidency and stressed that they should play a leading role in the EU electoral campaign (European Parliament, 2012). In March 2013, the EC also announced its recommendation for Europarties to nominate candidates. This was part of the Commission's strategy to get citizens more involved in EU decision-making and to increase the visibility and personal character of European elections. Designing candidate selection procedures which are democratic, for example, would raise the legitimacy of European institutions in general, and of Europarties in particular (European Commission, 2013). Indeed, some authors have argued that increasing intraparty democracy would raise citizens' levels of trust in political parties (Leduc, 2001; Scarrow, Webb, & Farrell, 2000).

The Europarties were asked to make known which candidate they supported for the presidency, and national member parties were expected to inform voters about that candidate during the campaign. Survey research shows that a majority of respondents would be more inclined to vote in European elections if parties proposed a candidate for the function of European Commission President (European Commission, 2013).

As it was the first time that Europarties organized candidate selection, this was a rather unique and interesting research opportunity. Europarties started from a blank slate, and were free to design their selection procedure of choice. However, literature states that the decision to choose a particular procedure is determined by normative and institutional factors, such as the electoral system, legal requirements, and territorial divisions (Lundell, 2004; Scarrow et al., 2000; Shomer, 2014). But what is even more important in this context is the very specific organizational nature of parties at the EU level. Europarties are federated organizations: they consist of various separate member parties at the national level, amalgamated into European party organizations. Each national member party has its own internal rules, including rules with regard to the selection of candidates for the European Parliament. The applied procedures by the different Europarties will be explained in detail in this section.

4.1. *European People's Party (EPP)*

Historically, the European People's Party (EPP) emerged from "diverse forms of cooperation that had long existed among Christian democrats in Western Europe" and was officially founded in 1976 in the run up to the first European Parliament elections of 1979 (Hanley, 2008;

Jansen & Van Hecke, 2011, p. 3). Although initially established by Christian democratic parties, the EPP later included conservative and center-right parties. Since 1999 it has the largest group in the European Parliament and it also holds major positions in the EC and the European Council, including the presidency.

The EPP decided on its candidate selection procedure during the Meise summit in December 2013. On this occasion, the party drew up a timeline for the selection of an EPP candidate that would best represent the party's values while having strong prospects of reaching a wide consensus in the European Council (which had to propose a candidate to the EP).

Concerning the candidacy dimension, the EPP stipulated that for a candidate to be nominated, he/she has to be affiliated to and supported by a national member party. Moreover, candidates need the endorsement of a maximum of two member parties from two EU countries other than the country of origin. On top of that, only presidents and secretary generals of ordinary member parties are entitled to nominate and/or endorse a candidate (European People's Party, 2014). The support of three parties was deliberately chosen as to avoid a race between the candidates to have the support of as many member parties as possible, like the ALDE for instance (L. Vandeputte, personal communication, November 14, 2014). The EPP equally wanted to avoid one candidate, since then it would become clear where he/she lacks support, as was the case with the PES and British Labour, for instance (K. Sasmatzoglou, personal communication, October 9, 2014).

By the closure of the candidate submission process, two candidates had submitted their candidacy: Jean-Claude Juncker and Michel Barnier. The candidacy of Jean-Claude Juncker, former prime minister of Luxembourg as well as the Eurogroup, was backed by his own Christian Social People's party (CSV), the German CDU and the Greek Nea Demokratia. In addition, Michel Barnier, the incumbent European commissioner for internal market and services, received the support of his home party UMP, and the endorsement of the Hungarian Fidesz and the Slovenian NSi member parties. As a next step in the procedure, the two candidacies were reviewed and validated during the EPP Political Assembly, which was part of the overall program of the EPP Electoral Congress.

Candidacies were subjected to a delegates' vote during the EPP Electoral Congress. The candidate that received the absolute majority of valid votes would be declared elected. Abstentions were not considered valid votes. The final result of 828 delegates with voting rights was as follows: from the 627 votes cast, 382 votes went to Juncker (61%) and 245 went in favor of Barnier (39%) (Cerulus, 2014). Juncker greatly benefited from the German delegation led by Angela Merkel, giving him the full backing of their total of 101 votes. Barnier, on the other hand, led a very active internal

campaign to mobilize the votes of those delegates that appeared to be disenchanted with the dominance of the German Christian Democrats within the EPP.

The list of persons holding voting rights during the EPP Political Assembly is relatively extensive. Among these 828 EPP delegates, which represent the selectorate in the selection procedure, are the members of the EPP presidency, presidents and delegates of member parties and associations, heads of state and government of EU member states, and presidents of other European institutions (e.g. European Council, Council of Europe, and Committee of the Regions) that are affiliated with national member parties. The EPP's selectorate falls into the category of selected party agencies that usually take the form of conventions, conferences, or assemblies (Kenig, 2009, p. 436). The size of this category of selectorates typically ranges from a few hundred to sometimes over a thousand delegates selecting candidates or party leaders.

4.2. Party of European Socialists (PES)

The PES is the European level political family that assembles the Socialist, Social Democratic, and Labour parties of the EU under one umbrella. At the time of the selection, there were 33 full member parties spread across all 28 EU Member States and Norway. The PES also included 5 full member organizations (e.g. the PES Women), 12 associate and 10 observer parties. In recent decades, the PES has been the main rival of the EPP in the wider European political landscape. The PES also enjoys a strong representation in various EU institutions.

Already in 2010, the PES Council took the unanimous decision to set up a democratic and transparent process for designating the PES candidate for the European Commission Presidency (Party of European Socialists, 2010). A special 'Working Group Common Candidate 2014' was set up to this end (M. Laffeber, personal communication, September 15, 2014). During the 2009 elections, PES lacked a strong figurehead, which was in stark contrast to the rivaling EPP with Barroso as the lead candidate during the election campaign. The early adoption of candidate selection procedures for the 2014 elections demonstrated the PES' willingness to increase the party's visibility through the personalization of EU politics.

To stand as a legitimate candidate, PES formulated the following nomination criteria: nomination by a PES full member party or organization and support of 15% of PES full member parties or organizations, including their own party. Furthermore, a member party can only support one potential candidate. Given that the PES was composed of 32 full member parties within the EU and 5 full member organizations, a candidate had to come up with the support of a minimum of 6 parties or organizations in order to reach the 15% stipulated, i.e.

one nominating her/him with 5 others supporting the nomination.

After the candidacy submission deadline, the PES presidency convened to check and validate the candidacies in order to draft a public list of potential candidates (PES, 2013). On this occasion, an electoral committee made up of representatives for each of the prospective candidates was also established in order to guarantee fairness. Because of the high candidacy requirements, Martin Schulz, incumbent president of the EP and member of the German SPD, emerged as the sole candidate for the PES. He obtained the support of 22 of the 32 PES member parties (Mahony, 2013), which made it very difficult for potential opponents to meet the nomination criteria. Once the nomination process was over, each member party and organization organized internal decision-making procedures to either support or reject Schulz' potential designation as the common PES candidate. To consolidate this vote at the European level, a weighting of the votes took place for each full member party and organization.

To conclude the overall process, the PES convened an Electoral Congress to ratify its candidate and adopt the party's common manifesto for a pan-EU campaign. During this congress where 405 delegates were eligible to cast their vote, Martin Schulz was confirmed as PES common candidate with 368 voting in his favor, 2 opposing and 34 abstentions (from, among others, the British Labour party).

4.3. Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE)

In the run-up to the 2014 European elections, ALDE was composed of 57 member parties. The liberal Euro-party is traditionally considered the third largest group in the European Parliament. The relatively small chance of beating EPP or PES in numbers did not stop ALDE from launching its own candidate selection procedure for the EC presidency. In this procedure, all delegates could vote, unlike the election of the ALDE president. Delegates that were not present could vote online in advance. Candidates had to be formally nominated by at least two member parties from more than one member state or by 20% of ALDE Party Congress voting delegates (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party, 2013a). Surprisingly, candidates did not need the support of their own party (J. Moroz-Rasmussen, personal communication, November 4, 2014). During the nomination process, two candidates came forward: the incumbent Economic and Monetary Affairs Commissioner Olli Rehn, supported by 14—mostly Nordic—member parties, and former Belgian Prime Minister and ALDE EP Group leader Guy Verhofstadt, nominated by the liberal parties of the Benelux (ALDE, 2013b; Cerulus, 2013). This is a consequence of the intra-party divisions that characterize the liberal

party: the ALDE group is a cooperation of two separate Europarties—the European Democratic Party (EDP) and the Liberals—and has the widest range of policy positions among its member parties (McElroy & Benoit, 2011, pp. 162-164). To avoid an open conflict between the different factions—the EDP threatened to leave the EP group if Olli Rehn would become the ALDE candidate—two mediators were appointed: Dutch prime minister Mark Rutte and Christian Lindner of the German FDP. They managed to make both nominees come to an agreement: Verhofstadt would be the ALDE candidate for the EC presidency and Rehn for one of the other senior positions in the EU (ALDE, 2014).

As a result, it was no longer necessary to organize a competitive procedure to determine the ALDE candidate. Participants at the ALDE Electoral Congress could simply approve or disapprove the agreement. The selectorate consisted of 32 member party delegations each entitled to a number of votes depending on the number of seats their party has in its national parliament. Of the 388 delegates, 245 approved the compromise in Verhofstadt's favor (79.3%), 44 disapproved (14.2%), and 20 delegates abstained (6.5%).

4.4. The European Green Party (EGP)

The EGP is a pan-European party bringing together Green parties from across EU member states as well as non-EU countries. The candidate selection procedure proposed by the EGP Committee was adopted by the EGP Council composed of all Green member parties. According to this procedure, any European Green politician with the ambition to run as the leading EGP candidate needs to be nominated by his/her national party and receive the support from at least four to a maximum of eight of the 33 EGP member parties (European Green Party, 2013). Moreover, all EU member parties have the right to exclusively support one candidate. After endorsements from the EGP member parties, four nominees (i.e. José Bové, Ska Keller, Rebecca Harms, and Monica Frassoni) were confirmed as EGP contenders.

Afterwards, these four contenders participated in an online open primary election. This first of its kind online 'Green Primary' increased the visibility of the EGP giving it an upbeat image while capturing the public's interest with its e-democracy project (J. Cremers, personal communication, September 12, 2014). A central priority of the EGP throughout this campaign was to emphasize the importance of more inclusive and participatory decision-making in the EU. All EU citizens, EGP supporters and sympathizers, were invited to take part in this online voting exercise, with the end goal of selecting two final figureheads to lead the EGP campaign.

The reasons for selecting two lead candidates are twofold. First, this stems from the EGP's conviction that leadership should be shared by two or more persons and not narrowed down to one person alone.

Secondly, the party firmly believes that both male and female should be represented in power and decision-making structures. This online selection procedure also reflects other EGP values: democracy, participation and inclusiveness, but also a high level of accessibility enabling as many people as possible to become involved. The EGP also opens the way to participation in the online voting procedure for younger citizens (i.e. as early as the age of 16). A total of 22,676 persons from all Member States voted, which led to the following results: 11,791 votes for Ska Keller; 11,726 for José Bové; 8,170 for Rebecca Harms and 5,851 for Monica Frassoni. As a result, Keller and Bové formed the duo to lead the Greens through the ins and outs of the 2014 EP elections.

4.5. Party of European Left (EL)

The EL was founded in 2004, in the run-up to the 2014 European Parliament elections. It has left-wing, (former) communist and socialist parties from various European countries as its members. Unlike the EPP and the PES, and much more so than ALDE and the EGP, the party suffers from geographical and electoral imbalances. Most of its member parties have no or little representation in a national parliament, except for the German *Die Linke* and the Greek *Syriza* (Coalition of the Radical Left). Moreover, it is much smaller than the other Europarties. Therefore the opportunity was taken to choose its own *Spitzenkandidat* in order to present the EL to a wider audience. The decision was made by the Council of Chairpersons, the main decision-making body, at its meeting in Madrid in October 2013. Alexis Tsipras, president of *Syriza* and vice-president of EL, was the only candidate. After being confirmed by the Council—not unanimously but by consensus—he was presented to the Congress in December 2013. Every member party had 12 delegates; 164 delegates took part in the vote. 84.15% voted in favor, 7.32% against, and 8.54% abstained (European Left, 2013). The main point of discussion was clearly not Tsipras but whether his candidacy implicitly legitimized the EU's political and institutional set-up that the EL strongly criticizes.

5. A Comparison of Europarties' Selection Procedures

This section highlights the similarities and differences between the various candidate selection procedures applied by Europarties in nominating candidates for Commission Presidency. More specifically, we analyze the four dimensions of candidate selection discussed earlier in the theoretical section of this article. Table 1 facilitates the comparison of procedures by summarizing the most important characteristics for each candidate selection dimension. This comparison allows us to confirm or reject the four hypotheses formulated earlier based on the Europarties' decision-making procedures and practices.

Table 1. Comparison of Europarties' Candidate Selection Procedures: Analytical Dimensions and Outcome. Source: Party statutes, internal regulations and interviews (see Appendix).

	EPP	PES	ALDE	EGP	EL
Candidacy	Support by national member party + max. two foreign member parties	Support by 15% of full member parties (incl. own party or other party from own country)	Support by at least two member parties (from different countries) or 20% of congress delegates	Support by at least four and max. eight member parties	Support by national party president and the Council of Chairpersons
Selectorate	828 EPP delegates at electoral congress	405 PES delegates at electoral congress	388 ALDE delegates at electoral congress	EU citizens above the age of 16	164 EL delegates at electoral congress
Decentralization	Number of votes for member parties: three + number depending on result in last European election	Number of votes for member parties based on combination of party strength in national parliament, European parliament and country size	Number of votes for member party delegations depends on party strength in national parliaments	One man one vote—no weights for member parties or countries	12 votes each member party
Voting or appointment procedures	Absolute majority of valid votes by EPP delegates (abstentions not valid)	Qualified majority of valid votes by PES delegates	Absolute majority of valid votes by ALDE delegates (in two rounds if necessary)	Relative majority of selectorate; two winning candidates cannot be of same sex or member state	Voting procedure, but not stipulated
Outcome	Jean-Claude Juncker Michel Barnier Valdis Dombrovskis*	Martin Schulz	Guy Verhofstadt Olli Rehn*	José Bové Ska Keller Monica Frassoni Rebecca Harms	Alexis Tsipras

Note: Candidates in bold are the selected *Spitzenkandidaten*. Candidates with an asterisk withdrew their candidacy before selection took place.

First, candidacy requirements do not show great variation among the various Europarties' selection procedures. In general, all parties require their nominees to be party members with some additional requirements (Hazan & Rahat, 2010). More specifically, apart from affiliation to one's own national member party, nominees are also required to gain the support of a defined set of other member parties and organizations. The EL is the outlier here, as the candidate needs to be put forward by its national party president. Among the other Europarties, there are, however, differences in the degree of strictness in their additional 'transnational' requirements. The PES clearly applies the strictest procedure, where nominees are expected to gather the support of no less than 15% of the other member parties. This resulted in a candidate selection process lacking intra-party competition, as only Schulz succeeded in gaining sufficient endorsement within the PES party organization. In addition, formal candidacy criteria do not mention any requirements with regard to candidates' personal qualities or experience. In practice, however, the various party nominees can be considered seasoned heavyweight politicians, with some of them having a background as former prime minis-

ters. In sum, while some variation exists in terms of the required member parties' support, the candidacy requirements do not differ significantly from one another, which confirms the first hypothesis, with the EL as an exception.

Second, with regard to the nature of the selectorate, the EGP clearly stands out when compared to the other Europarties. This confirms the second hypothesis, which stated that the EGP selectorate would be more inclusive compared with the other selectorates. Indeed, the Greens organized an extremely inclusive selection procedure where all voters and citizens older than 16 were eligible to participate online. Self-evidently, this primary election is located at the extreme inclusive end of the inclusiveness–exclusiveness continuum. The other four Europarties each organized party conferences to select the final candidate for EC presidency. These party agencies were composed of party delegates in the cases of PES, ALDE and EL, and additionally high-level intra-party officeholders in the case of EPP. In other words, selectorates of these four parties are situated towards the more exclusive end of the continuum when compared to the EGP procedure. The PES selectorate is probably even more exclusive than the ALDE,

EPP and EL procedures, since the formal PES procedure requires nominees to be checked and validated first by the PES presidency before presenting candidates to the wider electorate.

Third, the level of decentralization in Europarties' candidate selection processes has to be measured by the influence of national member parties. Analogous to the electorate dimension, the EGP's selection procedure differs substantially in terms of decentralization. More specifically, the online primary election did not take into account any demographic balances, making it a comparatively more centralized candidate selection procedure than the ones organized by EL, PES, ALDE and EPP. Within EL every member party counts equally while the latter three parties take the members states' demographic weight in their delegate conferences into account. This makes the final step of the selection process fairly decentralized in nature. On the other hand, none of the analyzed candidate selection procedures allows for individual member parties to nominate EC presidency candidates unilaterally. As discussed earlier, candidacies always have to be supported by a number of member parties and organizations, which decreases the decentralized nature of candidate selection procedures. As a consequence, the results show that the third hypothesis should be rejected: the level of decentralization is substantially lower within the EGP compared to the other Europarties.

Fourth and lastly, not only the EPP but all five Europarties opted for voting procedures rather than appointment systems to nominate their candidates. By applying voting systems, the parties have deliberately chosen reduced representational control: there is no need for general consensus on the selected candidates among selectors (Hazan & Rahat, 2010). Therefore our last hypothesis is rejected. It should be noted, however, that only within the EPP and the EGP voters had a clear choice between different candidates. All parties tried to create a balance between encouraging internal debate and sending a unified message to the outside world. Clearly, by having two candidates that almost split the whole Europarty, ALDE took the riskiest path but eventually opted for the safe road.

6. Conclusion

This article analyzed the selection procedures of *Spitzenkandidaten* in the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections as designed and executed by the European People's Party (EPP), the Party of European Socialists (PES), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE), the European Green Party (EGP), and the Party of the European Left (EL). The choice of *Spitzenkandidaten* was a relatively groundbreaking process as it was the first form of political recruitment organized at the EU level. This made the 2014 EP elections different from previous ones, as these candidates

organized a Europe-wide campaign and voters had the possibility to take the profile and the program of the EC presidency candidates—the choice for *Spitzenkandidaten*—into account when going to the polls.

All Europarties had to start from scratch, since there was no tradition to lean upon (J. Moroza-Rasmussen, personal communication, November 4, 2014). They had to invent something (J. Cremers, personal communication, September 12, 2014; L. Vandeputte, personal communication, November 14, 2014) so the easiest and least time consuming way to solve this problem was to copy-paste existing procedures, particularly the ones to elect a Europarty president, applying the same majority rule, the same delegates voting, etc. As a result, the novel candidate selection procedures for the selection of the EC presidency candidate were strongly inspired by already existing decision-making practices of Europarties.

Even though doubts exist as to whether the *Spitzenkandidaten* were able to reinforce the link between the EP elections and the EC president (Hobolt, 2014), Europarties embraced the new selection process as a means of strengthening their position at the EU level. This is not to say that the procedures cannot be improved (L. Vandeputte, personal communication, November 14, 2014). Europarties have to evaluate the process and the outcome. One has to bear in mind that the selection procedures were set up at a moment when the Europarties did not have any guarantees that the candidate of the largest party would actually become the head of the EC. Many government leaders considered the nomination of the EC president the prerogative of the European Council and remained skeptical of the entire process even after the European elections had already taken place. Only because the Europarties themselves had built up momentum around the *Spitzenkandidaten* process and the European Parliament had put pressure on the heads of state and government in the direct aftermath of the elections, EPP candidate Jean-Claude Juncker was nominated by the European Council and subsequently elected by the Parliament as the new EC president. This can explain why the procedures were put in place relatively late and in line with existing party practices.

Despite several shortcomings it is clear that the *Spitzenkandidaten* set a precedent for the 2019 elections (M. Laffeber, personal communication, September 15, 2014). On the 11th of November 2015, the European Parliament adopted a text for the reform of the electoral law of the EU, which demonstrates that the *Spitzenkandidaten* process will become an indispensable aspect of the 2019 election campaign. The Parliament urges the Europarties to nominate their candidates for the EC presidency at least 12 weeks before the elections and to establish democratic and transparent procedures to select the candidates. Furthermore, it encourages the member states to facilitate the

participation of the Europarties and their lead candidates in electoral campaigns and in the media (European Parliament, 2015). As a consequence, we expect that the Europarties will further professionalize their selection procedures and start the process earlier with more high profile politicians standing as candidates in order to maximize public and media attention. In this way, the 2014 EP elections might prove to be a game changer in the role played by Europarties and their influence on the inter-institutional balance within the EU.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Dr. Gert-Jan Put

Gert-Jan Put is a researcher at the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO) affiliated to the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute. His research interests include candidate selection, legislative turnover and campaign spending. He obtained his PhD with a thesis on the geographical dimension of candidate selection, and has been published in *Political Behavior*, *Electoral Studies* and *Acta Politica*. He is also a visiting researcher at Tel-Aviv University.



Dr. Steven Van Hecke

Steven Van Hecke is assistant professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences (KU Leuven) where he teaches Comparative and EU Politics. His research is mainly about Europarties and EU institutions. He has published in *Acta Politica*, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, *International Journal of Iberian Studies*, and *Journal of Contemporary European Research*.



Corey Cunningham

Corey Cunningham obtained her Master's Degree in Translation and European Institutions from the Institut Libre Marie Haps in Brussels in 2012. Ms. Cunningham then pursued her academic curricula by enrolling herself for the Advanced Master in European Politics and Policies at the KU Leuven in 2013. Ms. Cunningham currently works as a Parliamentary assistant to Belgian Member of the European Parliament, Mr. Claude Rolin.



Wouter Wolfs

Wouter Wolfs is a researcher at the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute. He is preparing a PhD in political science on the finance regime of Europarties, European foundations, and political groups in the European Parliament. The focus of his research is on the impact of the EU regulatory framework and European subsidies on the development of the Europarties, and on the spending patterns and internal financial decision-making processes of the parties.

Appendix. List of interviews undertaken in the framework of this manuscript

EPP	Kostas Sasmatzoglou	EPP Spokesperson	09/10/2014
	Luc Vandeputte,	EPP Deputy Secretary General	14/11/2014
PES	Marije Laffeber	PES Deputy Secretary General	15/09/2014
	Alberto Bondesio Martinez	PES Assistant President, Secretary General and Deputies Office	05/06/2014
ALDE	Didrik de Schaetzen	ALDE Communication Officer ALDE Secretary	04/06/2014
	Jacob Moroza-Rasmussen	General	04/11/2014
EGP	Jacqueline Cremers	EGP Secretary General	01/04/2014 and 12/09/2014
EL	Maité Mola	EL Vice President	29/10/2014

Notes: Extra information about EL was asked but not yet received (15.12.2015). All interviews took place in Brussels.

Article

The *Spitzenkandidaten* in the European Parliament Election Campaign Coverage 2014 in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom

Heidi Schulze

Department for Communication Research, Dresden University of Technology, 01069 Dresden, Germany;
E-Mail: heidi.schulze@tu-dresden.de

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Abstract

Elections to the European Parliament are characterised by a steady decline in voter turnout. To tackle this problem, in 2014, several groups of the European Parliament nominated pan-European Spitzenkandidaten who were expected to personalise the elections and mobilise European voters. Based on this development, this study analyses the media coverage of the 2014 EP elections with special focus on the role of the Spitzenkandidaten. A quantitative content analysis of European election campaign coverage in the opinion leading newspapers of three influential EU member states, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom was carried out. The results show large candidate- and country-specific differences regarding the visibility and thematic coverage of the EP elections in general as well as the presentation of the Spitzenkandidaten. The Spitzenkandidaten were not very visible in either the German, French, or British newspaper coverage. With respect to the presence and media personalisation of the Spitzenkandidaten, the newspaper coverage of the EP election does not demonstrate any mobilising effect and thus does not reflect the high expectations the European Parliament attributed to the nomination of the Spitzenkandidaten.

Keywords

comparative cross-national analysis; content analysis; European elections; media coverage; media personalisation; Spitzenkandidaten

Issue

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1. Introduction

This time it's different. With this slogan the European Parliament launched the campaign for the 2014 elections to the European Parliament (EP) to announce that they expected these elections to differ substantially from previous ones (Chauchepirat, 2014). They were the first EP elections since the Lisbon Treaty, which strengthened the position of the EP, had come into effect. For example, it was assigned the task of electing the President of the European Commission. Although the President was still officially to be nominated by the European Council, the five largest EP groups used this reform to each nominate their preferred candidate for

the position: Jean-Claude Juncker, former prime minister of Luxembourg and chairman of the Eurogroup (EPP); Martin Schulz, president of the EP since 2012 (S&D); Guy Verhofstadt, former prime minister of Belgium, member of the EP and leader of the ALDE faction (ALDE); Ska Keller, member of the EP since 2009 (Greens/EFA), and Alexis Tsipras, vice-president of the European Left and prime minister of Greece since 2015 (GUE/NGL). The aim of the introduction of the pan-European Spitzenkandidaten was to personalise the election and ultimately mobilise the European electorate (Niedermayer, 2014, p. 523). This structural innovation was a concerted effort to address the steady decline in voter turnout since the first European elections in 1979.

Empirical findings indeed confirm that the personalisation of an election campaign can have a positive impact on the overall election process: candidates as intermediaries of complex policy issues can reduce this complexity by rendering politics more accessible, and thus, not only inform but ultimately mobilise voters (Brettschneider, 2002; Huss, 2007; Lass, 1995). Personalisation increases personal involvement by facilitating voters' comprehension of political issues (Bentele & Fähnrich, 2010; Merkle, 2015; Ohr, 2000) and was found to have an overall positive effect on attitudes towards politics (Jebril, Albaek, & de Vreese, 2013).

Subsequent to their nomination, each Spitzenkandidat launched a pan-European election campaign in order to introduce him-/herself to the European public and to present the position of his/her political group. However, the candidates' campaign budgets were relatively low and they tended to focus their campaigning efforts on Central European countries (Pop, 2014). Schulz, for instance, visited Germany eleven times and Juncker went to Germany eight times. France and Belgium received more attention than other European countries too, while the United Kingdom for instance did not appear on the campaign route of either of these two previously mentioned candidates at all (Schmitt, Hobolt, & Popa, 2014). With regards to timing, the candidates focused their campaign activities on the last three to four weeks before the elections, resulting in an intensified effort during May, the month of the ballot. Furthermore, the Spitzenkandidaten exchanged their viewpoints in the context of several European TV debates, a novelty in the context of EP elections. From April 9 to May 20, nine TV debates were held in the three working languages of the EU (French, English and German). They were broadcast in all member states on national television and online via several web outlets. The majority of the debates, however, focused exclusively on the candidates of the two largest EP factions, Juncker and Schulz. In addition to regular campaigning the candidates used online social networks such as Facebook and Twitter in which Schulz again showed the highest campaign activity. As a result, he garnered the most attention in terms of followers and likes (Pop, 2014; Schmitt et al., 2014).

However, there is no consensus with regards to the extent that the new approach can be evaluated as a success, if at all. The presence of Spitzenkandidaten supported the professionalisation process of EP elections in general, but, in terms of the final voter turnout, the alterations in the electoral process did not have the effect the EP factions desired, and instead they reached a new low point. Still, compared to previous EP elections, the turnout decreased to a lesser extent and preliminary research demonstrates that knowledge of the candidates had a minor positive influence on voter turnout (Schmitt, Hobolt, & Popa, 2015). It is not enough, however, to focus on only one of the groups of actors involved in the electoral process, the voters. Since the

spatial distance of candidates and voters is much higher in the context of EP elections than during national elections, the intermediary role of the mass media is of crucial importance. Although the Spitzenkandidaten had held important European political positions prior to the elections, they were mostly unknown outside their home countries (Hobolt, 2014; Marino, 2014; Piedrafita & Renman, 2014). Consequently, with respect to the low voter turnout the question arises as to how far the EP elections were covered in general and to what extent the media referred to the Spitzenkandidaten in their election campaign coverage. Previous studies have confirmed large-scale country-specific differences with respect to the coverage of the EP elections. It is necessary, therefore, to deploy a cross-national comparative approach in order to analyse the question of media coverage of the Spitzenkandidaten. This study analyses the three largest countries in the European Union, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. These three countries are well suited for comparison in the context of EP elections not only because of their population size and, thus, their number of seats and influence in the EP, but also because they differ in terms of their media system, with each country reflecting one of three different media systems according to Hallin and Mancini (2004). Additionally, in contrast to general voter turnout, voter participation in these three countries increased relative to the 2009 EP elections, despite differences in campaign efforts.

2. The EP Elections in the Media

Due to the physical and conceptual distance between the European institutions, their politicians and voters, mass media functions as a key actor and as a decisive factor in the information and opinion-forming processes of voters in the context of EP elections (Strömbäck et al., 2013). The mass media is the main source of information for the electorate, even more so during national elections. Various studies have confirmed that greater visibility of the EP elections in the media positively influences the factual knowledge and turnout of the EP elections (Banducci & Semetko, 2003; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Gerstlé, Magni-Berton, & Piar, 2006; Hobolt, Spoon, & Tilley, 2009; Weßels, 2005). However, compared to national elections, the mass media covers the EP elections less extensively and tends to focus its campaign coverage on the very last days of the campaign (Boomgaarden, Vliegenthart, de Vreese, & Schuck, 2010; Leroy & Siune, 1994; Peter, 2004). Still, cross-national comparisons of different EP elections found a general increase of their visibility over time (Boomgaarden et al., 2010; de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, & Boomgaarden, 2006; Schuck, Azrout et al., 2011; Vliegenthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden, & de Vreese, 2008). In terms of media-related differences, several studies concluded that quality newspapers not only report more frequently but also

more comprehensively on the EP elections than tabloid media, which rarely cover the elections at all (Boomgaarden et al., 2013; Brettschneider & Rettich, 2005; Maier & Maier, 2008).

Regarding the coverage in the countries Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, cross-national comparative studies have found apparent country-specific differences, though they seldom discuss these differences in detail. According to Schuck, Azrout et al. (2011) the 2009 EP elections were comparatively most visible in French newspaper coverage, less so in the British media, and least of all in Germany; these differences were only minimal, though. However, their findings contrast those of Strömbäck et al. (2011) who found the EP elections to be far more visible in the German coverage than in the British. These contrary results might be a consequence of a difference in research design: Schuck, Azrout et al. (2011) only analysed the front page of the newspapers while Strömbäck et al. (2011) considered the whole newspaper for their analysis. As for the thematic coverage of the EP elections, British newspapers covered the EP elections predominantly from a Euro-sceptic and national perspective (Bruter & Harrison, 2007; Negrine, 2006; Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, & Weaver, 1991). Similarly, the German coverage focuses mostly on the national aspects of the topics related to EP elections (Adam, 2007; Lozac'h, 2007; Tenscher, 2006; Voltmer & Eilders, 2003; Wilke & Reinemann, 2005). Results concerning the content of the French media coverage of EP elections are scarce but in general, several studies agree that in all three countries the EP elections are far less visible in the media coverage than national elections (Adam, 2007; Brettschneider & Rettich, 2005; Gerstlé et al., 2006; Odmalm, 2005, 2006).

Recent findings suggest that media attention, and thus public attention towards the EU, increased prior to the EP elections due to the economic crisis in the Euro area (Kriesi & Grande, 2014 in Hobolt, 2014). At the time of the EP election campaign the European debt crisis was one of the most salient topics and was perceived as a European issue (Cassel & Thomas, 2014; Hobolt, 2014). Additionally, Negrine (2006) argues that the professionalisation of the EP election campaign could influence the coverage positively. The nomination of Spitzenkandidaten and their subsequent campaigning contributed to the professionalisation process of EP elections, as they have done in national elections. However, it remains unclear how much this nomination affected the media coverage of the EP election campaign in general. In order to understand and evaluate the role of the Spitzenkandidaten, it is essential to consider the context in which they are discussed and thus focus on the entire coverage of the EP elections. Consequently,

the question arises of how the EP election campaign was covered in the national media in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (RQ1). The above review of similar studies demonstrates that the majority of contributions analysing the EP election campaign coverage focuses on the variables 'visibility of the campaign', 'main topics', and 'perspective of the coverage'. Thus, these three aspects are of special interest in the context of the general description of the 2014 EP election campaign.

3. Media Personalisation in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom

Definitions and operationalisations of the multifaceted construct *personalisation* vary enormously (Adam & Maier, 2010). In a very broad sense, personalisation describes an increasing focus on individual senior politicians. In the context of election campaigns, personalisation concerns three different dimensions: campaigning, voting behaviour, and coverage. The personalisation of the campaign coverage is referred to as media personalisation and describes the concentration of the election campaign coverage on the Spitzenkandidaten (Brettschneider, 2002). Media personalisation is usually studied along two dimensions: *Individualisation* describes the content-related shift from institutions/parties to persons/politicians and *Privatisation* refers to the shift of the evaluation of politicians based on political traits to non-political/private traits (Brettschneider, 2014; van Aelst, Sheaffer, & Staney, 2012). While there is common consent concerning these two dimensions, their operationalisations in empirical studies and their results vary greatly.¹

The media personalisation of EP elections has rarely been tested empirically and cross-national comparative studies of media personalisation are rare. The very few studies that analyse the coverage of candidates and politicians in the context of EP elections merely include the visibility of European actors relative to national actors. All of them came to a similar conclusion: the visibility of European actors increases over time but national actors are still reported on more frequently (Brettschneider & Rettich, 2005; Peter & de Vreese, 2004; Schuck, Xezonakis, Elenbaas, Banducci, & de Vreese, 2011; Wilke & Reinemann, 2005). Preliminary research analysing the press coverage of the 2014 EP-elections also finds an increase in the visibility of the Spitzenkandidaten over time (Gattermann, 2015).

The large number of studies analysing this phenomenon in the context of national elections allows for a comprehensive observation of certain trends and features with regards to Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. In general, French election campaign coverage

¹ A detailed discussion of the different operationalisation types is presented by Adam and Maier (2010) and van Aelst et al. (2012).

exhibits the largest degree of media personalisation (e.g. Dalton, McAllister, & Wattenberg, 2000; Kriesi, 2012). Results for British coverage are mixed, but overall a moderate degree of media personalisation is inferred (e.g. Dalton et al., 2000; Karvonen, 2010; Kriesi, 2012). Hardly any media personalisation was found in German election campaign coverage (e.g. Holtz-Bacha, Langer, & Merkle, 2014; Leidecker & Wilke, 2015; Plasser, Pallaver, & Lengauer, 2009; Zeh & Schulz, 2015). These country-specific variations can, in large part, be explained by the differences in both the political and media systems of each country (Adam & Maier, 2010; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014). Cross-national comparative studies evaluate these system-specific differences to be more relevant than transnational comparative factors such as the difference between quality and tabloid newspapers (Jebri et al., 2013; Karvonen, 2010; Kriesi, 2012; Vliegthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans, 2011). All in all, however, the majority of the latest studies analysing media personalisation conclude that the situational factors—e.g. specific candidates, campaign novelties like debates, or campaign topics—of each election matter the most (e.g. Brettschneider, 2002; Kriesi, 2012; Vliegthart et al., 2011; Zeh & Schulz, 2015). Additionally, Gattermann (2015) concludes that the political and media system related differences of these countries cannot explain the differences in the visibility of the Spitzenkandidaten.

The nomination of the Spitzenkandidaten was expected to personalise the EP election campaign, which should then increase the general interest in the EP elections and, as a consequence, boost voter turnout. Analysing the media personalisation in the context of the 2014 EP elections, therefore, offers the opportunity to evaluate and discuss the novelty of the Spitzenkandidaten and its implications. Considering the pan-European character of the Spitzenkandidaten, their campaign, and novel campaign events like the TV debates as well as the

general increase of voter participation in the three countries, cross-national similarities in the coverage can be assumed. On the other hand, reasons for possible country-related differences need to be taken into account like the differing campaign efforts of the Spitzenkandidaten, the prominence and visibility of the candidates in each country prior to the EP elections, or the large-scale country-specific differences of the EP election campaign coverage measured in previous research. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the similarities and differences concerning the visibility and personalisation of the Spitzenkandidaten in the EP election campaign coverage in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom (RQ2).

4. Methodology

In order to analyse the coverage of the EP elections and the pan-European Spitzenkandidaten, data was collected via a quantitative content analysis of the national daily press coverage in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom.² To approximately represent the wide array of the newspaper landscape for each country three different national daily newspapers were subject to coding: Two quality newspapers, one from each political leaning (simplified) and one tabloid³ (see Table 1). Each of these newspapers exhibits the highest circulation numbers in its category and can thus be assumed to hold a central opinion and discourse-leading position in its country.

Since the EP elections receive comparatively little media attention and also bearing in mind the campaign activities of the Spitzenkandidaten, this study focuses solely on the final weeks of the election campaign. During this period, the EP election and the commission candidates are expected to receive the most extensive media attention. In order to facilitate comparability to studies with a similar research interest, the sample period was set to three weeks prior to the elections (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014; Schuck, Xezonakis et al., 2011;

Table 1. Newspapers per country selected for analysis.

Newspaper	Country	Political Leaning	Tabloid
Sueddeutsche Zeitung	Germany	Left	No
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	Germany	Right	No
Bild	Germany	Right	Yes
The Guardian	United Kingdom	Left	No
The Daily Telegraph	United Kingdom	Right	No
The Sun	United Kingdom	Right	Yes
Le Monde	France	Left	No
Le Figaro	France	Right	No
Le Parisien/Aujourd'hui en France	France	Right	Yes

² Though television is usually reported to be the most important source of information for election news (Plasser et al., 2009), newspaper coverage was selected as the most suitable medium for analysis. Compared to TV it can be used for a more conservative test of media personalisation and research found no significant differences concerning the visibility in newspaper and TV

coverage (Boomgaarden et al., 2013; Mughan, 2000).

³ There is no exact tabloid counterpart to Bild and The Sun in France. Le Parisien/Aujourd'hui en France however is characterised by simplified and image-intensive reporting and, therefore, best suited for the comparison (Leidenberger & Koch, 2008).

Strömbäck et al., 2011). The election dates, however, differed from country to country which is why the exact sample periods had to be adapted accordingly: articles from British newspapers were published in the period of May 1 to May 21, while the French and German articles were published between May 5 and May 24.

The unit of analysis was, therefore, each article (headline and text) discussing the Spitzenkandidaten or the 2014 EP elections published in the printed edition of the selected newspapers during the three weeks prior to the elections. However, each article mentioning one or several of the Spitzenkandidaten also referred to the EP elections in general. The articles were obtained through the online databases Factiva and Nexis, as well as from the online archive of the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. After disregarding redundant and irrelevant articles, 532 articles underwent the entire coding procedure.

The cross-national comparative research design offers the possibility of a broader perspective and thus a deeper approach to the results' discussion and empirical insights. However, compared to single-case studies, comparative studies are concerned with one particular methodological challenge crucial to the reliability and validity of the research undertaking: equivalence. To discuss equivalence is to ensure the adequate comparability of the results in the differing systems and to avoid methodological artefacts (Vliegenthart, 2012; Wirth & Kolb, 2012). While there are several statistical means to test the quality of cross-national surveys computationally, there are none suited for this content analysis (Rössler, 2012). But each step of the research process has been carefully evaluated with respect to the equivalence criteria. Thus, equivalence can be assumed.

4.1. Operationalisation and Codebook

The article analysis is based on a detailed codebook consisting of formal and content-related categories. The formal categories allowed the correct allocation of each article as well as a general description of the coverage and included the variables: *country*, *newspaper*, *date*, *page number*, and *article length*. The content-related variables are divided into two sub-categories: the EP election campaign coverage in general and the media personalisation of the Spitzenkandidaten in particular.

Referring to RQ1, the EP election coverage is described on the basis of the variables *visibility*, *topic*, and *perspective*. The *visibility* is understood as the number of articles referring to the EP elections. For each article a maximum of three topics (one main topic and two additional topics) can be coded. The order of coding follows a hierarchical approach: thus there are three main

attributes—'Politics in general', 'EP Elections' and 'People'—with each four to eight different sub-attributes based on similar studies from Wilke and Reinemann (2005) and Kalantzi (2004), as well as the PIREDEU-codebook (Schuck, Xezonakis, Banducci, & de Vreese, 2010). The *perspective* further describes the main topic explaining from which viewpoint the respective topic was discussed and comprises the attributes 'EU perspective', 'national perspective', and 'external perspective'. The last two attributes may differ depending on the country in which the article has been published. For example, an article published in a British newspaper discussing the main topic with relation to its consequences for the UK would be coded as 'national perspective'. On the other hand, an article in a French newspaper presenting the main topic strictly referring to Germany is to be coded as 'external perspective'.

Since media personalisation is a multi-dimensional construct, personalisation is measured based on several categories. In order to generally understand the presence of the Spitzenkandidaten in the coverage, *visibility* measures the frequency of the articles mentioning their names and is therefore counted for each article. Repeated mentions of the same actor within one article are not counted. With respect to the theoretical definition, the two main categories to analyse the media personalisation are *individualisation* (from institution/parties to persons/politicians) and *privatisation* (from political traits to non-political/private traits). Individualisation is measured via the variable *focus* that analyses the actor at the centre of each article with respect to the attributes 'national parties', 'EU parties/factions', 'Spitzenkandidaten', 'other EU politicians', 'national politicians', and 'international politicians'. Privatisation comprises the categories *characteristics* and *personal life*. The coding scheme for both categories are based on the suggestions of van Aelst et al. (2012, p. 219f), and were slightly amended and translated. The attributes for *characteristics* include 'competence', 'leadership', 'credibility', 'morality', 'appearance', and 'rhetorical skills'. For each attribute it was coded if the characteristic was mentioned with relation to the political or personal context of the Spitzenkandidat. The category *personal life* entails the attributes 'family life', 'past life', 'leisure time', and 'love life'.

Referring to the equivalence criteria, the codebook and the whole coding process relied on one common reference language: German. Thus, the coders, one per country, were German native speakers with excellent foreign language skills. They underwent extensive multi-level coder training that resulted in satisfactory reliability values.⁴

⁴ Formal categories: Krippendorff's alpha= 1 both for intercoder and researcher coder reliability. Content related categories: Krippendorff's alpha for topic= 0.7, perspective= 0.7, visibility= 1, focus= 0.7, politicians & parties= 0.9, characteristics= 0.8, private

life= 1 for intercoder reliability. Krippendorff's alpha for topic= 0.7, perspective= 0.7, visibility= 1, focus= 0.7, politicians & parties= 0.9, characteristics= 0.9, private life= 1 for researcher coder reliability.

5. Results

5.1. Newspaper Coverage of the 2014 EP Election

5.1.1. Visibility

Altogether, the EP elections were mentioned in 532 articles in the course of the three weeks prior to the day of the election. Since Sundays were excluded from this analysis, this amounts to an average of 3.3 articles per day per newspaper. However, a more detailed analysis in Figure 1 reveals country- and media-specific differences. The French newspapers discussed the EP elections most frequently (FR: 222 articles), closely followed by the German newspapers (DE: 193 articles). Substantially less attention was given by the British newspapers (UK: 117 articles). Comparing media-related differences, it becomes obvious that the EP elections are far more visible in the quality press than in the tabloids.

The analysis of the article count over time shows that the daily amount of articles is subject to large fluctuations, though the daily amount of articles follows a similar shape in all three countries. While there are several peaks, which might be the result of similar Europe-wide campaign events, there is a steady increase in coverage depth. Especially during the last eight to five days before the election the interest of the media in terms of article numbers increases markedly due to the proximity of the event.

5.1.2. Topic and Perspective

The broad analysis of the main topic shows that the EP elections are the central aspect of more than half of the articles (53%), while a third of the articles refer to politics in general (34%) and 12% of the articles portray one person or several people. Table 2 presents the in-depth analysis of the main topic for the entire sample and each country separately. Looking in detail, the EP elections are primarily discussed in relation to the topics ‘EP election campaign, campaigning and TV debates’ and ‘Euroscepticism’. The country-specific analysis shows varying thematic foci: The British coverage primarily focuses on issues related to ‘domestic politics & administration’ as well as the ‘EP election campaign’. The German coverage is, with the exception of the ‘EP election campaign’, relatively balanced and multifaceted. The main topics of the French coverage differ clearly from the other two countries: while ‘domestic politics’ is rarely reported, ‘economy & finance’ appears to be the most important issue—even trumping the election campaign itself while ‘Euroscepticism’ and ‘politicians’ profiles’ are of relatively exceptional relevance in the French newspapers.

The perspective of the article refers to the viewpoint from which the main topic is discussed. Table 3 points out the country-specific differences concerning the choice of perspective for the discussion of each broad category of the main topic and thus how often each main topic is

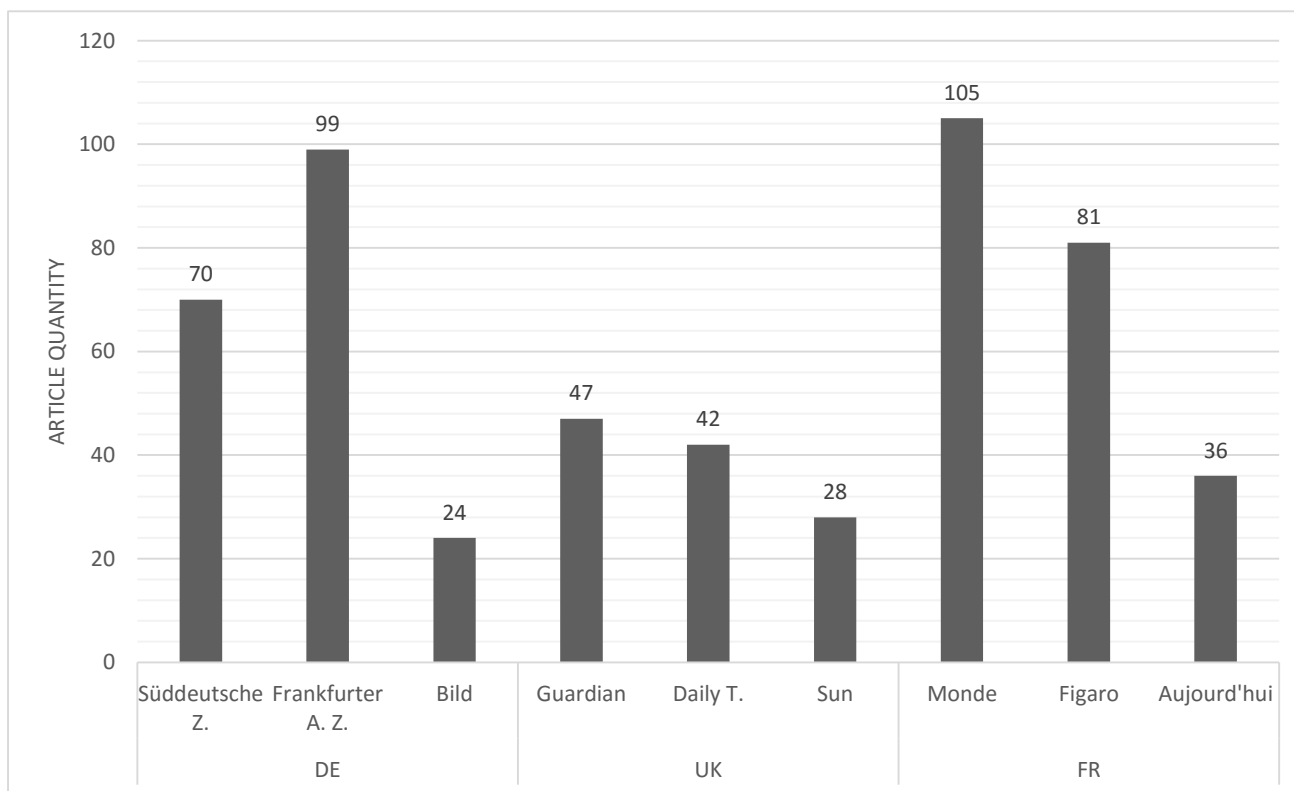


Figure 1. Quantity of articles per newspaper and country (N= 532).

Table 2. The main topics in total and per country in %.

Main Topic	Total	DE	UK	FR
EP election campaign	24.4	28.5	33.3	16.2
Economy & finance	11.7	7.8	6.0	18.0
Domestic politics & administration	10.2	9.3	24.8	3.2
Profiles of politicians	8.3	6.2	2.6	13.1
Euroscepticism	5.8	3.1	2.6	9.9
Foreign politics	5.5	6.2	2.6	6.3
Polls	4.9	3.6	4.3	6.3

Note: Per article one main topic was coded; topics that were only present in less than 5 % of the articles within each group are not listed due to their lack of relevance; n(DE)= 125; n(UK)= 104; n(FR)= 109; N= 532.

Table 3. Perspective of the main topic in %.

Topics	EU-perspective			National perspective			External perspective		
	DE	UK	FR	DE	UK	FR	DE	UK	FR
Politics in general	40.3	10.6	39.4	30.6	85.1	45.1	25.8	4.3	15.5
EP elections	32.4	9.5	25.7	33.3	85.7	60.2	34.3	3.2	14.2
People	47.6	-	2.6	33.3	85.7	71.1	19.0	14.3	26.3
Total	37.3	9.4	26.1	32.1	85.5	57.2	29.5	4.3	16.7

Note: The reference point concerning ‘national’ and ‘external’ varies with regard to each country; in 0,6 % of the articles the perspective was ambivalent; each topic per country adds up to 100%; n(DE)= 125; n(UK)= 104; n(FR)= 109; N= 532.

discussed from which perspective in each country. The German coverage is, in general, quite balanced measured against the perspective from which the topics are discussed. However, the EU-perspective prevails minimally. The British coverage on the other hand shows the strongest national focus and rarely discusses topics from a different angle. French newspapers also reflect the topics from a national perspective more frequently; only a fourth of the articles assumed the perspective of the EU and its institutions. Additionally, the media-specific differences are quite distinct: though following the country’s generally preferred perspective, in all countries the tabloids discuss the main topics much more frequently from a national perspective than the quality newspapers.

5.2. Newspaper Coverage of the Spitzenkandidaten

5.2.1. Visibility of the Spitzenkandidaten

A minority of articles referring to the EP elections mention one of the Spitzenkandidaten (21.1%). The country-specific differences are nevertheless pronounced: while the British coverage barely mentions the candidates at all (2.6%), around a fifth of the French articles about the EP elections (18%) names them, and the German coverage discusses them most frequently (35.8%). Figure 2 visualises the country- and media-specific differences. The tabloids present the Spitzenkandidaten substantially less frequently than the quality newspapers.

In general, the Spitzenkandidaten are not very visible in the newspaper coverage prior to the EP elections. The entire EP election campaign coverage contains 193

candidate mentions. Schulz (n= 86; 16.2%) and Juncker (n= 66; 12.4%) are mentioned most frequently across all countries. Verhofstadt (n= 21; 3.9%) and Tsipras (n= 15; 2.8%) receive considerably less mentions while Keller is virtually invisible (n= 5; 0.9%). With respect to country-specific differences, it becomes apparent that the German media predominantly focuses on Schulz and Juncker while the candidates of the smaller factions are scarcely mentioned. The French coverage on the other hand, while also mentioning Schulz and Juncker more frequently, discusses the candidates of the smaller factions more prominently and presents a broader and more balanced coverage of the Spitzenkandidaten than the German newspapers.

5.2.2. Individualisation

Individualisation describes the shift of media attention from parties to politicians. It is measured via the variable *focus* that analyses the main actors of the coverage. Table 4 highlights the percentile frequency of the main actors for each country and the entire sample with respect to parties and politicians in general as well as in greater detail. In general, politicians were more frequently at the centre of the coverage than parties. The French coverage displays the highest ratio of politician to party-focus—politicians, then, function as the central actors more than twice as frequently as parties. The British newspapers also focus predominantly on politicians, though a little less so than the French. While still focusing on politicians as well, German newspapers present the lowest degree of individualisation.

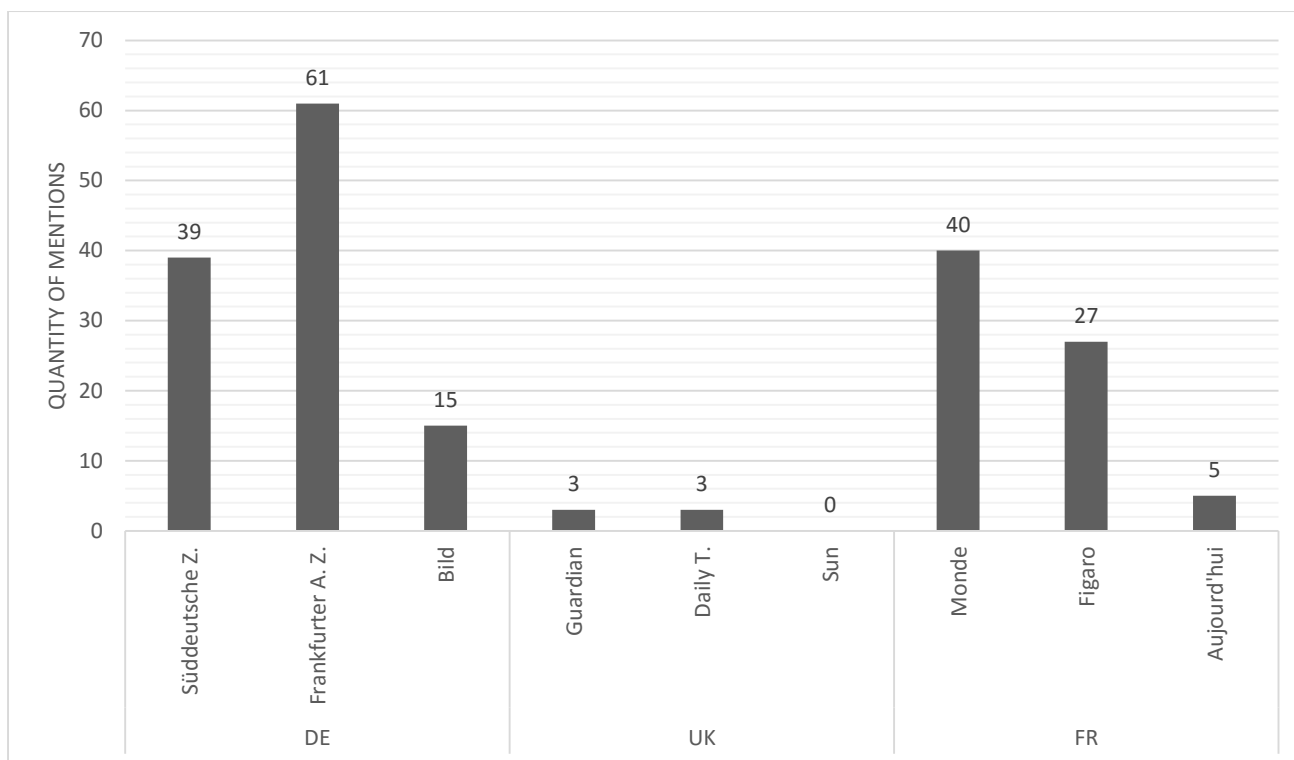


Figure 2. Visibility of the Spitzenkandidaten per newspaper and per country (N= 532).

Table 4. Main actor (focus) in %.

Main actor (focus)	Total	DE	UK	FR
National parties	22.2	24.9	30.8	15.3
EU-parties	0.8	1.0	1.7	0.0
Total parties	23.0	25.9	32.5	15.3
Spitzenkandidaten	7.5	16.6	0.0	3.6
Other EU-politicians	12.4	9.3	23.9	9.0
National politicians	15.0	5.7	30.8	14.9
International politicians	5.6	7.3	1.7	6.3
Total politicians	40.5	38.9	56.4	33.8

Note: The reference point concerning 'national' and 'international' varies with regard to each country; n(DE)= 125; n(UK)= 104; n(FR)= 109; N= 532.

Concerning the relevance of the Spitzenkandidaten, the analysis of the focus supports the previous findings: the British coverage did not put any Spitzenkandidat at the centre of any article but instead covered other EU and national politicians in depth. The French newspapers discussed the actions of a few of them in greater detail but, similarly to the United Kingdom, preferred to present other EU and national politicians. The German coverage emphasised the Spitzenkandidaten the most. All in all, in comparison to the parties, the Spitzenkandidaten are barely visible.

5.2.3. Privatisation

Privatisation refers to the characteristics (political vs. personal) and the private life of the Spitzenkandidaten. About half of all articles mentioning a candidate discussed

certain political and personal characteristics of each one (68 articles). The German coverage comprises the vast majority of these character references (153), the French considerably less (92), and the British newspapers almost none (11). In relation to the amount of candidate mentions, however, the British newspapers covered characteristics more frequently than the other two countries.

The 256 different character references predominantly involved the characteristics 'competence' (65) and 'leadership' (68). The majority of the references showed characteristics with respect to the political arena of the candidate. Only five character references involved their private lives. Concerning the different candidates, Schulz's (103), and Juncker's (103) character traits were covered most frequently (see Figure 3). A particular emphasis on one certain character trait of a particular candidate cannot be found.

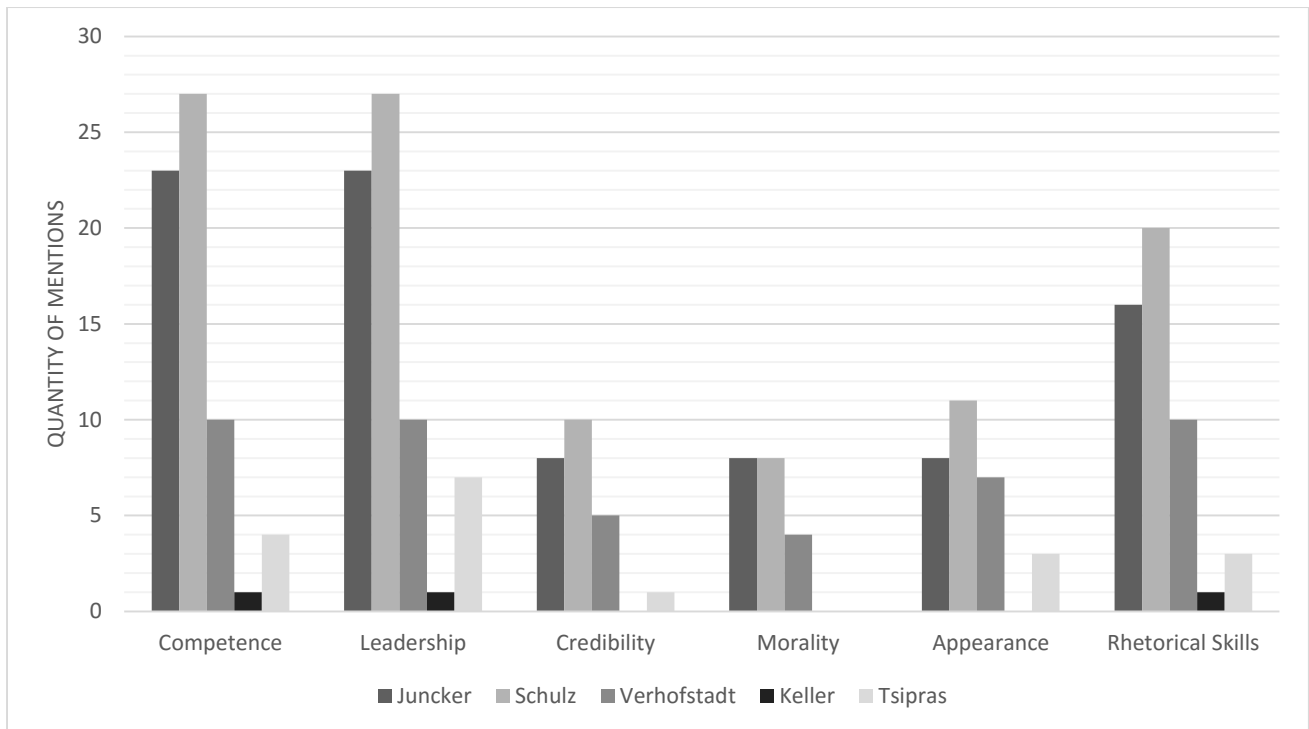


Figure 3. Characteristics per Spitzenkandidat (N= 532).

The private lives of the Spitzenkandidaten were barely covered by the newspapers. Altogether only seven articles included one or more references to a candidate’s private life (eleven in total). Thus, only 1.3% of the articles portrayed private aspects of the Spitzenkandidaten. The majority of the mentions referred to biographical details while their love life was not discussed at all.

6. Discussion

The analysis of the EP election campaign coverage across three countries portrays a highly diverse picture. The general amount of articles discussing the EP elections and thus, the visibility of the campaign, appears to adequately fulfil the task of informing and mobilising the voter. Although this analysis does not offer precise empirical substantiation in the form of time-series data for this assumption, compared to previous studies the general media attention towards the EP election seems to have increased (Peter, 2004; Strömbäck et al., 2011). This result would be consistent with various other studies that found an increase in the media coverage of EP elections (Boomgaarden et al., 2010; de Vreese et al., 2006; Schuck, Azrout et al., 2011; Schuck, Xezonakis et al., 2011; Vliegenthart et al., 2008). Concerning the detailed analysis of the content related categories topic and the perspective, this study’s results are highly similar to those of analyses of previous EP election campaigns. This shows that the presence of the Spitzenkandidaten hardly affected the way the national media cover the EP election campaigns in general. As in previous studies, large-scale country-related differences in

the media coverage of the EP elections were found (e.g. Peter, Lauf, & Semetko, 2004; Schuck, Azrout et al., 2011; Strömbäck et al., 2011). German coverage appears the most Europhile: The EP election campaign is quite visible not only with respect to the amount of articles that cover it but also in relation to the main topic focusing on the campaign itself. The majority of the issues are discussed from a European perspective. This result is the only one that is different from previous studies, which have found the German coverage to predominantly discuss the national perspective (e.g. Adam, 2007; Lozac’h, 2007; Tenscher, 2006; Voltmer & Eilders, 2003). French newspapers reported most frequently about the EP elections with respect to the amount of articles. Nevertheless, economy and finance were covered more often than the EP elections, and also Euroscepticism seemed to be an important topic of the public debate. While in general most articles were discussed from the national viewpoint, finance was equally covered from the national and EU perspective. It can therefore be assumed that the European debt crisis was of central concern, which previous studies found to positively influence the media attention towards the EU (Kriesi & Grande, 2014 in Hobolt, 2014). British newspapers covered the EP elections far less frequently than the German and French media and, similarly to the French coverage, almost all topics were debated from a national perspective. The majority of those country-related differences could be explained by the general attitude of the respective country’s public towards the European Union, with the Germans supporting their EU membership the most and the British people the least

(Bruter & Harrison, 2007; Lozac'h, 2007; Negrine, 2006).

Compared to the overall visibility of the EP election campaign in the coverage as well as the usual role of senior candidates during national elections, the Spitzenkandidaten appeared more as a side issue than as the centre of media attention. While British newspapers hardly covered the Spitzenkandidaten at all, French and German media paid a far higher amount of attention to the Spitzenkandidaten, which, however, was still low compared to national elections. Possible explanations for this could be again the attitude towards the EU membership but also the campaign efforts of the Spitzenkandidaten who focused especially on France and Germany while neglecting the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the German and French coverage predominantly focused on Schulz and Juncker, the candidates of the two main political groups in the European Parliament. It seems that the media embraced those candidates who were most likely to become the next president of the European Commission. Additionally, the position of Schulz as President of the EP explains why he was covered slightly more frequently than Juncker who was less visible as chairman of the Eurogroup. German newspapers in particular emphasised these candidates at the expense of candidates from the smaller parties who were barely mentioned, while the French coverage, by contrast, reported in a slightly more balanced manner and referred to the candidates of the smaller parties more frequently. This is especially surprising with respect to Ska Keller, a German politician who against all odds was more visible in the French than the German coverage. However, this result is in line with previous research of German election news coverage that regularly demonstrates a strong incumbent bonus, due to its relevance also referred to as *chancellor bonus* (Zeh & Schulz, 2015).

Nevertheless, in all three countries, the campaign coverage of the Spitzenkandidaten can hardly be understood as personalised with respect to the Spitzenkandidaten. Despite different findings from previous personalisation research, in this study the German coverage displays the highest degree of media personalisation concerning the Spitzenkandidaten (e.g. Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014). This indicates that the country-specific differences in media personalisation with respect to the Spitzenkandidaten can barely be explained by the factors that are usually used for comparing media personalisation in the context of national elections. The political and media system-related differences in personalisation are not reflected in the coverage of the Spitzenkandidaten (Adam & Maier, 2010; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014; Gattermann, 2015). Moreover, the degree of personalisation appears to be directly related to the number of candidate mentions as well as the preferred perspective for the EP election campaign coverage. The German coverage, which contained the most candidate references, also reported

most frequently from a European perspective. The British coverage, on the other hand, hardly mentioned the Spitzenkandidaten and discussed the main topics predominantly from a national perspective. These differences may possibly be explained by the general attitude of each country towards the EU in general or the European elections in particular and by the number of candidate's campaigning visits in different European countries.

7. Conclusions

At first glance, the 2014 Elections to the European Parliament differed greatly from all previous EP elections. For the first time, pan-European Spitzenkandidaten were nominated and were expected to raise the general interest in EP elections and mobilise European voters. Based on this development, this study analysed the media coverage of the EP elections in general and specifically with respect to the coverage of Spitzenkandidaten in Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. Altogether, the results demonstrate an adequate visibility of the 2014 EP election campaign in the newspaper coverage. Still, compared to the visibility of the EP election campaign in general, only a relatively small amount of the coverage discussed the Spitzenkandidaten and, compared to the usual amount of media personalisation during national elections, the coverage does not display personalising effects. This leads to the conclusion that the high expectations connected to their nomination were not reflected in the media coverage of them. However, one can hypothesise that the presence of the Spitzenkandidaten may have contributed indirectly to an increase in media attention towards the EP elections since the novelty of their nomination and campaign activities within the EP elections process raised the approximate number of topics relevant to the electorate and the media, and consequently, the general relevance of the EP elections. Furthermore, expecting an electoral procedure as complex and diverse as the one represented by the EP elections, encompassing voters from 28 member states, to change in the course of just one election appears overly ambitious. It might be too early, therefore, for an extensive evaluation of the effect of the Spitzenkandidaten at this point in time, which is why these developments will have to be monitored closely during future elections.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author



Heidi Schulze

Heidi Schulze is a research assistant and PhD candidate with the European Data Laboratory for Comparative Social Research (EUROLAB) at GESIS—Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences in Cologne, Germany. Her research interests include political & risk communication, public opinion, opinion-forming processes in online environments, and computational social sciences.

Article

Evaluations of the *Spitzenkandidaten*: The Role of Information and News Exposure in Citizens' Preference Formation

Katjana Gattermann^{1,2,*}, Claes H. de Vreese¹ and Wouter van der Brug³

¹ Amsterdam School of Communication Research, University of Amsterdam, 1018 WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands;
E-Mail: k.gattermann@uva.nl (K.G.), C.H.deVreese@uva.nl (C.H.V.)

² Amsterdam Centre for Contemporary European Studies, University of Amsterdam, 1018 WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands

³ Department of Political Science, University of Amsterdam, 1018 WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands;
E-Mail: W.vanderBrug@uva.nl

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections were characterised by a novel element in European Union (EU) politics. For the first time, the major European party families put forward top candidates for President of the European Commission, the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten*. This paper tests whether this innovation had the potential to—at least partially—alleviate the alleged accountability deficit. We rely on original survey data to assess citizens' preferences for each of the main *Spitzenkandidaten*: Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz, and Guy Verhofstadt. Our research is guided by three questions: what explains whether citizens formulate a preference for a certain *Spitzenkandidat*? Which factors are responsible for variations in such preferences? And, are these explanations moderated by citizens' political awareness? We show that three factors enable citizens to formulate a preference for the *Spitzenkandidaten*: news exposure, general EU political information, and campaign-specific information about the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Furthermore, we demonstrate that only the most knowledgeable citizens are able to use party cues in their evaluations of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. The implications of our findings are discussed with reference to the EU's democratic deficit debate.

Keywords

candidate evaluations; European Parliament elections; European Union politics; personalization of politics; political behaviour

Issue

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1. Introduction

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections brought about a novelty: the major European party families nominated top candidates for President of the European Commission, the so-called *Spitzenkandidaten*. Up until then, the European Council nominated candidates for Commission President. By making the Presidency dependent on the outcome of the elections, executive

power was—indirectly—at stake. We explore fundamental questions relating to this novelty: first, what explains whether citizens formulate a preference for a *Spitzenkandidat*? Second, which factors are responsible for variations in such preferences? And third, are these explanations moderated by citizens' political awareness?

We situate our study in extant research on EP elections. This literature traditionally characterises these elections as being second-order *national* elections,

which tend to be dominated by domestic politics. Compared to national elections, they display more signs of sincere voting and provide more opportunity to express discontent because no executive power has been at stake thus far. As a consequence, turnout is generally lower than in national elections, smaller and opposition parties tend to gain votes at the expense of government and larger parties, and radical, often Eurosceptic parties at the left and right ends of the spectrum do relatively well (e.g., Hix & Marsh, 2011; Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Van der Eijk, Franklin, & Marsh, 1996).¹

In an attempt to change the ‘second-order nature’ of EP elections, the novel *Spitzenkandidat* element was introduced in 2014. Moreover, it sought to address concerns about the EU’s democratic deficit which, among other things, has thus far been reflected in the lack of opportunities for citizens to determine the composition of the EU executive (Føllesdal & Hix, 2006). Hobolt and Tilley (2014) argue further that the EU suffers from an accountability deficit because citizens are not provided with sufficient information and opportunity to hold EU politicians accountable in EP elections. The *Spitzenkandidaten* campaigns had the potential to change this lack of information available to EU citizens because by nominating top candidates, the EP political groups sought to raise the awareness of and interest in the elections among European citizens².

Most of the embryonic research on the role of *Spitzenkandidaten* has focused on the question whether and how their campaigns influenced citizens’ interest in the EU elections (e.g., Hobolt, 2014), whether it motivated people to participate in those elections (Schmitt, Hobolt, & Popa, 2015), and how their participation in televised debates influenced attitudes towards the EU (Maier, Rittberger, & Faas, 2016). Our study contributes to this field by focusing on the relationship between political information and attitudes towards *Spitzenkandidaten*. Our study differs fundamentally from the other studies, in the sense that attitudes towards these *Spitzenkandidaten* represent the explanandum; in particular we explore citizens’ preferences with regard to the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

To do this, we rely on original survey data as part of a four-wave online panel study conducted in the Netherlands in the context of the EP elections (De Vreese, Azrout, & Möller, 2014). In the third wave of the panel survey, which was fielded in April 2014, i.e. one month prior to Election Day, we asked respondents to indicate their preferences for the three main *Spitzenkandi-*

daten, Guy Verhofstadt, Martin Schulz, and Jean-Claude Juncker.³ Our research is guided by three questions: first, what explains whether citizens formulate a preference for a certain *Spitzenkandidat*? Second, which factors are responsible for variations in such preferences? And, third, to what extent are the effects of these different factors moderated by political awareness, which Zaller (1992, p. 21) defines as ‘the extent to which an individual pays attention to politics *and* understands what he or she has encountered’ (emphasis in the original). Our results show that news exposure as well as having general EU political information and campaign-specific information about the *Spitzenkandidaten* are important pre-conditions for citizens to formulate a preference for each of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Moreover, knowledgeable citizens are able to use left/right and national party preferences as ‘cues’ to form their attitudes towards the specific candidates. These findings have important theoretical and political implications which we discuss in the conclusion.

2. Expressing Preferences for *Spitzenkandidaten*

Political awareness is likely to represent a crucial precondition enabling citizens to express their preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Zaller (1992, p. 21) argues that news exposure is important, but not sufficient for voters to formulate opinions. Citizens also need to have factual information at hand in order to make an informed choice at the polls. In the following discussion, we thus distinguish between news exposure and the extent to which citizens have political information about the EU, and the *Spitzenkandidaten* in particular.

Existing research has shown that information about the EU, its institutions and politicians is widely available to citizens. News coverage during EP election campaigns has become more comprehensive in recent years (Boomgaarden & De Vreese, 2016; De Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, & Boomgaarden, 2006; Schuck, Xezonakis, Elenbaas, Banducci, & De Vreese, 2011) and the EP as well as individual members (MEPs) receive regular broadsheet coverage during non-election times (Gattermann, 2013; Gattermann & Vasilopoulou, 2015). Furthermore, research on the personalization of politics suggests that individual politicians (e.g., Langer, 2007; Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007) and leaders in particular (e.g., Boumans, Boomgaarden, & Vliegthart, 2013) receive increasingly more news attention at the ex-

¹ However, research on individual-level voter behaviour also suggests that strategic considerations play a role as well (e.g., Boomgaarden, Johann, & Kritzinger, 2016; Carrubba & Timponi, 2005; Clark & Rohrschneider, 2009; Giebler & Wagner, 2015).

² See the EP’s resolution of 22 November 2012 (2012/2829 (RSP)).

³ Former Belgian Prime Minister Verhofstadt was put forward by the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) on February 1, 2014; the incumbent EP President and German politician Schulz was chosen by the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) as their main contender on March 1, 2014; and Juncker, former Prime Minister of Luxembourg and former President of the Eurogroup, was nominated by the European People’s Party (EPP) on March 7, 2014 (see also Put, Van Hecke, Cunningham, & Wolfs, 2016).

pense of political parties and institutions. We still know little about such trends in EU politics (Gattermann, 2015), however, we may expect that the personalization of the EP election campaign would generate more media attention (e.g., see Schulze, 2016), especially since the *Spitzenkandidaten* had ‘substantial presence on the ground’ through their direct campaigns across Europe (Schmitt et al., 2015, p. 351) and their participation in several pan-European televised debates.

Survey research has shown that news exposure can have positive effects on the intentions to turn out to vote (e.g., Aarts & Semetko, 2003; De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; De Vreese & Tobiasen, 2007; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010; Schuck, Vliedenthart, & De Vreese, 2016). We consider two interrelated ways in which news exposure affects turnout. First, media attention would increase citizens’ perceptions that there is something important at stake, and secondly, news exposure informs people about what is at stake. To the extent that this second mechanism applies, we would expect that those citizens who are regularly exposed to news coverage will be better able to express a preference for a certain *Spitzenkandidat*.

Some argue that these effects would be conditional upon the type of content. Aarts and Semetko (2003), for instance, show that exposure to public television had a positive effect on an individual’s decision to participate in general elections, while private television caused negative effects. Similarly, De Vreese and Tobiasen (2007) find that newspaper reading and watching news on public television programmes increased the likelihood of voters to turn out in the 2004 EP elections. Other research suggests that soft-news and non-quality outlets may also increase awareness, such as knowledge about 2004 US primary campaigns, which was positively influenced by exposure to US Democratic candidates’ appearances in late-night programmes and comedy shows (Brewer & Cao, 2006). During the 2009 EU elections, Banducci, Giebler and Kritzing (2015) even found that exposure to non-quality news content had a stronger relationship with knowledge about party positions in EU elections than exposure to quality news. This is slightly surprising because research has shown that during EP elections European affairs are more visible in quality media compared to non-quality outlets (e.g., De Vreese et al., 2006). Conversely, non-quality outlets are more likely to present news in terms of personalization, that is to say, shifting away from issues to individuals, as it goes hand in hand with the news value of human interest. Jebil, Albæk and De Vreese (2013) indeed found that exposure to personalization content has a negative effect on political cynicism, albeit only for those who are generally less interested in politics. We thus expect that news exposure to both quality and non-quality news content has a significant, positive effect on the preference for a *Spitzenkandidat*.

H1a: The higher their news exposure, the more likely citizens are to formulate a preference for the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

However, exposure to information does not necessarily infer that citizens are fully aware of that information. They also have to process the information that is available to them. We apply the definition of political awareness by Zaller (1992, p 21) and consider knowledge as an indicator of having factual information. In line with much of the extant literature, we distinguish between *general* political information and *campaign-specific* information (e.g., Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994; Converse, 1962; Nadeau, Nevitte, Gidengil, & Blais, 2008). General political information can be understood as information that has been available prior to the election campaigns, such as general differences between political parties, whereas campaign-specific information relates to the candidates themselves and their different policy positions (Chaffee et al., 1994, p. 306).⁴

Political information is also relevant for electoral decisions. Nadeau et al. (2008) show that those with high levels of general information are less likely to change their vote choice over the course of the campaigns, while campaign-specific information increases the likelihood of volatility. In the EU context, information is also key to opinion formation and vote choice. Elenbaas, De Vreese, Boomgaarden and Schuck (2012) show that utilitarian performance judgements are positively influenced by acquisition of performance-specific information, while general political knowledge does not play a direct role. Regarding voter behaviour in EU elections, De Vries, Van der Brug, Van Egmond and Van der Eijk (2011) find that general political knowledge positively affects EU issue voting, that is, the extent to which vote choice is being influenced by attitudes towards EU integration (De Vries, 2007).

EU politics are quite complex and do not necessarily resemble political processes in the domestic political system with which citizens are more familiar. This complexity is also apparent in the *Spitzenkandidaten* nomination: it was not clear during the campaigns whether and how the election outcome would translate into a position in the executive office. General information about EU politics is thus likely to be imperative for the ability of citizens to formulate preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

H1b: The more comprehensive their general political information about the EU, the more likely are citizens to formulate preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

⁴ These two types of information correlate highly; those who have high levels of general political information available are also more likely to have more campaign-specific information at hand (e.g., Converse, 1962, p. 586).

Turning to campaign-specific information, Gelman and King (1993) as well as Arcenau (2006) argue that campaigns enable voters, through learning, to form ‘enlightened preferences’ for parties or candidates. Evidence suggests that this is also case for EU elections and referendums. Although De Vries et al. (2011) do not specifically test the effects of campaign-specific information at the individual level, they find that the context of higher media attention towards the EU and more party contestation during the elections increases the extent of EU issue voting. Furthermore, Hobolt and Wittrock (2011) show that voters with additional information about the EU positions of parties are more likely to base their vote choice on their preferences for EU integration (see also Hobolt, 2007).

With particular view to the *Spitzenkandidaten* nomination, the difficulty for voters lay in linking the candidates with those national parties that indirectly supported the lead candidate. In European elections, voters are unable to vote for a European party group directly, but elect representatives of national parties. In other words, Dutch voters were required to understand that a vote for the Christian Democrats (CDA) means an indirect support for the EPP and therewith also their lead candidate Jean-Claude Juncker. We may thus also expect that campaign-specific information qualifies citizens to formulate a preference for a *Spitzenkandidat*. Conversely, those who only have very little or no information are unlikely to be able to formulate a preference since they are unlikely to have made the connection between their vote for a national party and the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

H1c: Citizens are more likely to formulate a preference for the *Spitzenkandidaten*, the more campaign-specific information they have about them.

3. Explaining Variations in Preferences for *Spitzenkandidaten*

Having discussed our hypotheses regarding the first main question—what explains whether citizens formulate preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*—we now turn to the question what explains variations in such perceptions. Why would someone have a high preference for Schulz and dislike Verhofstadt? To answer this question, it is important to realize that at the start of the campaign the *Spitzenkandidaten* were hardly known outside their home countries. This raises the question, on what basis can citizens form their judgments of candidates for whom they know very little?

The relevant literature on voting behaviour shows that voters who lack ‘encyclopaedic’ information about parties or candidates can often make use of ‘cues’, or ‘information shortcuts’, which help them form their political preferences (e.g., Lupia, 1994; Toka, 2008).

Electoral research since the 1950s has repeatedly demonstrated that most voters have limited political knowledge (e.g., Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Yet, even those with limited knowledge are often able to make a reasoned choice if they use the little information that they have in a smart way (e.g., Popkin, 1991; Sniderman, 2000; Van der Brug, 1999), though the choices derived from these cues may often be suboptimal (e.g., Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). In the absence of concrete knowledge about the issue positions of parties, citizens often rely on more general information they have about these parties, such as their left-right positions (e.g., Downs, 1957; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996). Other important heuristics that have been identified are partisan information (e.g., Hobolt, 2007), campaign events (Lodge, Steenbergen, & Brau, 1995), and perceptions of corruption (Toka, 2008).

In the context of EP elections it has been well established that voters, lacking information about European affairs, often take cues from national politics (Anderson, 1998). This is so frequent that European elections have even been labelled second-order national elections (e.g., Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999; Van der Brug & Van der Eijk, 2007). There are various cues that voters can take from national politics, such as their satisfaction with the incumbent parties, scandals, economic developments, evaluations of party leaders, preferences for national parties, or ideological similarities. In this paper we focus only on these latter two aspects: national party preferences and ideological distance.

If voters have little information about the *Spitzenkandidaten*, we believe it makes sense for them to rely on these two cues. A Dutch person with a strong preference for the national CDA could use this as a cue to evaluate Juncker of the EPP. If she dislikes the Dutch Social Democrats (PvdA), she could equally use this as a cue to derive a less positive evaluation of the social democratic *Spitzenkandidat* Schulz. Another cue that voters can use to evaluate the *Spitzenkandidaten* would be through the lens of ideology. If someone is left-leaning and thus perceives himself to be ideologically close to the PvdA and far from the VVD (liberals), he might use this as a heuristic to evaluate Schulz more positively than Verhofstadt. We derive the following two hypotheses:

H2a: National party preferences will positively affect the preferences of the *Spitzenkandidat* of the affiliated party group.

H3a: Ideological distances to the affiliated national party will have a negative effect on preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

However, the extent to which voters are able to use these national party preferences as a heuristic from

which to derive information about the candidates will depend crucially on their pre-existing knowledge. This argument is based on Zaller (1992) who asserts by his ‘reception axiom’ that those who are politically aware are better able to evaluate and therefore make use of the cues they receive. It has been well established in the literature that the extent of issue voting increases with the knowledge about party positions (e.g., Alvarez, 1997; De Vries et al., 2011; Hobolt, 2009; Steenbergen, Edwards, & De Vries, 2007). In the case of this particular study, the moderating role of political information seems particularly relevant. If one does not know that Schulz is the *Spitzenkandidat* of the social democratic party group, ideological orientations as well as national party affiliations are not very useful devices to evaluate him. General political knowledge might be important for using national party orientations as a cue. A person with hardly any knowledge of the national parties or their ideological positions will not be able to use this information. However, an even more crucial piece of information is the party political information of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Without such campaign specific information, it would be very difficult to use national party affiliations or left-right orientations as cues. From this we derive the following hypotheses:

H2b: The effect of national party affiliations (specified under H2a) will increase with the level of general political information about the EU.

H2c: The effect of national party affiliations (specified under H2a) will increase with the level of campaign specific information.

H3b: The effect of left-right distances (specified under H3a) will increase with the level of general political information about the EU.

H3c: The effect of left-right distances (specified under H3a) will increase with the level of campaign specific information.

4. Data and Methods

4.1. Sample and Data

Our analysis rests on original survey data collected within a four-wave online panel study in the Netherlands between December 2013 and June 2014 in the context of the EP elections on May 22, 2014. Unlike many other online panels, respondents are not self-selected, but are based on a random sample of the Dutch adult population. It is part of the ‘2014 European Election Campaign Study’; and the sample is representative in terms of age, gender, and education compared to census data (De Vreese et al., 2014). The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing

(CAWI), and the fieldwork was carried out by TNS NIPO Netherlands, which is a research organisation that complies with the ESOMAR guidelines for survey research approved under ISO. We employ survey questions of waves one and three. The latter contains the relevant information for our dependent variables. The fieldwork for the third wave was conducted between April 17 and 28, 2014; the first wave was fielded between December 13, 2013 and January 19, 2014. The N comprises 2189 in the first wave (response rate: 78.1%), and 1537 in the third wave (re-contact rate: 84.5%).

The Netherlands represents an ideal political context for studying electoral support for the *Spitzenkandidaten* during the 2014 European election campaigns: the three prominent *Spitzenkandidaten*, who are subject to this study (Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz, and Guy Verhofstadt), come from three neighbouring countries, Luxembourg, Germany, and Belgium, respectively. At the start of the campaign the party groups in the European Parliament agreed that the *Spitzenkandidat* of the largest party group would be nominated to become President of the Commission. This is how the debates of the *Spitzenkandidaten* were presented to the European public, although the heads of state in the European Council remained largely silent during the campaigns and seemingly left their options open (see also Hobolt, 2014). These developments thus represent an ideal setting for our study, which seeks to investigate whether citizens formulate a preference for an individual candidate and what explains their preferences.

4.2. Dependent Variables and Design Issues

Our dependent variables are electoral preferences for *Spitzenkandidaten*. These preferences were measured by survey questions which are intended to be as closely related as possible to electoral preferences without being contaminated by personality characteristics such as charm, friendliness, etc. These kinds of personality characteristics could themselves influence electoral preferences, but we were looking for a measure that taps into such preferences themselves. We operationalized the dependent variable by a short battery of questions, which were included in the third wave: ‘The three European Party Families (the Social Democrats, the Christian Democrats, and the Liberal Democrats) have each presented a European candidate to be elected as President of the European Commission by the new Parliament. If you were able to vote for a candidate directly, how likely are you to vote for the following politicians? Please specify your views on a 10-point scale where 1 means “not at all likely” and 10 means “very likely”’. Respondents were asked to indicate their probability to vote for Jean-Claude Juncker, Martin Schulz, and Guy Verhofstadt.⁵ The order of

⁵ In addition, the answer options included a control, Jeroen

these candidates was randomised. None of the respondents received information about the national or European party family affiliation of the candidates. All respondents were given a 'don't know' option. Furthermore, the sample of the third wave was split in two sub-samples to which respondents were randomly assigned: under the first condition respondents were given the question as presented above ($n=789$), respondents in the second condition ($n=748$) were additionally provided with the country of origin for each candidate (e.g., 'Jean-Claude Juncker from Luxembourg'). We merge both sub-samples, but control for the country cue for each *Spitzenkandidat* with a dummy variable.

To answer our first research question, we rely on a set of binary variables which indicate whether or not respondents expressed a vote preference for each *Spitzenkandidat*, which is coded as 1 if they did. The majority of respondents opted for 'don't know' (coded as 0) on each candidate, although fewer respondents chose this option for Verhofstadt ($M=0.42$, $SD=0.49$) than for Juncker ($M=0.39$, $SD=0.49$) and Schulz ($M=0.39$, $SD=0.49$). To explain variation in these variables we rely on a logistic regression. We analyse the preferences for each candidate separately as most respondents who indicate a preference for one candidate also indicate a preference for another candidate. Thus, modelling options such as McFadden's choice model are not appropriate, because the alternatives are not mutually exclusive.

To answer our second and third research questions, which focus on an explanation of differences in the evaluations of the three *Spitzenkandidaten*, we exclude the 'don't knows' on each candidate and created a dataset in a 'stacked' format. In this dataset, the respondent*candidate is the unit of analysis, so that each respondent appears as many times as there are candidates for whom s/he expressed a preference (maximally three times). We are primarily interested in the within-voter variation in their preferences for the three candidates (thus explaining why someone prefers candidate A over B), rather than the between-voter variation (why do some people express higher preferences than others to all candidates). We therefore analyse these data by means of multi-level analyses with fixed effects at the level of individual respondents. Consequently, individual level controls which do not vary within individuals are not included in these analyses. As robustness checks, we also present random effects analyses with individual level controls in the appendix. The results are substantively very similar.

Dijsselbloem, who was Dutch Finance Minister and President of the Eurogroup at the time. Since he was not actually a standing candidate and he was always kept last in the answer options in both sub-samples, we exclude him from our analysis.

4.3. Independent Variables

Our main independent variables correspond to the hypotheses outlined above and are subject to both explanatory analyses. We operationalise news exposure (H1a,) by four items surveyed in the third wave. *Public TV exposure* ($M=3.31$, $SD=2.69$) and *private TV exposure* ($M=2.19$, $SD=2.42$) each consist of the mean number of days per week a respondent watches either a public or private news programme on television and range from 0 to 7. For the newspaper items we aggregated the daily exposure to four broadsheets (NRC Handelsblad, NRC Next, Trouw, De Volkskrant) and four tabloids (Algemeen Dagblad, De Telegraaf, Metro, Spits), to form the variables *broadsheet exposure* ($M=0.99$, $SD=2.56$) and *tabloid exposure* ($M=2.67$, $SD=3.96$), respectively.

Political information is measured by two variables, which we operationalised in a similar manner as Nadeau et al. (2008, p. 235) and Elenbaas et al. (2012, p. 737), but with fewer and different items. The first variable, *general EU information* (H1b, H2b, H3b), is comprised of three questions from the third wave. These enquire about the number of Dutch MEPs after the 2014 elections, the current number of EU member states, and the current EP President. Each question comprised five answer categories to choose from, plus a 'don't know' option. We recoded all three variables into binary variables which are 1 if the correct answers were provided, and 0 if not. We then added them up to form a scale, ranging from 0 to 3 ($M=0.55$, $SD=0.84$). A Mokken scale analysis (e.g., Van Schuur, 2003), which takes into account that the answer difficulty might differ across questions, reveals that these three variables can be combined into a cumulative scale. The H -coefficient of this scale is 0.42, which according to Mokken indicates that the items form a moderately strong scale.

We measure campaign-specific information (H1c, H2c, H3c) by an additive scale of correct answers to three questions concerning the party family of the three *Spitzenkandidaten* under study. In the third wave respondents were asked the following: 'Several European political parties, in which Dutch political parties cooperate with other parties in Europe, have nominated a candidate for the presidency of the European Commission, should they become the largest political group in the European Parliament after the elections. Please indicate for each of the following politicians by which party they were nominated for presidency of the European Commission.' The answering options comprised six major European party groups and the respective affiliated Dutch parties, in addition to a 'don't know' and a 'none of the above' answer category. As before, correct answers were added up to form a scale that ranges from 0 to 3 ($M=0.28$, $SD=0.71$). The Mokken scale analysis returns an H -coefficient of 0.67,

indicating that the items form a very strong unidimensional scale.

The two variables *campaign-specific information* and *general EU information* are moderately correlated ($r=0.37$, $p<.001$). Furthermore, bivariate correlations between the news exposure variables and the information variables are at best weak (Table A3). Correlations range from $r=0.13$ (public TV news exposure and general EU information) to $r=0.29$ (broadsheet exposure and campaign information); non-quality news exposure (including public TV and tabloids) does not have a significant relationship with the information variables. Since the correlations between the independent variables are not very strong and since we have different expectations regarding the moderating effects of the different knowledge scales, we decided that the scales should not be combined in a single measure of knowledge and/or news exposure, but that we should analyse their effects separately.

We also add the control variable *national political information* which comprises two questions about national politics in the third wave: one asked about the name of the current Minister of Foreign Affairs; the other one asked about the statutory length of the legislative term of the Dutch lower house. It was calculated in a similar way as the other information variables. The final variable ranges from 0 to 2 ($M=1.56$, $SD=0.65$). The H -coefficient= 0.58 means that the items form a strong additive scale. Its correlations with the campaign-specific information variable is 0.21 ($p<.001$); its correlation with the general EU information variable is 0.24 ($p<.001$). The remaining control variables comprise *age*, *gender* (dummy *female*), and *education* (dummy variables *higher* and *lower education*, reference category: medium-level education) which were asked in the first wave.

To answer our second and third research questions, we also use *general EU information* as well *campaign information* as operationalised above. National party preferences (needed for testing H2a, H2b, and H2c) were measured by asking respondents to indicate on a 10-point scale 'how likely is it that you will ever vote for this party'. In the stacked data matrix these scores were matched to the preferences for each *Spitzenkandidat* of the related party group: preferences for the Dutch Christian Democrats (CDA) which are part of the EPP ($M=3.27$, $SD=2.73$) were matched with preferences for Juncker, the Labour party (PvdA) which belong to the S&D ($M=3.27$, $SD=2.70$) was matched to Schulz, and two liberal parties, VVD ($M=3.54$, $SD=2.94$) and D66 ($M=4.25$, $SD=2.99$), which both form part of the ALDE group were linked to Verhofstadt.⁶

Finally, we measure ideological distance on the left-

right scale (*Left-right distance*) by the absolute distance of respondents' self-placement and the respective party placements from the first wave. It ranges from 0 to 10 ($M=2.94$, $SD=2.37$). Left-right distances to these national parties were also linked to preferences for *Spitzenkandidaten* in the way we just described.

To account for other potential effects, we added several controls to the main models, which are shown in the Appendix (Tables A1 and Table A4). Here we control for EU attitudes, as strong individual preferences for EU integration might matter for the extent to which respondents are willing to provide a preference for each *Spitzenkandidat*; and might also impact their actual preferences. Since EU attitudes are multidimensional (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & De Vreese, 2011), we use five factors which are averaged from a total of 18 survey questions from the third wave. These range from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'). The five factors, identified by confirmatory factor analysis, correspond to those identified by Boomgaarden et al. (2011) and De Vreese, Azrout, and Möller (2016): *Negative affection* ($M=3.01$, $SD=1.55$, Cronbach's $\alpha=0.905$), *Utilitarianism and Idealism* ($M=3.76$, $SD=1.29$, $\alpha=0.856$), *Performance* ($M=3.06$, $SD=1.19$, $\alpha=0.870$), *Identity* ($M=2.73$, $SD=1.35$, $\alpha=0.863$), and *Strengthening* ($M=2.81$, $SD=1.26$, $\alpha=0.723$). A similar rationale underpins the consideration of *Government satisfaction* as an additional control. It is measured by the question 'The current national government is doing a good job' in the third wave with answer categories ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 7 ('strongly agree'). Lastly, in the logistic regression models (Table A1), we also control for *left-right self-placement* of the respondent as well as national party preferences. The descriptive statistics can be found in the appendix.

5. Findings

We begin our analysis by answering our first research question. Table 1 provides the logistic regression models for each of the *Spitzenkandidaten* Juncker, Schulz, and Verhofstadt, respectively. We report the b coefficients and robust standard errors of our main effects on the dependent variable, which assesses whether citizens formulate an opinion towards each of the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

Our first set of hypotheses stipulates that information and news exposure can explain why some citizens express a preference for the *Spitzenkandidaten*. We expected that news exposure (H1a) would have a positive effect on citizens' propensity to express a preference for candidates. Indeed, the models show that exposure to public television and tabloids is significant for all three candidates, while broadsheet exposure only matters for the preference formation towards Schulz and Verhofstadt; the effect of private television

⁶ Nb.: We took the means of the preferences for the VVD and D66, respectively, in order to match them to the preferences regarding Verhofstadt.

Table 1. Logistic regression, predicting the likelihood to express a preference for each *Spitzenkandidat*.

	Juncker		Schulz		Verhofstadt	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
General EU information	0.336***	0.078	0.321***	0.077	0.314***	0.080
Campaign information	1.005***	0.144	0.930***	0.137	1.103***	0.175
Public TV news exposure	0.103***	0.026	0.090***	0.026	0.087***	0.026
Private TV news exposure	0.015	0.025	0.018	0.025	-0.015	0.026
Broadsheet exposure	0.045	0.028	0.057**	0.027	0.085***	0.029
Tabloid exposure	0.037**	0.015	0.034**	0.015	0.038**	0.016
Nat. political information	0.248**	0.104	0.261**	0.103	0.358***	0.105
Age	0.008**	0.004	0.009**	0.004	0.015***	0.004
Lower education	0.234	0.166	0.192	0.165	0.131	0.166
Higher education	0.309**	0.140	0.158	0.140	0.393***	0.140
Female	-0.444***	0.119	-0.442***	0.118	-0.440***	0.119
Country cue	0.318***	0.120	0.368***	0.119	0.334***	0.120
Constant	-2.320***	0.258	-2.271***	0.255	-2.597***	0.264
-2 pseudo log likelihood	1703.254		1726.720		1688.578	
Wald chi2	193.953		188.004		194.669	
Prob > chi2	0.000		0.000		0.000	
BIC	1798.643		1822.109		1783.966	
N	1537		1537		1537	
Pseudo R Squared	0.170		0.159		0.193	

Note: * p<.1; ** p<.05; *** p<.01; dependent variable: don't know (0) vs. expressing voting preference for *Spitzenkandidat* (1), robust standard errors.

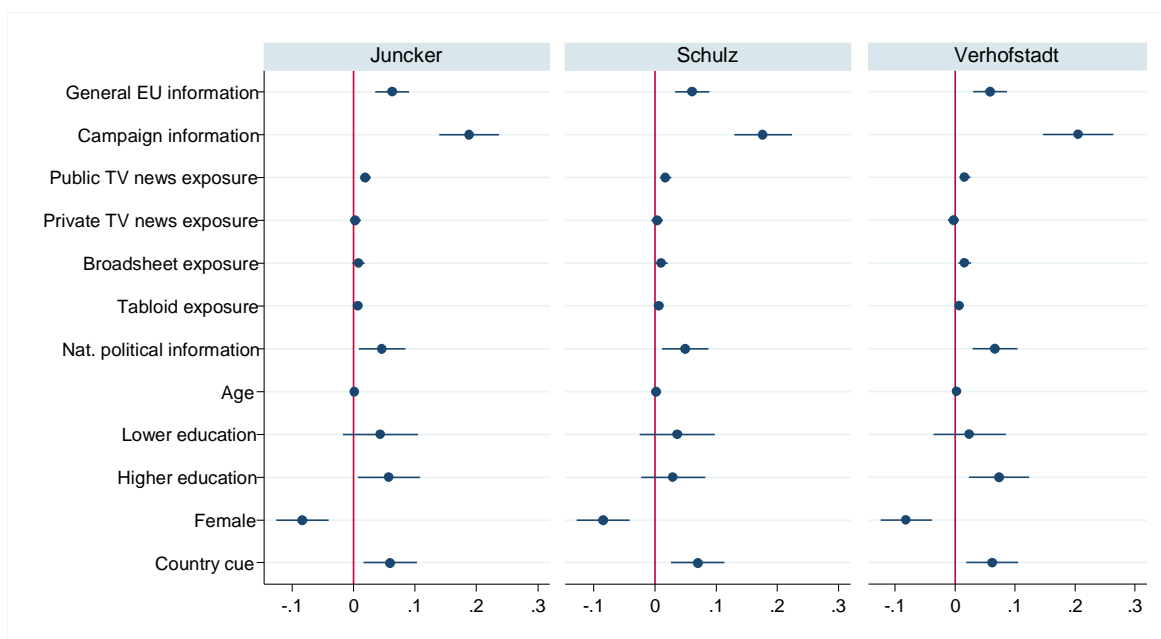


Figure 1. Average marginal effects on the likelihood to express a preference for each *Spitzenkandidat*. Note: calculations are based on Table 1.

is not significant. Furthermore, political information (H1b and H1c) is a strong predictor of citizens' ability to reveal a preference for each of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Table 1 shows that general information about the EU as well as campaign-specific information have significant, positive effects for all candidates.

In order to compare these effects across the *Spitzenkandidaten* we calculated the average marginal effects for all coefficients (see Mood, 2010). These are

displayed in Figure 1. The effects of news exposure are comparatively small; exposure to public television news has the largest effect, while exposure to private television outlets has no effect for either candidate. These findings therefore only provide partial support for our first hypothesis H1a. Furthermore, Figure 1 demonstrates that the average marginal effect of campaign-specific information is strongest for all candidates, followed by the average marginal effect of gen-

eral EU political information (and national political information). Our results therefore lend support to hypotheses H1b and H1c. They underline our argument that citizens are better able to formulate an opinion about the *Spitzenkandidaten* if they have general information about EU politics as well as campaign-specific information of the *Spitzenkandidaten*, given the complexity of the institutional relations in the EU and the abstract relationship between national parties and the nominations of the European party groups. The large effects of campaign-specific information underline that preference formation during European election campaigns is highly conditional upon the information available to citizens and voters. However, information about national politics also matters. Our control variable shows that it has a significant, positive effect for all candidates.

The effects of our control variables, higher education and age, have positive effects, although these are not consistent for all candidates. The effect of gender is significant and negative implying that men are more likely to indicate a preference for each of the *Spitzenkandidaten* compared to women. Furthermore, we find that, for all candidates, respondents who received a country cue opted less often for the ‘don’t know’ response than respondents in the first group of our study.

Our next analysis seeks to answer our second and third research questions concerning the factors responsible for variation in the distribution of voter preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*, and the moderating role of political awareness in particular. Table 2 shows the results of the fixed effects regression explaining variation in voter preferences for all candidates. We are interested in the within respondent variance, not in

explaining the variance between respondents. The decomposition of the variance showed that 25% of the total variance is within respondents and 75% is between. The explained variance at the within level is rather low, meaning that relevant cues, like ideology and party affiliation do not explain much of the differences in preferences.

We are interested in whether citizens base their preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten* on their party preferences (H2a) or on their ideological proximity to the candidate’s party on the left-right dimension (H3a). The results lend support to our assumptions. Model 1 shows that a one unit increase in the preference for the respective national party generates an increase of 0.15 in the preferences for the *Spitzenkandidat* who is supported by that party, controlling for everything else. In line with our expectations, left-right distance generates a negative effect on the dependent variable: the further away an individual voter is from the respective party stances, the lower the support for the *Spitzenkandidat* of that party ($b=-0.06$, Model 4). Taken together, both results suggest that citizens indeed use cues in their evaluations of the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

We expected further that information becomes imperative for citizens to align their preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten* with their party preferences and ideological orientations. The results reported in Model 2 and 3 show that the relevance of party preferences as a cue for the preference formation for the candidates increases with higher levels of general political information about the EU ($b=0.06$) as well as campaign-specific information ($b=0.17$), lending support to hypotheses H2b and H2c, respectively.

Table 2. Fixed-effects regression, explaining variation in preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
PTV national party EU14	0.152*** (0.025)	0.097*** (0.030)	0.010 (0.024)			
General EU information* PTV national party EU14		0.063** (0.026)				
Campaign information* PTV national party EU14			0.173*** (0.023)			
Left-right distance				-0.055** (0.025)	-0.016 (0.029)	0.050** (0.025)
General EU information* Left-right distance					-0.047* (0.027)	
Campaign information* Left-right distance						-0.152*** (0.027)
Constant	3.370*** (0.095)	3.373*** (0.094)	3.489*** (0.081)	4.279*** (0.073)	4.277*** (0.072)	4.253*** (0.067)
N	1822	1822	1822	1600	1600	1600
N groups	666	666	666	586	586	586
R Squared within	0.052	0.060	0.126	0.005	0.009	0.044
R Squared between	0.103	0.097	0.028	0.020	0.001	0.002
R Squared overall	0.089	0.098	0.060	0.015	0.000	0.000

Note: * $p<.1$; ** $p<.05$; *** $p<.01$; dependent variable: voting preference for a *Spitzenkandidat* (1-10), robust standard errors in parentheses.

Figure 2 visualises these effects and highlights the crucial importance of information: for those who have no such information at hand, party preferences do not matter for the preference formation for the *Spitzenkandidaten*. It is important to realise that this is by far the largest group: two-thirds (67.9 per cent) of those respondents who evaluated the candidates (43.3 per cent) did not know the party affiliation of *any* candidate. However, those who are better informed positively align their party preferences with their preferences for the European lead candidates. In comparison, the interaction effects are even stronger for campaign-specific information than for general EU information. Similarly, as Table 3 ($b=-0.05$; Model 5) and Figure 2

demonstrate, the interaction effect between general EU information and left-right distance is statistically significant and thus in line with H3b, yet weaker than that of campaign-specific information. Again, campaign-specific information plays a crucial role: the negative effect of the left-right distance is indeed moderated by voter knowledge about the *Spitzenkandidaten* ($b=-0.15$, Model 6). The visualisation of this moderating effect in Figure 2 shows that, again, citizens with no campaign-specific information do not use their ideological preferences as cues in providing their preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*. Instead, their use of this cue increases with higher levels of campaign-specific information. These results thus lend support to H3c.

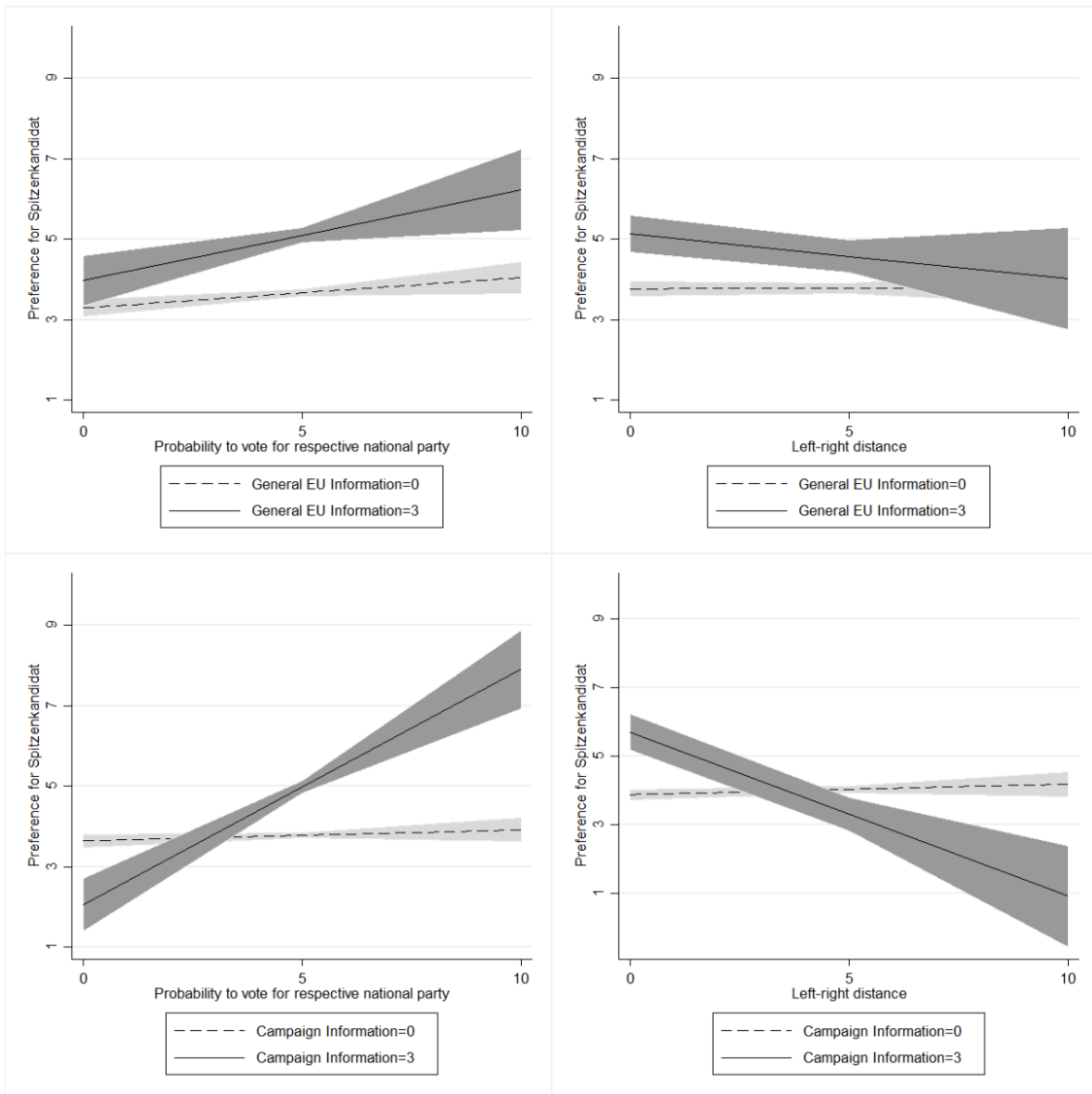


Figure 2. The effects of party preference and left-right distance on preference for a *Spitzenkandidat* at different levels of information. Note: lines represent expected values and shadowed areas 95% confidence intervals. The calculations are based on individual regression models testing the main effect on the dependent variable for different samples of general EU and campaign-specific information, respectively.

6. Conclusions

This study set out to examine the preference formation of Dutch citizens for the *Spitzenkandidaten* during the 2014 EP election campaign. Our aim was two-fold: firstly, we were interested in those factors that determine whether citizens formulate a preference for a certain *Spitzenkandidat*. Secondly, we sought to explain the variation in their distribution of preferences. Based on the literature on citizens' preference formation, we put forward three main explanatory factors for answering the first question: news exposure as well as political information and campaign-specific information about the *Spitzenkandidaten*, which can be summoned under what Zaller (1992) calls political awareness. Furthermore, we argued that information also moderates the effects of national party affiliations or left-right orientations, which citizens are expected to use as cues in their evaluations of the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

Our results show that exposure to public television news programmes and—to some extent also—broadsheet reading explains the likelihood of indicating a preference for the *Spitzenkandidaten*. These findings are in line with research that finds that exposure to quality news content or hard news has a positive effect on political participation (e.g., Aarts & Semetko, 2003; Schmitt-Beck & Mackenrodt, 2010). We also find a positive effect of tabloid exposure. Some literature would expect no or a negative effect of such news outlets (e.g., Aarts & Semetko, 2003; De Vreese & Tobiasen, 2007), but De Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) also find that attention to tabloid newspapers has a positive effect on the intention of Dutch voters to participate in a hypothetical EU referendum (see also Banducci et al., 2015). We are unable to assess whether this is due to specific content features of this news coverage, let alone establish whether they were visible at all in these newspapers. This has to do with the timing of our study. The third wave concluded on April 28, 2014. On that day the first pan-European presidential debate took place in Maastricht, after which the visibility of the *Spitzenkandidaten* in national broadsheets increased considerably across Europe (Gattermann, 2015).

Furthermore, both general information about the EU and campaign-specific information represent important pre-conditions for citizens to formulate a preference for each of the *Spitzenkandidaten*. This resonates with research on voting behaviour and opinion formation in the EU context which underlines the importance of knowledge about European affairs (e.g., Hobolt, 2007; De Vries et al., 2011) and specific information either about party positions (Hobolt & Wittrock, 2011) or EU performances (Elenbaas et al., 2012). We believe that in the context of the 2014 elections acquiring general political information is crucial because of the complexity of the investiture procedure; and knowledge of the *Spitzenkandidaten* be-

comes imperative since citizens elect national parties at the polls and hence need to have information about which candidate these parties support.

Our results also confirm earlier research showing how citizens can use cues to arrive at meaningful electoral decisions (e.g., Hobolt, 2007; Lupia, 1994; Toka, 2008; Van der Brug, 1999). Even though we did not strictly study electoral decisions, our study shows that citizens can form meaningful preferences for candidates that are relatively unknown by relying upon relevant party cues. However, most of the literature studies electoral contexts in which people with little knowledge can use cues to arrive at a reasoned choice. In the current context, we found that only the most knowledgeable are able to use these cues, while those citizens who have no or only little EU political and campaign-specific information hardly use any cues of party identification or ideological orientations in their evaluations of the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

Given the importance of news exposure and information, only few citizens actually expressed their preferences for each *Spitzenkandidat*. Moreover, of the minority of respondents who evaluated the candidates, only one third knew the party affiliation of one or more of these candidates. Even if we put the bar very low—being able to name the party affiliation of one candidate and evaluating at least one candidate—just 16.1% of the respondents fulfil this criterion for providing a meaningful assessment of the candidates. While this has rather negative implications for democratic participation of EU citizens in EU elections, we should be careful not to dismiss the *Spitzenkandidaten* campaigns right away. European elections are still second-order and as such it is no surprise that many citizens are not sufficiently informed to express their opinion. Druckman (2014, p. 478) argues that we should be persuaded of 'the *need to be realistic* about what to expect of citizens and avoid setting impossible bars such as "full information"' (emphasis in the original). It was the first time that European election campaigns were influenced by the *Spitzenkandidaten*; and the consequences of their nomination were still unknown during the campaign. Our finding that campaign-specific information is of crucial importance for citizens' ability to formulate a political preference in EU elections thus also represents a recommendation for the 2019 elections to foster the campaign environment at the European level.

Our results, which show that those citizens who are politically aware are also able to align their preferences for each *Spitzenkandidat* with their national party preferences as well as with their ideological orientation, underline our recommendation. To use the words of Hobolt and Tilley (2014) these citizens 'get it right'. Our analysis was based on a hypothetical question but the findings nevertheless imply that informed citizens and those who are regularly exposed to news might actually be able to hold their EU representatives accountable,

provided they are given the opportunity to do so. Thus, depending on their intensity, the *Spitzenkandidaten* campaigns may be able to contribute to alleviating the EU's alleged accountability deficit.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Dr. Katjana Gattermann

Katjana Gattermann is assistant professor of political communication and journalism at ASCoR and also affiliated with ACCESS EUROPE at the University of Amsterdam. She is founding director of the Erasmus Academic Network on Parliamentary Democracy in Europe (PADEMIA). Her research interests comprise political communication, political behaviour, public opinion and legislative behaviour in the EU. Her work has appeared in journals such as the *European Journal of Political Research*, *European Union Politics*, and *West European Politics*.



Prof. Dr. Claes de Vreese

Claes de Vreese is Professor and Chair of Political Communication at ASCoR at the University of Amsterdam. He is the founding Director of Center for Politics and Communication (www.polcomm.org). His research interests focus on political journalism, media effects, public opinion and electoral behaviour. His most recent (co-authored) books are *Political Journalism in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge UP) and *(Un)intended Consequences of European Parliament Elections* (Oxford UP).



Prof. Dr. Wouter van der Brug

Wouter van der Brug is Professor and Chair of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam. His research interests focus on comparative research in collective political behaviour, in particular electoral behaviour, right-wing populism, political trust and support and political parties. He publishes regularly in various international Political Science journals. His most recent (co-authored/co-edited) books are *The Politicisation of Migration* (2015, Routledge) and *(Un)intended Consequences of European Parliament Elections* (2016, Oxford UP).

Appendix
Table A1. Logistic regression, predicting the likelihood to express a preference for each *Spitzenkandidat* (full model).

	Juncker		Schulz		Verhofstadt	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
General EU information	0.333***	0.083	0.324***	0.081	0.311***	0.085
Campaign information	0.956***	0.148	0.872***	0.141	1.031***	0.177
Public TV news exposure	0.128***	0.029	0.112***	0.028	0.107***	0.028
Private TV news exposure	0.014	0.029	0.022	0.028	-0.011	0.029
Broadsheet exposure	0.053*	0.028	0.063**	0.028	0.093***	0.030
Tabloid exposure	0.032*	0.018	0.027	0.018	0.032*	0.018
Negative affection	0.080	0.053	0.096*	0.053	0.090*	0.054
Performance	0.166**	0.082	0.132	0.083	0.068	0.081
Identity	-0.012	0.068	0.001	0.069	-0.005	0.07
Utilitarianism/idealism	0.005	0.083	0.013	0.082	0.062	0.081
Strengthening	-0.008	0.068	0.003	0.067	0.002	0.068
PTV CDA EU14	0.002	0.026	0.001	0.026	0.001	0.026
PTV PvdA EU14	0.018	0.030	0.013	0.029	0.006	0.030
PTV VVD EU14	0.027	0.028	0.024	0.028	0.029	0.029
PTV D66 EU14	-0.024	0.026	-0.021	0.026	-0.005	0.026
Nat. political information	0.207*	0.125	0.204*	0.122	0.286**	0.124
Left-right self-placement	0.027	0.036	0.011	0.035	0.013	0.036
Government satisfaction	-0.124**	0.057	-0.099*	0.057	-0.075	0.056
Age	0.007	0.005	0.008*	0.005	0.015***	0.005
Lower education	0.146	0.192	0.131	0.19	0.070	0.191
Higher education	0.264*	0.154	0.116	0.155	0.342**	0.155
Female	-0.534***	0.131	-0.523***	0.13	-0.504***	0.132
Country cue	0.312**	0.132	0.381***	0.131	0.378***	0.132
Constant	-2.630***	0.496	-2.584***	0.492	-3.052***	0.507
-2 pseudo log likelihood	1405.184		1428.816		1392.45	
Wald chi2	166.628		159.652		162.136	
Prob > chi2	0.000		0.000		0.000	
BIC	1576.249		1599.881		1563.515	
N	1246		1246		1246	
Pseudo R Squared	0.173		0.160		0.191	

Note: * $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$; dependent variable: don't know (0) vs. expressing voting preference for *Spitzenkandidat* (1), robust standard errors.

Table A2. Descriptive statistics for full sample of the third wave (corresponding to the analysis reported in Table 1 and Table A1, respectively).

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
DV Juncker	1537	0.00	1.00	0.3871	0.48725
DV Schulz	1537	0.00	1.00	0.3878	0.48740
DV Verhofstadt	1537	0.00	1.00	0.4203	0.49377
General EU information	1537	0.00	3.00	0.5504	0.83866
Campaign information	1537	0.00	3.00	0.2785	0.71024
Public TV news exposure	1537	0.00	7.00	3.3071	2.68860
Private TV news exposure	1537	0.00	7.00	2.1932	2.42432
Broadsheet exposure	1537	0.00	18.00	0.9948	2.56351
Tabloid exposure	1537	0.00	28.00	2.6701	3.96237
Negative affection	1537	1.00	7.00	3.0073	1.55186
Performance	1537	1.00	7.00	3.0568	1.19464
Identity	1537	1.00	7.00	2.7274	1.35066
Utilitarianism/idealism	1537	1.00	7.00	3.7642	1.28594
Strengthening	1537	1.00	7.00	2.8124	1.25601
PTV CDA EU14	1447	1	10	3.27	2.726
PTV PvdA EU14	1441	1	10	3.27	2.701
PTV VVD EU14	1441	1	10	3.54	2.938
PTV D66 EU14	1441	1	10	4.25	2.993
Nat. political information	1537	0.00	2.00	1.5615	0.65274
Left-right self-placement	1306	0	10	5.24	2.298
Government satisfaction	1537	1	7	3.22	1.457
Age	1537	18	92	48.95	17.168
Lower education	1537	0.00	1.00	0.1698	0.37559
Higher education	1537	0.00	1.00	0.3208	0.46692
Female	1537	0.00	1.00	0.5075	0.50011
Country cue	1537	0.00	1.00	0.4867	0.49998

Table A3. Bivariate Correlations between the main independent variables.

	General EU information	Campaign information	Public TV news exposure	Private TV news exposure	Broadsheet exposure	Tabloid exposure
General EU information	1					
Campaign information	0.372***	1				
Public TV news exposure	0.128***	0.199***	1			
Private TV news exposure	-0.007	-0.037	0.131***	1		
Broadsheet exposure	0.151***	0.292***	0.206***	-0.064**	1	
Tabloid exposure	0.030	0.015	0.164***	0.198***	0.111***	1

Note: * $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$

Table A4. Random-effects regression, explaining variation in preferences for the *Spitzenkandidaten*.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE	b	SE
General EU information	0.242***	0.090	0.053	0.132	0.252***	0.091	0.224**	0.094	0.335***	0.109	0.207**	0.094
Campaign information	-0.075	0.090	-0.074	0.090	-0.657***	0.132	-0.056	0.092	-0.059	0.092	0.341***	0.111
Public TV news exposure	0.101***	0.035	0.102***	0.035	0.095***	0.035	0.102***	0.038	0.099***	0.038	0.099***	0.038
Private TV news exposure	0.011	0.034	0.014	0.034	0.009	0.034	0.01	0.036	0.011	0.036	0.011	0.036
Broadsheet exposure	0.013	0.023	0.014	0.023	0.010	0.023	0.003	0.023	0.001	0.023	0.001	0.023
Tabloid exposure	0.032	0.020	0.030	0.02	0.034*	0.020	0.028	0.021	0.029	0.021	0.030	0.021
PTV national party EU14	0.160***	0.023	0.118***	0.027	0.047**	0.022						
General EU information* PTV national party EU14			0.049**	0.023								
Campaign information* PTV national party EU14					0.147***	0.022						
Left-right distance							-0.060***	0.023	-0.028	0.027	0.031	0.024
General EU information* Left-right distance								-0.040	0.025			
Campaign information* Left-right distance											-0.136***	0.025
Negative affection	0.031	0.060	0.034	0.060	0.041	0.061	0.072	0.070	0.073	0.070	0.077	0.070
Performance	0.163	0.101	0.170*	0.100	0.182*	0.102	0.197*	0.108	0.201*	0.109	0.227**	0.109
Identity	0.289***	0.081	0.290***	0.081	0.281***	0.081	0.270***	0.091	0.270***	0.091	0.271***	0.091
Utilitarianism/idealism	0.137	0.095	0.133	0.095	0.145	0.096	0.228**	0.105	0.228**	0.106	0.214**	0.106
Strengthening	0.018	0.078	0.017	0.078	0.021	0.078	0.023	0.085	0.026	0.085	0.028	0.084
Nat. political information	0.109	0.160	0.122	0.161	0.136	0.164	-0.146	0.204	-0.145	0.204	-0.127	0.204
Government satisfaction	0.08	0.067	0.082	0.067	0.092	0.068	0.11	0.072	0.110	0.072	0.113	0.072
Age	0.007	0.005	0.007	0.005	0.008	0.005	0.004	0.072	0.005	0.006	0.004	0.006
Lower education	-0.068	0.233	-0.09	0.234	-0.100	0.234	-0.086	0.259	-0.102	0.260	-0.127	0.260
Higher education	0.373**	0.181	0.361**	0.183	0.423**	0.184	0.448**	0.197	0.448**	0.197	0.437**	0.197
Female	0.100	0.161	0.114	0.161	0.140	0.164	0.217	0.175	0.221	0.176	0.228	0.176
Country cue	0.266*	0.156	0.276*	0.157	0.283*	0.158	0.263	0.170	0.265	0.170	0.260	0.171
Constant	-0.460	0.576	-0.369	0.583	-0.283	0.588	0.271	0.730	0.156	0.730	-0.065	0.726
N	1822		1822		1822		1600		1600		1600	
N groups	666		666		666		586		586		586	
R Squared within	0.052		0.060		0.124		0.005		0.008		0.044	
R Squared between	0.255		0.252		0.239		0.215		0.214		0.211	
R Squared overall	0.214		0.214		0.220		0.164		0.165		0.171	

Note: * p<.1; ** p<.05; *** p<.01; dependent variable: voting preference for a *Spitzenkandidat* (1-10), robust standard error.

Table A5. Descriptive statistics corresponding to the analysis reported in Tables 2 and A4.

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
PTV for Spitzenkandidat (DV)	1837	1.00	10.00	3.9358	2.61848
General EU information	1837	0.00	3.00	0.8029	0.96244
Campaign information	1837	0.00	3.00	0.5890	0.95734
Public TV news exposure	1837	0.00	7.00	4.1306	2.65096
Private TV news exposure	1837	0.00	7.00	2.2444	2.49763
Broadsheet exposure	1837	0.00	18.00	1.6298	3.23720
Tabloid exposure	1837	0.00	21.00	3.1840	4.11476
Negative affection	1837	1.00	7.00	2.9477	1.64205
Performance	1837	1.00	7.00	3.0912	1.23614
Identity	1837	1.00	7.00	2.8173	1.46452
Utilitarianism/idealism	1837	1.00	7.00	3.9469	1.39354
Strengthening	1837	1.00	7.00	2.8848	1.39242
PTV national party EU14	1800	1.00	10.00	3.64	2.688
Nat. political information	1837	0.00	2.00	1.7349	0.54428
Left-right distance	1600	0.00	10.00	2.9384	2.37030
Government satisfaction	1837	1.00	7.00	3.26	1.533
Age	1837	18	87	53.60	16.722
Lower education	1837	0.00	1.00	0.1590	0.36573
Higher education	1837	0.00	1.00	0.3941	0.48879
Female	1837	0.00	1.00	0.4241	0.49433
Country cue	1837	0.00	1.00	0.5161	0.49988

Article

Debating Europe: Effects of the “Eurovision Debate” on EU Attitudes of Young German Voters and the Moderating Role Played by Political Involvement

Jürgen Maier ^{1,*}, Berthold Rittberger ² and Thorsten Faas ³

¹ Department of Political Science, University of Koblenz-Landau, 76829 Landau, Germany; E-Mail: maierj@uni-landau.de

² Department of Political Science, University of Munich, 80538 Munich, Germany;
E-Mail: berthold.rittberger@gsi.uni-muenchen.de

³ Department of Political Science, University of Mainz, 55122 Mainz, Germany; E-Mail: thorsten.faas@uni-mainz.de

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

In the run-up to the elections to the European Parliament in 2014, EU citizens had the unprecedented opportunity to watch televised debates between the candidates running for president of the European Commission. The most important debate was the so-called “Eurovision debate”, which was broadcasted in almost all EU member states. In this study we explore the responses of a sample of 110 young German voters, who watched this debate, to the candidates’ messages and whether exposure to the debate caused a shift in the respondents’ attitudes towards the EU. Combining data from a quasi-experiment, real-time response data, and data from a content analysis of the debate, we find that respondents’ reactions to the candidates’ statements were—on average—positive and that some respondents displayed attitudinal changes resulting in more favorable views towards the EU. Although the direct connection between real-time responses and post-debate attitudes is not as strong as expected, most of the measured effects indicate that a positive evaluation of the candidates’ messages usually results in more pro-European attitudes. Furthermore, we find no strong evidence that political knowledge moderates debate effects. In general, differences between political ‘novices’ and political ‘experts’ tend to be rare.

Keywords

EU attitudes; European election; evaluation of candidate statements; political knowledge; televised debates

Issue

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1. Introduction

In the run-up to the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections, the candidates running for the office of president of the European Commission participated in several televised pan-European debates, a novelty in the EU’s history. Among the series of debates, the so-called “Eurovision debate”, which was held on May 15th 2014, stood out as the single most important debate. In con-

trast to all other debates, this event was not only broadcasted in the vast majority of EU member states, it also featured the five major candidates running for president of the European Commission (for an overview see Maier & Faas, 2014b). For the first time in the EU’s history, an overwhelming majority of EU citizens thus had an unprecedented opportunity: they could directly compare the candidate’s positions and personalities in a televised debate, a well-known campaign for-

mat in the context of national elections and where it has turned out to be a powerful campaigning tool in the run-up to elections.

There is a large body of literature on the impact of televised debates in national elections (for an overview see, e.g., McKinney & Carlin, 2004). This research has demonstrated that debates can have—among other things—effects on prospective voters’ cognitive and political involvement, attitudes towards candidates and issues, turnout, and voting behavior. In this contribution, we focus on the influence of debates on political attitudes towards candidates and issues, the impact of which is heavily disputed in the literature. While a meta-analysis by Benoit, Hansen, and Verser (2003) indicates that viewing televised debates can affect issue preferences and attitudes respondents hold towards the candidates (see also, e.g., Abramowitz, 1978; Geer, 1988; Lanoue & Schrott, 1989a, 1989b), most studies on debates in the U.S. suggest that debates reinforce already existing attitudes rather than transforming them (see, e.g., Chaffee, 1978; Hagner & Rieselbach, 1978; Katz & Feldman, 1962; Kraus, 2000; McKinney & Carlin, 2004). These findings are in line with the results from classical campaign research that the reinforcement of attitudes is the most important campaign effect. Mechanisms of selective exposure and selective information processing usually prevent individuals from receiving ‘wrong’ information, i.e. information contradicting their views, and thus, from changing their attitudes (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). For Germany, it has been demonstrated that—at least in the short run—a significant part of the electorate changed their opinions about the respective candidates running for chancellor after watching a debate (for a summary see, e.g., Maier, Faas, & Maier, 2014). It has been argued that selective information processing is rendered more difficult in the case of televised debates than for other types of campaign messages. Empirically, it has been shown that televised debates make it more difficult for recipients to permanently block messages from the political opponent. Hence, candidates have not only the opportunity to “preach to the converted” (Norris, 2003) but also to influence independent voters as well as supporters of the political opponent (Faas & Maier, 2004; Maier & Faas, 2011). With respect to the Eurovision debate, research indicates that exposure to campaign messages also affects candidate evaluations. Most of the candidates for Commission president were perceived more favorably after watching the debate (Dinter & Weissenbach, 2015).

Since the early days of research on the effects of campaign communication, it has been claimed that voters lacking political knowledge and political interest are most likely to be persuaded by campaign messages (see, e.g., Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). This implies, in turn, that voters’ level of political involvement is a factor that moderates the impact of new information on po-

litical attitudes and behavior. The reason for this relationship is that voters with a higher level of cognitive and political involvement are more likely to hold strong attitudes towards politics (see, e.g., McGraw & Ling, 2003). Moreover, a higher level of knowledge about politics enables voters to create counterarguments to protect themselves against persuasive messages (see, e.g., Matthes & Marquard, 2013; Reinemann & Maurer, 2010). Hence, new information will not change their attitudes as easily as is the case for voters displaying low levels of political involvement (Iyengar, Peters, Kinder, & Krosnick, 1984; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990). In turn, it has been argued that with increasing levels of political knowledge the likelihood of attitudinal changes also rises. Individuals with higher levels of cognitive abilities are able to process a message more profoundly (see, e.g., Delli Carpini, & Keeter, 1996; Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Zaller, 1992). This is particularly important if a message includes complex information (which is true for most information about politics in general, and should particularly apply to the multi-level character of EU politics). As a consequence, voters who do not possess the required knowledge to properly process relevant political information are more likely to brush the message aside. In contrast, voters with political expertise tend to think more carefully about political information and the likelihood to be affected by information thus increases (Hwang, Gotlieb, Nah, & McLeod, 2007).

Evidence that campaign information—or, more generally, information provided by the mass media—has such a conditional impact on attitudes is, however, mixed. While some studies find that campaign or media effects are stronger for voters with low levels of political involvement (e.g., Hwang et al., 2007; Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Matthes & Marquard, 2013), other studies find no effect or even the opposite relationship (e.g., Krosnick & Brannon, 1993; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997; Young, 2004).

This inconclusive pattern also appears to be characteristic of EP election campaigns, most notably with regard to media effects on EU attitudes and behavior. With respect to political attitudes, Schuck and de Vreese (2006) demonstrated that the impact of media frames on public support for EU enlargement is moderated by political knowledge. Individuals with low levels of political knowledge were, in general, more affected by news frames than individuals with higher knowledge levels. Moreover, they were more susceptible to risk framing than citizens with high levels of political knowledge. In addition, Schuck, Boomgaarden and de Vreese (2013) showed that citizens who are less aware of election campaigns tend to become more cynical when consuming news through the media. With respect to electoral behavior, Blumler (1983) was able to demonstrate for the first EP election that exposure to televised campaign information had a particularly

positive impact on turnout for voters with a strong interest in the campaign. In contrast, Schönbach (1983) found that the impact of the mass media on turnout is somewhat stronger for voters with low campaign interest. In addition, Cayrol (1991) indicated that mass media information about the 1989 EP election campaign had no impact on voters displaying high levels of involvement. For the 1999 election, Schönbach and Lauf (2002) found the impact of TV exposure to make no difference for involved and uninvolved voters. Moreover, their results indicate that newspaper consumption and interpersonal communication mobilized the rather less involved voters. Analyzing the 2009 EP elections, De Vries, Van der Brug, Van Egmond and Van der Eijk (2011) found issue voting to be slightly more pronounced among politically sophisticated voters and in contexts that provide higher levels of EU-related information (see also Hobolt, 2005).

With respect to televised debates, there is very little research on the moderating impact of political involvement on debate effects. Druckman (2003) demonstrated that citizens with low levels of political sophistication exposed to the 1960 Kennedy–Nixon debate learned more than politically sophisticated voters. Furthermore, Reinemann and Maurer (2010) showed for the 2005 German televised debate that political interest neither affected the perception of the debate nor did it moderate the impact of the debate on attitudes towards candidates.

The differential impact of political involvement on the magnitude of campaign effects can be traced back to a number of factors (see also Lecheler & de Vreese, 2011; Lecheler, de Vreese, & Slothuus, 2009). First, studies assessing the moderating impact of political involvement differ substantially in their operationalization of the concept. Whereas some researchers use measures of interest or awareness, others rely on measures of knowledge. Although all of these measures are positively correlated they tap into different micro-level processes. Whereas interest and awareness focus on motivations, knowledge is about cognitions. Second, while standard items to measure political knowledge are lacking, scholars largely agree on how to measure the motivational aspects of political involvement. Hence, different results on the moderating role of political knowledge might be simply a result of different operationalizations. Third, the impact of political involvement might vary with the dependent variable in focus.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the body of research exploring the effects of televised debates. In particular, we are interested in how recipients process the information provided by the Eurovision debate and the impact of watching the debate on EU attitudes. In addition, we want to investigate whether political involvement plays a moderating role for the influence of such a debate. To this effect, we analyze the relationship between debate exposure, debate effects, and political

involvement for the 2014 Eurovision debate among young German voters. Recent research has shown that watching this debate affected candidate evaluations and attitudes toward the EU (Dinter & Weissenbach, 2015; Maier, 2015). Unfortunately, the studies available to date did not investigate if the effects of the Eurovision debate are similar across different groups of voters.

Research on EU attitudes of young voters is relatively scarce. Existing studies indicate that young voters are usually better informed about the EU (e.g., Maier & Bathelt, 2013), tend to hold more pro-European attitudes (e.g., Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & de Vreese, 2011), and yet they are less likely to participate in EP elections (e.g., Bhatti & Hansen, 2012). It is noteworthy, though, that there is a general lack of studies focusing on the effects of campaign communication on this voter segment in general (see, e.g., Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007) and with regard to the EU in particular (e.g., Esser & de Vreese, 2007). Hence, our study contributes to learning about the impact of a major campaign message on citizens who had the first opportunity to cast their vote at the European level.

2. Research Design

On May 15th 2014, seven days before the beginning of the election period (May 22nd–25th), the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) aired what has become known as the “Eurovision Debate”. For a duration of 90 minutes, the top candidates of the five major political groups represented in the EP—Jean-Claude Juncker (European People’s Party), Martin Schulz (Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats), Guy Verhofstadt (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe), Ska Keller (The Greens—European Free Alliance), and Alexis Tsipras (European United Left—Nordic Green Left)—discussed the most pressing problems facing the EU. The debate took place in the plenary chamber of the EP in Brussels in front of a large audience.

According to information provided by the EBU, the debate was broadcasted in more than 30 countries all over the world by 49 TV stations, 10 radio stations, and via 39 Internet live streams.¹ As Monica Maggioni, one of the moderators of the debate, pointed out at the beginning of the televised program, the potential reach of the debate encompassed 400 million voters. Since EP election campaigns differ from country to country, the debate can be seen to serve as a common point of reference for the entire EU (see also Benoit, 2014, p. 4). Against this backdrop, the debate performed poorly.

¹ According to the EP, the debate was available on television in 26 EU member states. In addition, the EP provided a live stream on its web site. In Estonia and the Netherlands the debate was available only via Internet. In Denmark and Finland the debate was videotaped and broadcasted the next day (see <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/divers/broadcasters.pdf>)

For example, only 160.000 citizens in Germany watched the debate (market share: 0.5%),² which was aired by Phoenix TV, a publicly owned news channel.

In order to capture the effects of the Eurovision debate on young voters, we set up a study totaling 130 students enrolled at the universities of Koblenz-Landau, Mainz, and Munich. The impact of the debate was measured employing an experimental pretest-posttest design. The participants watched the debate live on large screens in university lecture auditoriums or seminar rooms. Immediately before and immediately after the debate, the participants were asked to fill in detailed questionnaires, which included questions about their social profile, political knowledge about the EU, attitudes towards politics in general, towards the EU and the candidates running for presidency, as well as their voting intentions for the upcoming elections. We assessed the direct impact of debate exposure by comparing pre- and post-debate values of the dependent variables of our analysis (i.e., EU attitudes; for wording and coding of all variables see appendix). In order to analyze if the debate had conditional effects on voters displaying different levels of political involvement, we used political knowledge as a moderator variable. This is in line with the results provided by Zaller (1992) who has evaluated different measures of political awareness, finding that factual knowledge is the best measure in this case (see also Converse, 2000; for the operationalization of this variable see appendix).³

² See <http://www.quotenmeter.de/n/70768/phoenix-europa-wahl-erreicht-kaum-zuschauer>

³ As there is no standard scale to measure either political

Our analysis is based on 110 respondents (Koblenz-Landau: N=45, Mainz: N=36, Munich: N=29) for whom we measured computer-based real-time judgments during the course of the debate. The utilized real-time response (RTR) system employs the so-called push button technique. Whenever participants had a favorable or unfavorable impression of the debate, they were asked to indicate this by pushing the relevant button. Two keys were clearly marked on a customary computer keyboard, hence allowing participants to make positive and negative judgements independently. The keys corresponded to the design of the computer screen that participants had in front of them (see Figure 1). Whenever a

knowledge or knowledge about the EU in particular, we captured political knowledge with three items on factual knowledge about the EU. All variables have a sufficient item difficulty (M=69.7, minimum 60.9, maximum 74.5). The distribution of our knowledge index is as follows: 7 percent no correct answer, 21 percent one correct answer, 27 percent two correct answers, 45 percent three correct answers. The average number of correct answers is M=2.1 (SD=1.0). The standardized reliability (Kuder-Richardson formula 20) of the scale is $r=.51$. Although, reliability is clearly below the cutoff value considered as adequate by most researchers, Schmitt (1996, pp. 351-352) argues that even scales with reliability scores as low as in our case might be useful "when a measure has other desirable properties such as meaningful content coverage of some domain and reasonable unidimensionality". Both criteria are met here: first, a factor analysis yields only one dimension. Hence, our scale is homogenous. Second, as the wording of our knowledge items indicate, all of them refer to the EU. In addition, all items are positively correlated (mean inter-item correlation .26; minimum: .16, maximum: .41). All items of the scale are thus related in a meaningful way to the domain in focus.

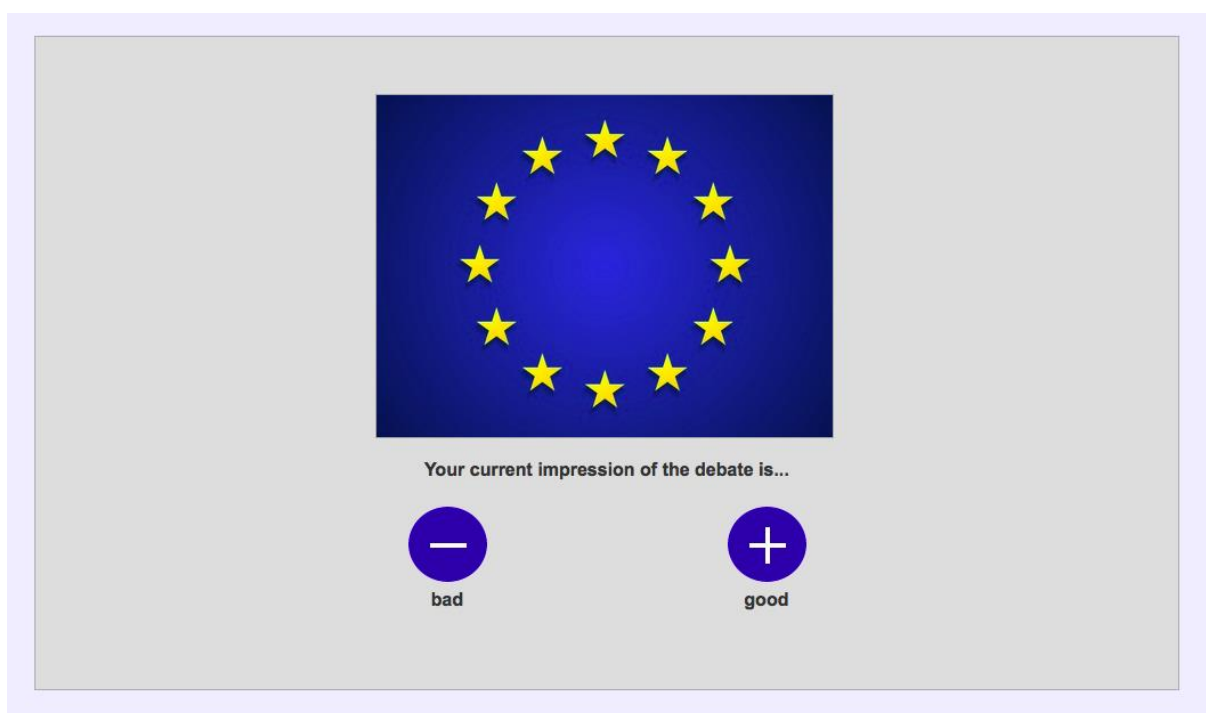


Figure 1. RTR screen.

participant decide to strike one of the keys, the respective symbol on the screen flashed up to confirm the stroke. The RTR-system yields categorical data about positive and negative impressions of the debate on a second-by-second base. Previous research indicates that the RTR data is reliable and valid (see, e.g., Maier, Maurer, Reinemann, & Faas, 2007).

In order to connect real-time responses with the content of the debate, we carried out a content analysis of the Eurovision debate. Based on the German transcript of the debate (Maier & Faas, 2014a; for an English transcript see Maier & Faas, 2014b), we first disaggregated the debate content into single statements. These single statements are our unit of analysis. A statement is considered to be complete if the speaker, the content, the object, or the strategy changed. In order to match the content of the statements with recipients' real-time responses we identified the exact beginning as well as the exact end of each message. Second, we separated functional from non-functional units. Non-functional units are statements that were incomplete, i.e. that they were not intelligible. Third, all functional units addressed by candidates were coded (e.g., the topic of the statement). For the purpose of our analysis we only employ information about which candidate was speaking at a particular point of the debate.

Our student sample is, of course, a convenience sample. Although research has indicated that there is nothing wrong with student samples in experimental research *per se* (Druckman & Kam, 2009), we have to acknowledge that the distribution of some of the items used in our analysis might be biased due to the structure of the sample (for instance, assessments about the most pressing problems Germany is facing). Nevertheless, as the focus of our study is on campaign effects, this kind of bias should not be a problem. Most of the respondents are students of political or social science study programs (79%). 56 percent of the participants are female. The average age is 22.0 years ($SD=2.9$). Based on a self-placement on an eleven-point ideology scale from 0 ("left") to 10 ("right") our sample is slightly biased to the left ($M=3.7$, $SD=1.6$). In addition, the participants of our study view the EU favorably: prior to the debate, 84 percent viewed Germany's membership in the EU as a "good thing", 16 percent believed that being part of the EU is "neither good nor bad" for Germany, and only one percent indicated that Germany's EU membership is a "bad thing".⁴

⁴ Our sample is neither representative for Germany nor for young voters. Nevertheless, we have no indication that the processing of the debate and its effects are different for voters not included in our sample. Because we are interested in the effect of the debate (and not in distributions of EU attitudes), we assume that our findings are valid for young and well-educated German voters in general.

3. Results

3.1. Perception of the Candidates' Statements

To assess the individual perception of the candidates' statements we make use of the data obtained through RTR measurement. In total, we received 29,746 real-time responses during the debate. 24,619 (82.8 percent) of these responses were direct reactions to the candidates speaking. On average, every participant exercised a key-stroke 223.8 times during the debate.⁵ Since the duration of the debate was 5,380 seconds, recipients reacted to what the candidates said by pushing one of the keys about every 24 seconds. The majority of reactions to the candidates were positive (16,542, i.e. 67.2 percent). Voters with low and high levels of political knowledge differed somewhat but not significantly ($p>.05$). On average, political 'novices' stroke a key 196.9 times (i.e. about every 27 seconds). Political 'experts' reacted, on average, 234.4 times to what the candidates had to say (i.e. about every 23 seconds). In addition, the share of positive responses is quite similar as well (65.6 vs. 67.6 percent, $p>.05$). With respect to the candidates, Keller received most of the spontaneous responses (6,501, i.e. 26.4 percent), followed by Verhofstadt (5,487, i.e. 22.3 percent), Juncker (4,916, i.e. 20.0 percent), Tsipras (4,193, i.e. 17.0 percent), and Schulz (3,522, i.e. 14.3 percent). This ranking is similar for respondents with low and high knowledge levels.

In order to keep our research as transparent and comprehensible as possible, we draw on the *individual balance* between a candidate's share of positive and his/her share of negative reactions for all subsequent analyses (for this approach see also Faas & Maier, 2004). Based on this measure, a score of +100 (-100) indicates that a respondent's reaction towards a candidate is exclusively positive (negative). A score of 0 indicates that positive and negative reactions are in balance, or that a candidate received no response at all. Using this measure, Table 1 indicates that Keller (+73.1) and Schulz (+71.9) are clearly ahead of Verhofstadt (+39.6) and Juncker (+34.2). Tsipras obtained the worst, albeit still positive balance (+10.7).

If we disaggregate the evaluation of the candidates' debate performance by issue block, it becomes apparent that the candidates performed very differently during the course of the debate (see Table 2). Juncker received most support when he talked about the acceptance of religious symbols in Europe (+50.2) and about the refugee issue (+48.9). He performed worst when he explained measures to overcome Euroscepticism (-2.3). Schulz had his best moments when he outlined his plans

⁵ Note that there is a large variation for the number of individual responses to the candidates. The minimum number of reactions is 14, the maximum number is 2,036. The standard deviation is 305.2.

Table 1. Mean balance between the share of positive and negative real-time responses to candidate statements by candidate and topic.

	Juncker	Schulz	Verhofstadt	Keller	Tsipras
Debate as a whole	+34.2	+71.9	+39.6	+73.1	+10.7
<i>Blocks of issues</i>					
Opening statement	+17.0	+4.3	+9.2	+59.9	-9.1
Youth unemployment	+38.9	+62.9	+42.1	+62.5	-1.8
Austerity	+20.4	+38.5	-23.4	+57.5	-20.8
Regulations of banks	+31.2	+35.5	+15.0	+54.6	-1.6
Euroskepticism	-2.3	+48.9	+18.6	+54.9	-12.8
Ukraine crisis	+37.8	+60.9	+40.8	+73.7	+37.0
Independent movements	+39.1	+50.4	+18.6	+39.5	+25.1
Refugees	+48.9	+43.6	+48.9	+69.1	+21.2
Religious symbols	+50.2	+49.4	+55.0	+66.2	+37.6
Turnout	+25.6	+65.1	+22.9	+56.9	+4.9
Lobbyism and corruption	+29.7	+48.6	+71.5	+55.9	+24.6
President of EU commission	+24.5	+41.4	+11.2	+29.8	-1.4
Closing statements	+28.2	+52.7	+23.7	+33.2	+13.2
N	110				

Table 2. Mean balance between the share of positive and negative real-time responses to candidate statements by candidate and topic by voters with low and high level of political knowledge.

	Low knowledge					High knowledge				
	Juncker	Schulz	Verhofstadt	Keller	Tsipras	Juncker	Schulz	Verhofstadt	Keller	Tsipras
Debate as a whole	+44.7	+61.4	+42.0	+74.2	+6.3	+30.1	+76.0	+38.7	+72.6	+12.4
<i>Blocks of issues</i>										
Opening statement	+34.1	+3.2	+19.4	+61.3	-24.7	+10.3	+4.7	+5.1	+59.3	-3.0
Youth unemployment	+48.0	+61.5	+46.0	+61.3	+9.7	+35.4	+63.5	+40.5	+63.0	-6.3
Austerity	+19.4	+34.0	-7.0	+60.8	-10.6	+20.8	+40.3	-29.9	+56.2	-24.9
Regulations of banks	+44.8	+9.7 ^b	+16.1	+50.0	-5.0	+25.9	+45.7	+14.6	+56.4	-0.3
Euroskepticism	+8.5	+27.4 ^a	+16.7	+52.7	-9.6	-6.6	+57.4	+19.4	+55.7	-14.0
Ukraine crisis	+33.5	+51.0	+20.2	+79.6	+32.6	+39.5	+64.8	+48.9	+71.4	+38.7
Independent movements	+32.3	+44.5	+37.9	+32.3	+17.4	+41.8	+52.7	+11.2	+42.3	+28.2
Refugees	+45.2	+35.5	+51.6	+64.5	+14.8	+50.3	+46.8	+47.9	+70.9	+23.7
Religious symbols	+64.5	+30.1 ^a	+49.7	+70.9	+28.7	+44.6	+56.9	+57.1	+64.4	+41.1
Turnout	+27.6	+67.6	+0.3 ^a	+65.9	-2.2	+24.7	+64.1	+31.8	+53.4	+7.6
Lobbyism and corruption	+30.1	+28.0 ^a	+68.8	+58.6	+16.1	+29.5	+56.6	+72.5	+54.8	+27.9
President of EU commission	+16.1	+40.3	+12.6	+9.7 ^a	+6.5	+27.8	+41.8	+10.7	+37.6	+0.6
Closing statements	+38.7	+23.2 ^c	+21.0	+25.8	+20.4	+24.1	+64.3	+24.8	+36.1	+10.3
N	31					79				

Note: a: $p < .05$, b: $p < .01$, c: $p < .001$.

to confront the low turnout in EP elections (+65.1), to reduce youth unemployment (62.9), and when he highlighted his position on the Ukraine crisis (+60.9). His weakest performance was during his opening statement (+4.3). Verhofstadt performed best when addressing lobbyism and corruption (+71.5). He was judged least favorably when he talked about austerity (-23.4). Keller performed very strong during all phases of the debate. She obtained her best scores with her position on the Ukraine crisis (73.7), and was deemed least convincing when she talked about the future role of the presidency of the European Commission (+29.8), as well as during her closing statement (+33.2). For Tsipras the picture was more mixed than for the other candidates. While his arguments on religion (+37.6) and the Ukraine crisis (+37.0) were received favorably, he faced negative responses on several issues: His posi-

tion on austerity (-20.8) and his explanation about why the EU is often seen critically by citizens (-12.9) were the most unpopular. If we compare the perceived performance of the candidates across issues, Keller performed most successfully. She 'won' in seven out of thirteen issue blocks, including the opening statement. Schulz received the best ratings on five issues, including the closing statement. Verhofstadt performed best on one issue (lobbyism and corruption), while Tsipras and Juncker did not 'win' any of the thematic blocks.

How successful was the perceived performance of the candidates with respect to the recipients' level of political knowledge about the EU? Our results indicate that both groups of voters—those with high and low knowledge levels—reacted quite similarly to the candidates' statements (see Table 2). Focusing on the debate as a whole, we do not find any significant differ-

ences between ‘experts’ and ‘novices’ ($p > .05$). If we analyze the reactions to the candidates by issue blocks we find some statistically significant differences ($p < .05$), albeit only for Schulz, Verhofstadt and Keller. All of these differences point in the same direction: respondents with a high level of political knowledge were more impressed by the candidate statements than less knowledgeable voters. If we add gender, ideology, and diffuse support for the EU as control variables, four group differences remain significant ($p < .05$). On the one hand, Schulz was able to convince ‘experts’ more than ‘novices’ when he talked about Euroskepticism, lobbying and corruption, as well as during his closing statement. On the other hand, subjects with a high level of political knowledge showed more support for Verhofstadt on the issue of turnout than voters with lower levels of factual knowledge.

In sum, the candidates left more positive than negative impressions among our audience of students. The real-time reactions of recipients with a low level of political knowledge and those of political ‘experts’ differ only for some candidates and for some issues. After controlling for variables, which potentially explain the differences between these two groups of voters, it turns out that only a few of the original effects remain significant. Interestingly enough, our results indicate that respondents with higher levels of political knowledge tend to be more persuaded by the candidates than those with lower levels of knowledge.

3.2. Impact of the Debate on Political Attitudes

One of our most important findings is that exposure to the Eurovision debate led to only minor attitudinal changes (see Table 3). Overall, we observe only two changes reaching conventional significance levels ($p < .05$). First, watching the debate causes an increasing

willingness among respondents to favor further European integration (+.35 scale points). Second, exposure to the debate leads to a decrease in fear associated with the EU (-.25 scale points). In addition, three attitude changes almost reached statistical significance. First, expectations about the development of the economy in the EU are more optimistic after the debate than before (+.11 scale points, $p = .052$). Second, prior to the debate, the participants of our study believed that the economic situation in Germany is better than the EU’s. After watching the debate, this ‘national advantage’ is reduced by -.10 scale points ($p = .055$). Third, the share of subjects who believe that the most appropriate level to solve the most important problems facing Germany is the European level increased by 8.2 percentage points ($p = .060$).

If we compare the impact of the debate for respondents with high and low levels of political knowledge, we find different effects among these groups for two out of sixteen issue blocks (see Table 4). First, the perception that the EU is the most appropriate arena to solve Germany’s problems changed only moderately for participants with a high level of EU-related knowledge (+2.5 percentage points). However, watching the debate increased the perception that the EU is an effective problem solver for political ‘novices’ (+22.6 percentage points). The difference between the two groups is statistically significant ($p < .05$). Second, for respondents with a low level of political knowledge, the belief that the EU is responsible for the economic situation in Germany has solidified as a result of watching the debate (+.46). In contrast, respondents with a high level of knowledge about the EU tend to believe that the EU bears less responsibility for the state of the national economy after the debate than before (-.34). These results indicate that political ‘novices’ and political ‘experts’ draw very different conclusions from the

Table 3. Impact of debate exposure on political attitudes.

	Before the debate	After the debate	Difference
% EU most appropriate level to solve most pressing problem	62.7	70.9	+8.2
Development of economic situation of the EU	-0.23	-0.26	-0.04
Expected development of economic situation of the EU	0.24	0.35	+0.11
Comparison of the economic situation in Germany and the EU	1.46	1.36	-0.10
Responsibility of EU for economic situation in Germany	6.64	6.53	-0.11
Financial support of suffering member states	3.11	3.15	+0.04
Trust EU	0.27	0.35	+0.07
Trust European Commission	0.11	0.13	+0.02
EU good thing	0.83	0.85	+0.02
Further integration	1.75	2.10	+0.35 ^a
EU: Fear	-1.64	-1.89	-0.25 ^a
EU: Anger	-1.34	-1.51	-0.19
EU: Hope	0.64	0.84	+0.20
EU: Joy	-0.30	-0.04	+0.25
EU: Disgust	-1.94	-1.99	-0.05
EU: Contempt	-0.73	-0.70	+0.03
N	110	110	110

Notes: Except for the first row all values are means; a: $p < .05$, b: $p < .01$, c: $p < .001$.

Table 4. Impact of debate reception on political attitudes by political knowledge level.

	Low knowledge			High knowledge			Difference low/high knowledge
	Before the debate	After the debate	Differ- ence	Before the debate	After the debate	Differ- ence	
% EU most appropriate level to solve most pressing problem	54.8	77.4	+22.6 ^a	65.8	68.4	+2.5	+20.0 ^a
Development of economic situation of the EU	-0.03	-0.16	-0.13	-0.30	-0.30	0.00	-0.13
Expected development of economic situation of the EU	0.26	0.29	+0.03	0.23	0.38	+0.15 ^a	-0.12
Comparison of the economic situation in Germany and the EU	1.35	1.16	-0.19	1.51	1.44	-0.06	-0.13
Responsibility of EU for economic situation in Germany	6.35	6.80	+0.46	6.76	6.42	-0.34 ^a	+0.80 ^a
Financial support of suffering member states	3.07	3.13	+0.06	3.13	3.15	+0.02	0.04
Trust EU	0.13	0.29	+0.16	0.33	0.37	+0.04	+0.12
Trust European Commission	-0.06	0.03	+0.10	0.18	0.16	-0.01	+0.11
EU good thing	0.74	0.77	+0.03	0.86	0.87	+0.01	+0.02
Further integration	1.63	2.07	+0.44	1.79	2.11	+0.32 ^a	+0.12
EU: Fear	-1.84	-2.00	-0.16	-1.57	-1.85	-0.29 ^a	+0.12
EU: Anger	-1.32	-1.23	+0.10	-1.34	-1.65	-0.30	+0.40
EU: Hope	0.29	0.81	+0.52	0.77	0.85	+0.08	+0.44
EU: Joy	-0.65	-0.48	+0.16	-0.16	0.13	+0.29	-0.13
EU: Disgust	-1.84	-2.06	-0.23	-1.97	-1.96	+0.01	-0.24
EU Contempt	-0.48	-0.42	+0.06	-0.82	-0.81	+0.01	+0.05
N		31		79			110

Notes: Except for the first row all values are means; a: $p < .05$, b: $p < .01$, c: $p < .001$.

debate ($p < .05$). For both issues, the impact of political knowledge on attitude change remains significant after controlling for gender, ideology, and diffuse support for the EU ($p < .05$). Moreover, a third variable turns out to be significantly influenced by different knowledge levels: Exposure to the debate causes ‘experts’ to see the EU as less threatening than political ‘novices’ ($p < .05$).

In sum, watching the Eurovision debate created—at least in part—more favorable impressions about the EU among young and well-educated German voters. Differences between political ‘experts’ and ‘novices’ are a rare occurrence. In addition, we see no clear picture whether subjects with a low level of political knowledge or participants with a high level of knowledge are more influenced by watching the debate. In one case (responsibility of the EU for the economic situation in Germany), the reactions of the two groups of voters even move in different directions.

3.3. Impact of the Evaluation of the Candidates’ Debate Performance on Political Attitudes

Thus far, our results indicate that exposure to the debate caused a shift in a subset of relevant EU attitudes. In addition, the subjects of our study reacted spontaneously to the statements of the candidates because they picked up pieces of information from the debate, which made them reconsider their positions towards the EU. As a consequence, we expect that the content of the debate had an impact on individual EU attitudes. In order to analyze the impact of real-time responses on post-debate attitudes we present a regression model including the evaluation of the debate performance for each of the five candidates. In addition, we include the respective post-debate attitude, gender,

and ideology as control variables.

Our results indicate that the explanatory power of the response to the candidates’ messages for post-debate attitudes—i.e. the increase of R^2 when adding the control variables first and the RTR values for the candidates last—tends to be rather small, with R^2 varying between .8 and 11.8 (see Table 5). Since the R^2 for the full model ranges between $R^2 = 25.9$ and $R^2 = 70.5$, the explanatory power of the candidate statements is rather modest. A closer look at the model reveals that only few of the candidate variables have a statistically significant impact on post-debate attitudes. First, support for Juncker increases the perception among respondents that the EU is the most appropriate level to solve the most pressing national problems. This relationship is reversed for Schulz. Second, support for the messages voiced by Verhofstadt increases the willingness to financially support member states suffering from the economic crisis. Third, trust in the EU increases if subjects had a positive impression of the statements by Verhofstadt, Keller, and Tsipras. Fourth, support for the messages by Keller fosters trust in the European Commission. Fifth, a positive evaluation of Schulz’s statements reduces associations of hope with the EU, while sympathy for the statements by Verhofstadt decreases associations of joy as well as of disgust with the EU.

To answer the question of whether there is a conditional impact of the evaluation of the candidates’ statements on post-debate attitudes, we finally analyze the minimum R^2 of these variables for each of our dependent variables for political ‘novices’ and political ‘experts’.⁶ Our results indicate that the explanatory power

⁶ Due to small N for voters with a low level of political knowledge we do not discuss the regression coefficients.

Table 5. Impact of real-time responses to candidate statements on post-debate political attitudes.

	R ²	Min. R ² candidate statements	Juncker	Schulz	Verhof- stadt	Keller	Tsipras
% EU most appropriate level to solve most pressing problem	0.362	0.067	0.218 ^a	-0.218 ^a	0.067	0.056	0.150
Development of economic situation of the EU	0.538	0.020	-0.047	-0.053	-0.051	-0.014	-0.114
Expected development of economic situation of the EU	0.555	0.017	0.133	-0.010	-0.068	-0.018	0.102
Comparison of the economic situation in Germany and the EU	0.432	0.021	0.040	-0.049	-0.072	0.169	-0.062
Responsibility of EU for economic situation in Germany	0.485	0.008	0.048	-0.065	-0.012	0.090	0.011
Financial support of suffering member states	0.536	0.047	-0.050	-0.053	0.163 ^a	0.146	-0.112
Trust EU	0.570	0.118	0.074	-0.072	0.208 ^b	0.210 ^b	0.162 ^a
Trust European Commission	0.479	0.057	0.113	-0.040	0.027	0.233 ^b	0.040
EU good thing	0.705	0.003	0.054	0.008	-0.047	0.032	-0.027
Further integration	0.644	0.005	-0.005	0.014	0.015	0.069	-0.007
EU: Fear	0.526	0.019	0.084	0.005	-0.153	0.068	-0.053
EU: Anger	0.377	0.018	0.018	0.021	0.109	-0.064	-0.040
EU: Hope	0.259	0.057	0.092	-0.209 ^a	-0.076	0.187	0.051
EU: Joy	0.420	0.043	0.090	0.030	-0.229 ^a	0.075	0.041
EU: Disgust	0.587	0.026	0.020	-0.007	-0.169 ^a	0.077	-0.081
EU: Contempt	0.368	0.051	-0.030	0.020	-0.133	0.063	-0.241
N	110						

Notes: All models control for pretest value of the dependent variable, ideology, and gender. Displayed are standardized regression coefficients; a: $p < .05$, b: $p < .01$, c: $p < .001$.

Table 6. Impact of real-time responses to candidate statements on post-debate political attitudes by political knowledge.

	Low knowledge		High knowledge	
	R ²	Min. R ² candidate statements	R ²	Min. R ² candidate statements
% EU most appropriate level to solve most pressing problem	0.303	0.183	0.482	0.047
Development of economic situation of the EU	0.520	0.102	0.598	0.025
Expected development of economic situation of the EU	0.508	0.121	0.638	0.045
Comparison of the economic situation in Germany and the EU	0.344	0.085	0.546	0.026
Responsibility of EU for economic situation in Germany	0.521	0.031	0.579	0.021
Financial support of suffering member states	0.493	0.133	0.620	0.078
Trust EU	0.570	0.280	0.618	0.078
Trust European Commission	0.495	0.336 ^b	0.583	0.003
EU good thing	0.600	0.042	0.796	0.019
Further integration	0.644	0.008	0.589	0.007
Fear	0.551	0.136	0.569	0.016
Anger	0.676	0.080	0.313	0.018
Hope	0.299	0.166	0.334	0.039
Joy	0.269	0.123	0.505	0.036
Disgust	0.616	0.137	0.635	0.028
Contempt	0.094	0.047	0.499	0.060
N	31		79	

Notes: All models include pretest value of the dependent variable, ideology, gender, and real-time responses for the five candidates; a: $p < .05$, b: $p < .01$, c: $p < .001$.

of the real-time responses to candidate statements tends to be higher for voters with a low level of political knowledge than for knowledgeable voters (see Table 6). Only in one case—trust in the European Commission—is the difference in minimum R² large enough to reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

In sum, the relationship between the evaluation of the candidates' messages and EU attitudes is not as strong as expected. In most cases, the sign of the regression coefficients indicates that support for the candidates increases favorable opinions about the EU. Although our final analysis shows that political 'novic-

es' tend to be more persuaded by candidate messages than political 'experts', the differences measured are statistically significant in only one instance. Interestingly enough, this conditional impact affects a variable at the center of the Eurovision debate: trust in the European Commission.

4. Summary and Conclusion

In 2014, the EP election campaign was characterized by the introduction of a new campaign format: a televised debate between candidates running for the presidency

of the European Commission. Based on the vast body of research on TV debates in the domestic context, we developed the expectation that exposure to the Eurovision debate would lead to a shift in attitudes on the EU. Based on a quasi-experiment among German students we found that viewers of the debate tended to respond positively to what the candidates had to say. In addition, we were able to demonstrate that respondents changed a (small) sub-set of their EU-related attitudes due to debate exposure. Although it seems plausible that shifts in political attitudes are connected to evaluations of candidate messages, the observed relationships are not very strong. One tentative explanation for the weak relationship between candidate statements and attitude change is that the participants of our study might not perceive each message as equally salient. Unfortunately, our data does not allow us to differentiate between the relative importance respondents attach to individual reactions. Still, most of the effects we found indicate that positive evaluations of the candidates' messages result in more favorable attitudes towards the EU. However, our results do not indicate whether the measured effects are indicative of a reinforcement of already existing pro-European attitudes, or if some EU-skeptical recipients were actually persuaded by the candidates' messages. Nevertheless, the general finding that our recipients displayed more positive attitudes towards the EU ties in well with previous findings in TV debate research.

Another goal of this contribution was to analyze whether the recipients' political expertise influenced the perception and the impact of the debate. We found no major and systematic differences between political 'novices' and political 'experts' with respect to information processing, direct debate effects, and the link between spontaneous reactions to what the candidates said and EU attitudes. One explanation for the often small and statistically insignificant differences between 'novices' and 'experts' can be linked to the small sample size. Moreover, the inconclusiveness of the moderating impact of knowledge on the perception and the effects of the debate might result from the observation that the processing of debate content is much more complex than what can be captured by our models. In particular, we assume that not only is what the candidates say important for voters but also how the messages are verbalized. This might indicate that debate strategy matters.

While most of our findings suggest that the moderating role of political knowledge for the impact of the Eurovision debate as a major campaign message is limited, our results also underscore an important observation made by previous research in this field: the effect of political involvement varies with the dependent variable in focus (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2011; Lecheler et al., 2009). One of the main results we thus draw from this analysis is that we consider the often-claimed dif-

ferences between voters with low and high levels of political knowledge to be exaggerated. This is in line with other findings from debate research in the German context (Reinemann & Maurer, 2010).

In sum, our findings highlight that televised debates in the run-up to the 2014 EP election can affect the attitudes of voters. Although our results do not provide a final and conclusive answer to the question about the impact of political knowledge on the likelihood of attitudinal change, our general finding suggests that the observed attitudinal shift leads to more positive evaluations of the EU. Hence, EU pundits should press for keeping this debate format for future elections. A prerequisite to achieving massive effects is, of course, that large parts of the electorate watch Eurovision debates. Based on the experiences of the 2014 election there is ample scope to improve the attractiveness of this campaign event.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Dr. Jürgen Maier

Jürgen Maier is Professor of Political Communication at the University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany. His current research focuses on the content and effects of campaign communication with a particular interest on televised debates; media, public opinion, and electoral behavior; processing of political information; experiments in Political Science, and real-time response measurement.



Dr. Berthold Rittberger

Berthold Rittberger is Professor of International Relations at the University of Munich and co-editor-in-chief of the *Journal of European Public Policy*. His research focuses on European integration and processes of institutional change as well as political representation in the EU.



Dr. Thorsten Faas

Thorsten Faas holds an MSc in European Politics and Policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science. He received his PhD in 2008 from the University of Duisburg-Essen. Since 2012, he is a Professor of Political Science at the Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz. In his research, he focuses on elections, electoral behavior and political communication.

Appendix. Question wording and coding.

EU most appropriate level to solve most pressing problem: “What do you think would be the most appropriate level to deal with those three problems that you have just mentioned?”; “European level” (1), “National level” (0), “Regional/local level” (0).

Development of the economic situation of the EU: “Thinking about the economy in the European Union as a whole, would you say that over the past year the economy in the EU...”; “has improved by much” (2), “has improved somewhat” (1), “stayed about the same” (0), “got somewhat worse” (-1), “got much worse” (-2).

Expected development of the economic situation of the EU: “What about the next 12 months? Do you expect the economy, in the European Union as a whole,...”; “to get much better” (2), “to get somewhat better” (1), “to stay about the same” (0), “to get somewhat worse” (-1), “to get much worse” (-2).

Comparison of the economic situation in Germany and the EU: “If you compare the state of the economy in your country with the European Union as a whole, would you say the state of the economy in your country is...”; “much better than in the EU” (2), “somewhat better than in the EU” (1), “about the same as in the EU” (0), “somewhat worse than in the EU” (-1), “much worse than in the EU” (-2).

Responsibility of the EU for economic situation in Germany: “What do you think—to what extent is each of the following institutions responsible for the economic conditions in your country?” The EU; 11-point scale from -5 (“not at all responsible”) to +5 (“fully responsible”).

Financial support for economically depressed member states “Do you agree or disagree that in times of crisis countries that are better off should give financial help to another EU member state facing severe economic and financial difficulties?”; “totally agree” (3), “agree” (2), “disagree” (1), “totally disagree” (0).

EU good thing: “Generally speaking, do you think that your country’s membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?”; “good thing” (1), “neither good nor bad” (0), “bad thing” (-1).

Further integration: “Some say European integration (i.e. the economic and political cooperation between the member states) should be pushed further. Others say it has already gone too far. And what is your opinion on this issue?” 11-point scale from +5 (“European integration should be pushed further”) to -5 (“European integration has already gone too far”).

Trust in EU: “How much of the time do you think you can trust the following groups and institutions to do what is right? The European Union”; “almost always” (2), “frequently” (1), “about half of the time” (0), “once in a while” (-1), “almost never” (-2).

Trust in EU Commission: “How much of the time do you think you can trust the following groups and institutions to do what is right? The European Commission”; “almost always” (2), “frequently” (1), “about half of the time” (0), “once in a while” (-1), “almost never” (-2).

Fear: “If you think about the European Union: To what extent does the EU trigger fear in you? Fear”, 7-point scale from -3 (“not at all”) to +3 (“to a great extend”).

Anger: “If you think about the European Union: To what extent does the EU trigger anger in you? Anger”, 7-point scale from -3 (“not at all”) to +3 (“to a great extend”).

Hope: “If you think about the European Union: To what extent does the EU trigger hope in you? Hope”, 7-point scale from -3 (“not at all”) to +3 (“to a great extend”).

Joy: “If you think about the European Union: To what extent does the EU trigger joy in you? Joy”, 7-point scale from -3 (“not at all”) to +3 (“to a great extend”).

Disgust: “If you think about the European Union: To what extent does the EU trigger disgust in you? Disgust”, 7-point scale from -3 (“not at all”) to +3 (“to a great extend”).

Contempt: “If you think about the European Union: To what extent does the EU trigger contempt in you? Contempt”, 7-point scale from -3 (“not at all”) to +3 (“to a great extend”).

Political knowledge: “For each of the following statements about the EU, please mark whether you think they are true or false: “The EU currently consists of 28 member states” (true), “The members of the European Parliament are directly elected by the citizens of each member state” (true), “Norway is a member of the EU” (false). Based on the answers to these statements a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (“none of the statements were an-

swered correctly”) to 3 (“all statements were answered correctly”) was calculated. For some analyses the scale was dichotomized into “low political knowledge/political novices” (i.e., none or one statement correctly answered) (0) vs. “high political knowledge/political experts” (i.e., two or three statements correctly answered) (1).

Ideology: “In political matters people talk of “the left” and “the right”. What is your position?” 11-point scale from 0 (“left”) to 10 (“right”).

Gender: male (0), female (1).

Article

Cross Road Elections: Change in EU Performance Evaluations during the European Parliament Elections 2014

Claes de Vreese *, Rachid Azrout and Judith Moeller

Amsterdam School of Communication Research ASCoR, University of Amsterdam, 1018 WV Amsterdam, The Netherlands; E-Mails: c.h.devreese@uva.nl (C.V.), R.Azrout@uva.nl (R.A.), J.E.Moller1@uva.nl (J.M.)

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections were held after a period where public opinion about the EU changed significantly. In this paper we investigate evaluations of the performance of the European Union, as this dimension of EU attitudes is particularly relevant ahead of elections. We look at public opinion developments since 2009 and then zoom in on the role played by the news media in shaping public opinion about EU performance by linking citizens' evaluations across time to the news media content they were exposed to. The article relies on original multiple wave survey panel data and a systematic media content analysis in the Netherlands. It shows how public opinion has changed, how it changes around EP elections, and how exposure to media coverage can help improve citizens' evaluations of EU performance.

Keywords

EU attitudes; European Parliament elections; media effects; public opinion

Issue

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1. Introduction

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections were among the most contested in the history of the European Union. Never before were elites and citizens so divided on EU questions and never before were anti-EU sentiments so strong. For a long time European integration was considered a consensus topic (Hooghe & Marks, 2005) and EU attitudes were seen as uni-dimensional. This made intuitive sense during a period where European integration was rarely politicized and the EU did not feature centrally in political or public debates. Recent work in the field, however, demonstrated that these attitudes contain multiple dimensions (Hobolt, 2014). Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas and de Vreese (2011) identified five dimensions dealing with (1) the identification with Europe, (2) evaluations of potential benefits of

the EU, (3) evaluations of the current (democratic) performance of the EU, (4) the emotional component of attitudes towards the EU, and finally (5) a more ideological attitude towards EU integration. This dimensional structure has been validated and the importance of these dimensions for voting behaviour in EP elections has been demonstrated (van Spanje & de Vreese, 2014).

In this paper we focus in particular on the *performance dimension* of EU attitudes. The perceived performance of the European Union and its institutions is highly relevant in relation to elections where citizens are asked to vote for one of the key institutions, because it is one of the most important criteria voters apply in order to make their voting decisions. Indeed a rich literature has shown that citizens are capable of evaluating the performance of their elected officials, also in the context of EU politics (Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). Moreover,

performance evaluations are a key component of citizens' general evaluations of EU politics (de Vreese & van der Brug, 2016).

In this study, we first look at how this dimension of EU attitudes has developed at the aggregate level since 2009. Second, we turn to the individual level and investigate the role played by the news media in shaping public opinion about EU performance by linking citizens' evaluations across time to the news media content they were exposed to. Using multiple wave panel survey data and a media content analysis, the central question is if exposure to news about the performance of the EU affects *change* in individual level attitudes.

Understanding these dynamics is important, both from a theoretical point of view of trying to understand the role of new information in shaping EU attitudes as well as from a societal point of view, as the EU is a political reality that has been very prominent in past years' politics. But this increase in prominence was paralleled by an increase in the contentiousness of the EU, and the obviousness of the EU is not undisputed. Understanding support for the EU is important for the legitimacy (or illegitimacy) of the EU as a democratic system. Furthermore these findings may help us in understanding citizens' decisions to vote for pro-European or Eurosceptic parties (see Treib, 2014; van Spanje & de Vreese, 2014). In the long run EU attitudes and voting based on EU considerations may affect not only the direction in which the EU is heading, but also national political choices (de Vries, 2007).

2. EU Attitudes: Multiple Dimensions

The EU today covers more policy areas and more geographical space than ever before. As argued in detail elsewhere, there are very good theoretical and empirical reasons to consider EU attitudes as multidimensional. In general, political support can be directed towards different objects of support (Easton, 1975), can be diffuse or specific (Gabel, 1998; Hewstone, 1986), or can be of a utilitarian or affective nature (Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970). Recent research identified five dimensions of EU attitudes: negative affection, identity, performance, utilitarianism, and strengthening.

The first dimension, *negative affection towards the EU*, touches on a perceived threat of European unification. The second dimension, *identity*, encompasses attitudes specific to citizens' identification with the EU, such as pride in being an EU citizen and feeling close to other Europeans and their culture and history, but also adherence to EU symbols such as the flag. The third dimension relates to the democratic and financial functioning and the performance of European institutions, and is labelled '*performance*' (of the EU). The fourth dimension, *utility*, entails traditional general support as well as the perception of the country's and the individual's personal benefit as a result of EU membership, and

attitudes in line with post-materialist utilitarian approach to European integration in terms of the EU helping to preserve peace, prosperity and the environment. The fifth dimension called (EU) '*strengthening*' entails attitudes towards the future of European integration and to a process of further deepening and widening of the EU. Within this multi-dimensional structure some sub-dimensions are more stable than others. Identity, for example, is conceptually close to being a character trait, while *performance evaluations* are more likely to fluctuate over time, as the actual performance of the EU is not stable itself. More importantly, mediated information about the performance of the EU varies substantially across time, depending on issue cycles and the larger political agenda, as well as the functioning of the EU institutions. For this reason and given the importance of this attitude dimension in electoral decision-making, we study *performance* evaluation as an outcome of exposure to EU news in detail.

3. Doing Well? EU Performance Evaluations

In the run up to elections it is essential that citizens form evaluations about the performance of power holders, policies, and institutions. As convincingly pointed out by Hobolt (2012), though there is a rich academic literature on how EU institutions function and how they could be designed to alleviate the alleged 'democratic deficit' in the EU, we still have only limited knowledge about how citizens view European democracy. Previous research has demonstrated that there is a lot of cross-national and individual level variation in citizens' evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU (e.g., Desmet, van Spanje, & de Vreese, 2012). In a general sense, Alvarez and Franklin (1994) argued that how people see the performance of a regime depends on the cost-benefit assessments people make. These assessments may pertain to evaluations of political performance (Klingemann & Fuchs, 1995; Rose & Mishler, 2002), economic performance (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Lewis-Beck, 1988), and expectations of governance in the near future (Stokes, 2001).

The EU performance evaluations as part of the broader EU attitude structure are important because they concern the perception and evaluation of the actual functioning of the systems and its institutions. In line with Rohrschneider (2002), Scheuer (2005), and Boomgaarden et al. (2011), Desmet et al. (2012) found that citizens do not per se connect their evaluations of the EU's democratic performance with their political support for further integration, i.e. these are relatively independent attitude dimensions. That said, performance evaluations matter for future support as they are building blocks for these latter, more general attitudes, and they are, as such, crucial considerations in the process of EU opinion formation (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Rohrschneider, 2002).

Most prior research focusing on the EU's performance has relied on a single item tapping satisfaction with the way democracy works. This has been investigated both in general cross-national terms (e.g., Norris, 1999) and with respect to the EU specifically (Karp, Banducci, & Bowler, 2003). Hobolt (2012) succinctly summarizes that in the "EU context, scholars have argued that whereas input-oriented and output-oriented legitimacy coexist in democratic nation-states, support for democracy in the EU must rely solely on output-based legitimacy (see, for example, Majone, 1998, 2000)". As Scharpf (1999, p. 12) notes: "[T]he legitimacy of [the EU's] institutional practices...is almost automatically judged, and found wanting, by reference to the conglomerate of input- and output-oriented criteria familiar from national debates'. As put by Hobolt (2012): "since the EU lacks a single demos with a collective identity, the legitimacy of the Union hinges almost exclusively on its performance (Scharpf, 1999; Majone, 2000)". This makes the performance dimension of EU attitudes crucial.

4. Explaining Change in EU Performance Evaluations

As a general antecedent of EU performance evaluations we know that economic considerations and government approval matter (the so-called national yardstick, see Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Desmet et al., 2012; Hobolt, 2012). However, since we, in this study, are concerned with *changes* in performance evaluations, we focus in particular on one of the key antecedents for changing opinions, the role of information as provided by the media. Research has generally not paid much attention to how media may affect citizens' assessment of the democratic performance of a polity like the EU (see Desmet, van Spanje, & de Vreese, 2015, for an exception). This might be surprising since we know from other studies that being exposed to specific media coverage can alter perceptions and support for different EU issues (e.g., Azrout, van Spanje, & de Vreese, 2012; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2016; Maier & Rittberger, 2008).

The functioning of the EU is an issue where most citizens rely on *others'* judgment—in lieu of direct, personal experiences. In the words of Desmet et al. (2015, p. 3179): "Because European citizens do not experience the democratic performance of the EU first-hand, evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU depend on collective experiences, and therefore on information gathered through interpersonal and mass media communication". We theorize that specific aspects of the media coverage are most likely to affect performance evaluations, namely visibility of the EU and evaluations of the EU by actors in the news or the editorial board (de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, & Boomgaarden, 2006; Hopmann, Vliegthart, De Vreese, & Albæk,

2010). Visibility refers to how often the EU or its institutions and actions are in the news. The visibility has traditionally been low to modest but with significant cross-national variation (e.g., de Vreese et al., 2006). The supply of information is a condition sine qua non speculating about media effects stemming from news coverage makes little sense. In addition, specific features of the coverage, evaluations of the EU in general and, in particular, evaluation of the democratic performance of the EU, and the quality/effectiveness of the policies of the EU are expected to affect evaluations. Because these evaluations provide a frame of reference to news users that they can apply when they make up their mind about the performance of the EU. Based on extant research our key *hypothesis* is that exposure to news with explicit evaluations is likely to cause *change* in EU performance evaluation. We address this by estimating the impact of both news visibility and evaluations on change in evaluations, and we also assess the magnitude of these effects by offering insights into what would happen with evaluations if either the news content or the news usage of individuals would change.

5. Methods

To test our hypothesis we rely on two original sources of data: a national four-wave panel survey and a media content analysis. Our study is conducted in the Netherlands. This country was long seen as a stable supporter of further integration, but public opinion has changed and the Dutch voted no to the Constitutional Treaty in a referendum in 2005 and in EP elections in both 2009 and 2014, Eurosceptic parties gained a significant share of the vote. This makes the Netherlands an interesting case to investigate further. Ideally, our research would have allowed us to collect multiple wave survey data and media data in more countries, but in the absence of this opportunity we also stress that our key concern is to test the *dynamics* of media influence on public evaluations. We are more concerned with the nature of this dynamic than with the actual level of support, and we have little reason to expect that the dynamic would be different in a different context.

5.1. Survey

A four-wave panel survey was held in the Netherlands, with waves in December 2013 and March, April, and May 2014.¹ It is part of the '2014 European Election Campaign Study' (de Vreese, Azrout, & Möller, 2014). The fieldwork was coordinated by TNS NIPO Netherlands, a research institute that complies with ESOMAR guidelines for survey research. The sample was drawn from the TNS NIPO database. The database consists of

¹ Fieldwork dates were 13th–26th of December, 2013 for the first wave, 20th–30th of March, 2014 for the second wave, 17th–28th

of April, 2014 for the third wave, and 26th of May–2nd of June, 2014 for the fourth wave.

200,000 individuals that were recruited through multiple recruitment strategies, including telephone, face-to-face, and online recruitment. Quotas (on age, gender, and education) were enforced in sampling from the database. The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). A total of 2189 respondents participated in wave one (response rate 78.1%), 1819 respondents participated in wave two (re-contact rate 83.1%), 1537 participated in wave three (re-contact rate 84.5%), and 1379 in wave four (re-contact rate 89.7%).

5.2. Content Analysis

Visibility and evaluations of the EU in the media were measured in a quantitative media content analysis of three daily newspapers (two quality newspapers [NRC Handelsblad and De Volkskrant] and one tabloid [De Telegraaf]), two television news programs (one from the public broadcaster [NOS Journaal] and one from a commercial broadcaster [RTL Nieuws]) and one widely read online news source (nu.nl).² We sampled the news from December 2nd, 2013 until May 21st, 2014 (the day before the EP Election Day). For the period before the EPE campaign period (until April 16th) every outlet was coded every 3rd day, according to an alternating scheme (so each time a particular outlet would not be coded on a particular day of the week); during the campaign period, all outlets were coded every day.

For the newspapers, every article on the front page and on a random page was coded. In addition, during the campaign period, for every other newspaper, coders would also code all articles on the domestic and international (foreign) news pages that mentioned the EU (or its institutions or the EP elections) at least twice. In the period before the campaign, coders coded all articles mentioning the EU twice for each newspaper in our sample. For television news all stories were coded, with the exception of the weather forecast and specific sections devoted to sports.

For the online source, the sampling strategy was similar to the one used for the newspapers. Since the

front page of online news is unique for every user visiting the site at a specific point in time and it is therefore impossible to ascertain which articles were available to respondents in the survey,³ we opted for using the articles classified as “most read” as an approximation. For the random page, for each day the website was coded so that a random sample of the published articles in the domestic and foreign news was chosen as being part of the random page. This sampling strategy led to 4643 articles coded in 68 editions of each newspaper, 80 broadcasts of each television news program, and 80 days of the online news source (a total of 444 date-outlet combinations).

Coding was performed by ten recruited and trained student coders. The coders participated in a joint training with fellow coders. The EU performance variable was part of the Dutch coding. After the training, inter-coder reliability was assessed using a none-random sample of articles from English newspapers to test the variables coded EU wide (N=16), and a non-random sample of articles from Dutch newspapers to test the Dutch specific variables (N=11). The articles were chosen such that there would be some spread on all variables. The results of the inter-coder reliability test are shown in Table A in the Appendix and fall within conventional ICR standards (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998).

5.2.1. Content Analysis Measures

Visibility was assessed by coders coding whether the EU or its institutions were mentioned in the article (no = 0; yes = 1). Visibility for a particular outlet and a particular period was calculated as the proportion of all articles in that period for that outlet. As for newspapers there was an oversampling of stories mentioning the EU, the proportion was only calculated for articles on the front page and the random page (as a random sample of the news).

EU evaluation was assessed by coding the number of positive and negative evaluative statements in each article. We coded evaluative statements about the EU as a whole (i.e., as a political institution) and not about specific institutions (as for instance the European Commission or the European Parliament). If the number of negative evaluations exceeded the number of positive

² We chose these outlets because they are the most used news media in their respective categories, and together they give a good representation of the Dutch media environment. More specifically we focus on a combination of national television news and newspapers, because these media are consistently listed as the most important sources of information about the EU for citizens in Europe (*Eurobarometer* 54–62). We first included the main national evening news broadcasts of the most widely watched public (NOS Journaal) and commercial (RTL Nieuws) television stations. Second we included three newspapers: De Telegraaf is the most read national newspaper with a sensationalist character; De Volkskrant and NRC Handelsblad are the most read quality newspapers, with the first having a

more left-of-centre ideology and the second being right-of-centre. Since citizens retrieve their news more and more online, we also added the most widely used online news website: www.nu.nl

³ We did not consider the homepage of the news website as a front page, because online news sites do not have a unique daily homepage. The homepage is constantly changing and is also adjusted to personal preferences of the site’s visitor by the use of cookies. And on a more practical note, the homepage of nu.nl lists at any given moment more than 60 titles of the most recent published articles, which should not be considered as front page material in terms of the importance of the news and also given that this is too high a number of articles compared to the front page of a physical newspapers.

evaluations, EU evaluation was coded as -1; if the number of positive evaluations exceeded the number of negative evaluations, EU evaluation was coded as +1; if the number of positive and negative evaluations was equal (or if there were no evaluations) EU evaluation was coded as 0. Similar to visibility, EU evaluation for a particular outlet and a particular period was calculated as the mean of all articles in that period for that outlet. The oversampling of EU articles here does not affect the randomness of the sample, because all articles concerning the EU were selected to code on randomly selected days. Thus, the mean is calculated across all articles mentioning the EU.

EU performance evaluation was assessed by coding references to the current performance of the EU. These references could be about the democratic performance of the EU, and about the quality/effectiveness of the policies of the EU. In contrast to our measure of EU evaluations, here we also coded evaluations of the performance of specific EU institutions. EU performance evaluations were coded -1, 0 or +1 in the same way as with the general EU evaluation.

5.2.2. Survey Measures

To measure the different dimensions of EU attitudes, respondents were asked in each wave to self-assess their agreement, on a 7 point scale, to a multiple item scale. *EU performance* was measured with three items: (1) The European Union functions well as it is, (2) the European Union functions according to democratic principles, and (3) the decision-making process in the European Union is transparent. Cronbach's alpha ranged from .86 to .88 in the four waves.

Media exposure was assessed by asking respondents on how many days in a typical week did they watched or read each of the outlets. To measure exposure to the EU and to evaluations of the EU, we weighted the media exposure measure. For this, we used the visibility and evaluation scores from the content analysis. For each wave of the survey, we assessed for each outlet how visible the EU was and how it was evaluated between the waves. We linked media visibility to individual respondents by multiplying the visibility scores for each period-outlet combination to the self-reported exposure to

⁴ For each wave the EU visibility exposure measure (X_1) is calculated by weighting the media exposure measure using the following equation:

$$X_{1i,t} = \sum_j exposure_{i,j,t} * visibility_{j,t}$$

With $exposure_{i,j,t}$ the number of days respondent i reports to use outlet j in a typical week at time point t , and $visibility_{j,t}$ the mean visibility of the EU in outlet j in the period preceding time point t .

that outlet in the consecutive wave of the survey. For evaluation exposure we followed a similar method.⁴ Combining media content data with (panel) survey data is seen as one of the strongest designs for assessing media effects in observational studies (Schuck, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2016; Slater, 2004, 2015).

A number of control variables were included in the model. To test whether it is mere media exposure or whether exposure to specific content has an effect above and beyond, we added a "raw" media exposure measure, adding together the number of days respondents use each of the media outlets used in this study. The descriptive measures of this variable and all additional variables can be found in Table B in the Appendix. Additional control variables include two measures of interest, the first measuring general interest in the EU and the second measuring individual interest in the election campaign for the EP elections specifically. Also, we added two measures of interpersonal communication: Interpersonal communication about politics and interpersonal communication about the EU as covariates to the model. Finally, we added satisfaction with the current government and respondents evaluations of the economy. All items were measured on a seven-point scale and measured at the same time as the dependent and independent variable (see Table B in the Appendix for question wording).

6. Results

6.1. Descriptives of Public Opinion Development

In Figure 1 the mean values (with 95% confidence interval) of the EU performance evaluations are plotted over time starting in April 2009 (just before the previous EP elections of 2009); the subsequent four time points represent the four waves of our survey. This finding dovetails a more general pattern showing that since 2009, Dutch citizens have become more negative in their views regarding the EU (De Vreese, Azrout, & Moeller, in press). The drop in the performance dimension (with an aggregate level .6 drop on a 7-point scale) is the largest when compared to other attitude dimensions. A formal test showed that the difference was significant ($p < .001$).

Similar, we calculated the EU evaluation exposure measure (X_2) using the formula:

$$X_{2i} = \sum_j exposure_{i,j} * evaluation_j$$

With j representing the different media outlets, $exposure_{i,j}$ the number of days respondent i reports to use outlet j in a typical week, and $evaluation_j$ the mean evaluation of the EU in outlet j in the period preceding the wave.

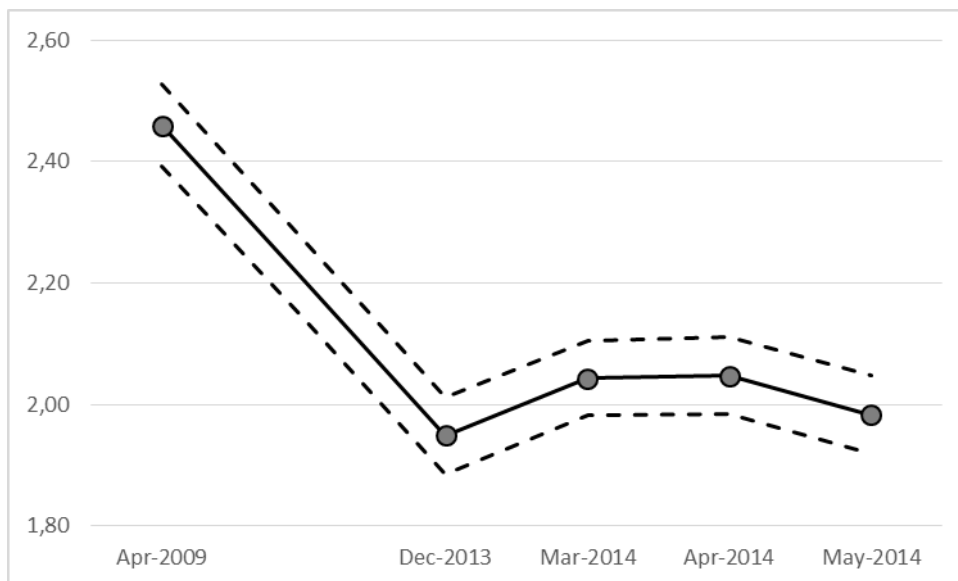


Figure 1. Mean values of EU performance evaluation by the public over time, with the 95% confidence interval.

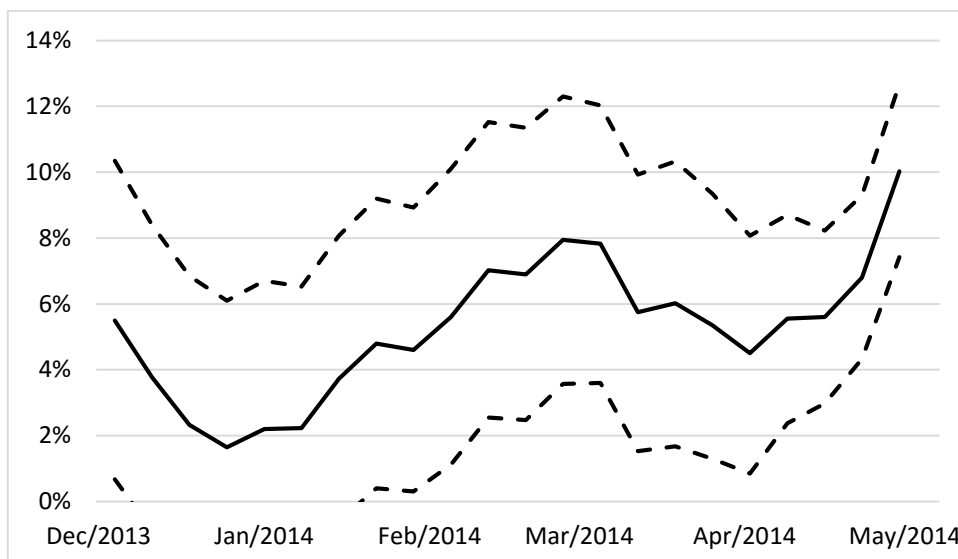


Figure 2. Over time visibility as a proportion of the number of articles mentioning the EU on the front page and the random pages. Note: To smooth out the graph, we used a moving average of 4 weeks. The dashed lines represent the 95% confidence interval.

6.2. Descriptives Media Coverage

In order to understand the dynamic relationship of media coverage and attitude formation it is useful to describe the development over time in media coverage and attitude formation separately. With regard to media coverage two characteristics are of importance in this study: visibility and evaluation.

6.2.1. EU Visibility

Figure 2 shows how visible the EU was over time between December 2013 and the elections in 2014 (taking

all outlets together). The EU was least visible in January 2014 (less than 2% of the news coverage). The visibility of the EU steadily increases over time, but drops again a little in April of that same year, and increases again as the June elections draw nearer. Comparing the different outlets (see Figure 3), we see substantial differences in EU visibility across the different newspapers. In particular, the tabloid (de Telegraaf) and television news programs (public and commercial) score lowest in EU visibility. The online news source nu.nl scores highest in our analysis, but this is likely due to different sampling strategies.

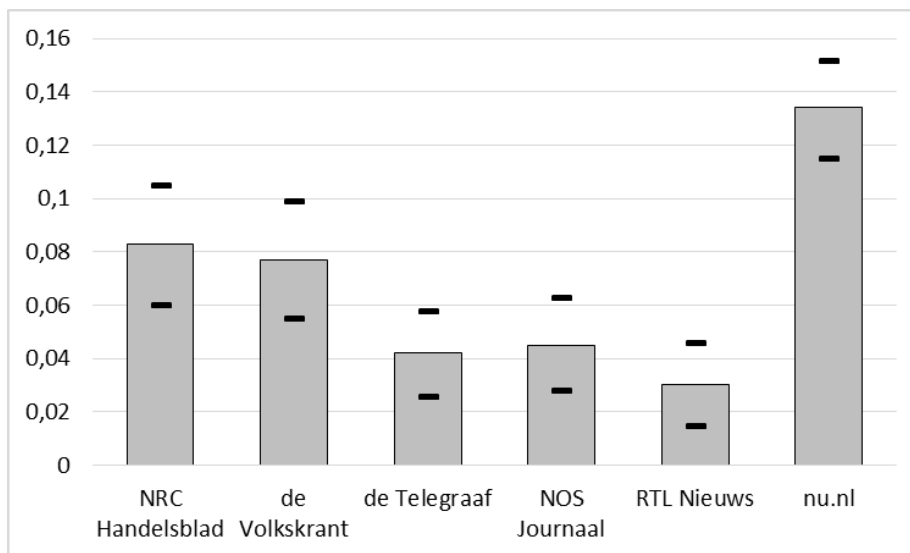


Figure 3. Visibility per news outlet, as the proportion of articles mentioning the EU on the front page and the random page (including the 95% confidence interval).

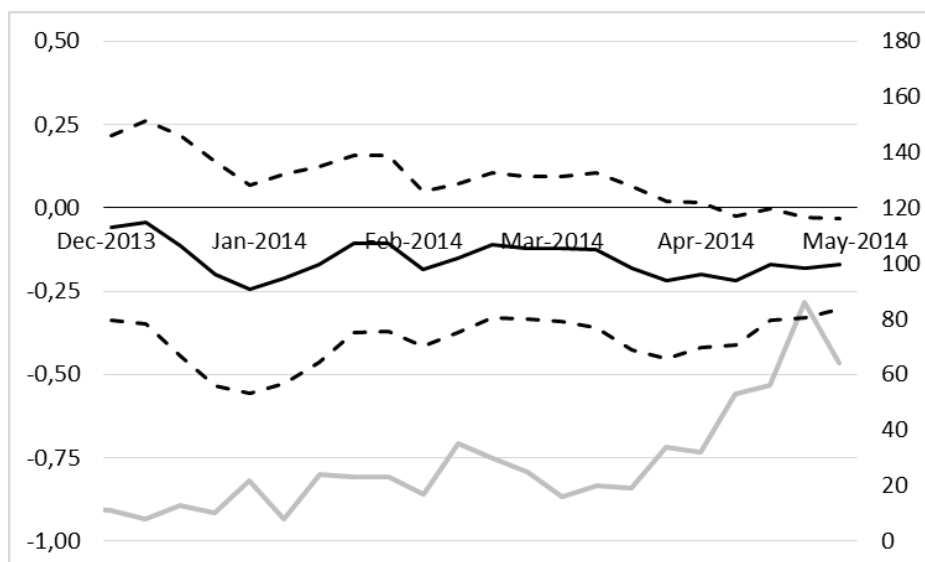


Figure 4. Average EU evaluations over time. Note: The left axis represents values of EU evaluations, with the black solid line representing the mean evaluation over time (and the dashed line representing the 95% confidence interval). To smooth out the line, we used a moving average of 4 weeks. The grey line represents the number of news stories each week, with the scale shown on the right axis (no moving average).

6.2.2. EU and Performance Evaluations

Figure 4 shows the development of EU evaluations over time. Our results indicate that the general EU evaluation is, on average, always a negative evaluation. Yet, evaluations are generally close to zero and with the exception of the final month, the 95% confidence interval includes the neutral value. But we should note that, given the number of coded articles about the EU in each week, this is most likely due to insufficient statistical power. In a similar fashion, the negative peaks observed in January are likely the result of the small number of articles (considering the low visibility of the EU in January), whereby a few extreme articles have substantial influence.

Plotted in Figure 5, the performance indicator also shows that evaluations are, on average, negative over the entire period, only reaching statistical significance at the end of our sampling period (this again is likely due to a lack of statistical power). Also, positive (February) and negative peaks (April) are the result of limited coverage in the weeks before, with “extreme” performance evaluations. EU evaluations also differed across news outlets (see Figure 6). General EU evaluations were most negative in tabloid newspapers (De Telegraaf), while nu.nl (the online news source) is the least negative. These differences are, however, small and not significant. But we do observe that all outlets show on average (minor) negative evaluations.

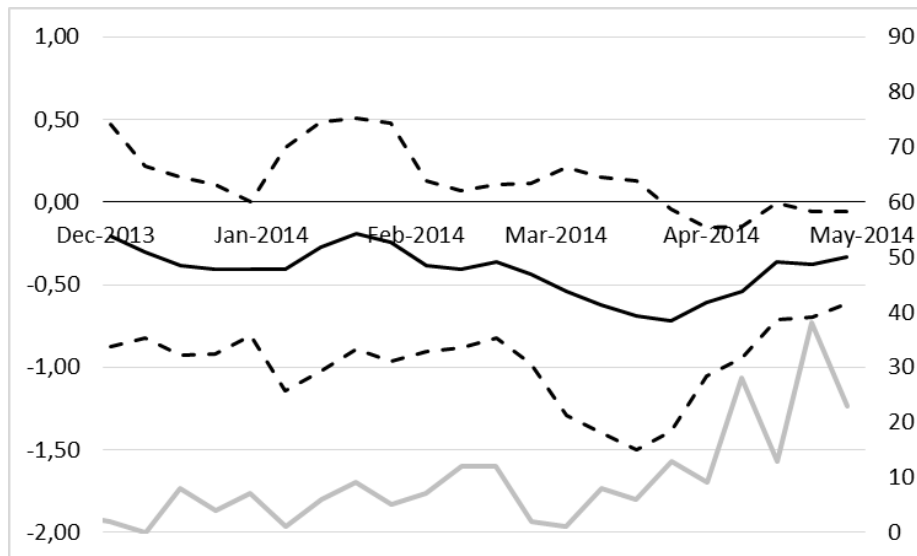


Figure 5. Average performance evaluations over time. Note: The left axis represents values of EU performance evaluations, with the black solid line representing the mean evaluation over time (and the dashed line representing the 95% confidence interval). To smooth out the line, we used a moving average of 4 weeks. The grey line represents the number of news stories each week, with the scale shown on the right axis (no moving average).

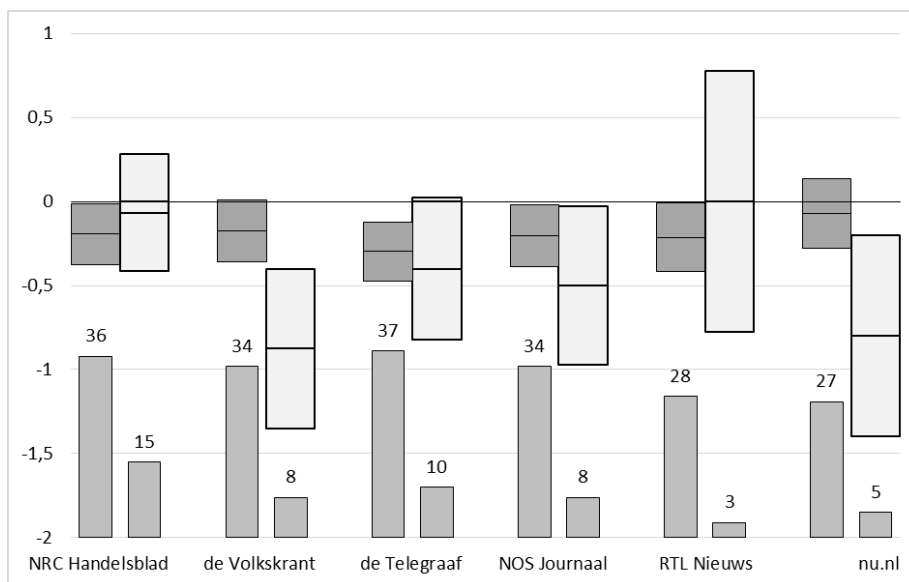


Figure 6. EU and performance evaluations per news outlet. Note: The darker grey bars represent EU evaluations and the lighter grey bars represent performance evaluations, with the middle of the bar representing the mean per outlet and the length of the bar representing the 95% confidence interval. The bars at the bottom represent the number of news stories the mean is based on.

A similar pattern emerges for performance evaluations, however in this case De Volkskrant is found to be the most negative and RTL Nieuws the least negative. However, we need to note that many of these more detailed results are calculated on the basis of a very small set of articles that featured performance evaluations. For example, RTL Nieuws' coverage of the EU featured only 3 stories in 6 months that mentioned EU performance. Similar to the general EU evaluations, performance had an overall (though minor) negative evaluation, with no significant differences between newspapers.

6.3. Explanatory Analyses of EU Performance Dimension

We now turn to analysing factors influencing change in EU performance evaluations of Dutch citizens using multi-level panel modelling, in particular the influence of media exposure to stories about the EU and evaluations of the EU and its performance. Table 1 shows the results of predicting change in EU performance evaluations using fixed effects modelling. We use a fixed effects model to explain within-subject change in the dependent variable with within-subject change in the

independent variables, i.e., we compare each respondent with him/herself at an earlier time point (e.g., Allison, 2009). The advantage of this approach is that the models implicitly control for all time-invariant factors like gender or stable character traits and thus do not need to be added to the models. Additionally, we control for interest in the EU and the EP elections campaign, interpersonal communication, government satisfaction and economic evaluations, as these are both likely to change over time and are likely related to both media exposure and EU performance evaluations.

The first model in Table 1 is a baseline model, with all the controls added but without weighted media exposure measures. We observe that raw news exposure has a significant negative effect on EU performance evaluations ($b = -0.010$, $se = 0.001$, $p < .001$). Adding EU performance exposure (see model 2) significantly improves the model ($\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 5.987$, $p = .014$) and we find a positive significant effect of EU performance exposure ($b = 0.241$, $se = 0.099$, $p = .014$). Thus, more exposure to EU performance in the news leads to a more positive evaluation of EU performance.

To give a more substantial interpretation, we need

to consider that the EU performance exposure variable can vary by change in *amount of media used by an individual* and by *change in the amount of coverage about EU performance in each outlet*. To illustrate the different impact of media coverage and media use, we plotted the expected change in EU performance evaluations against change in media use and change in media content in the two panels of Figure 7.

In the first panel of Figure 7, we show the predicted change in EU performance evaluations when *media use exposure* changes while keeping measures of media content constant. Because the impact of increase in media use also depends on the amount of coverage on EU performance, we added three lines to the graph, indicating the impact when frequency of media coverage is held constant at the mean (the solid line), the mean minus one standard deviation (the dotted line), and the mean plus the standard deviation (the dashed line). The first panel thus shows that when average news users increase their use of a media outlet by one standard deviation, our model predicts a positive change in EU performance evaluations of 0.026. Yet, we need to consider that this is the predicted impact of change in use of *one*

Table 1. Fixed effects models explaining EU performance attitudes using exposure to EU performance visibility and evaluation in the media.

	1	2	3	4
Intercept	0.018 (0.068)	0.043 (0.069)	0.022 (0.069)	0.043 (0.069)
Wave 2	0.067* (0.031)	0.074* (0.031)	0.060+ (0.035)	0.073* (0.035)
Wave 3	0.054+ (0.030)	0.055+ (0.030)	0.047 (0.034)	0.054 (0.034)
Wave 4	0.006 (0.025)	-0.043 (0.032)	0.001 (0.027)	-0.044 (0.033)
Raw news exposure	-0.010*** (0.002)	-0.012*** (0.003)	-0.010*** (0.003)	-0.012*** (0.003)
Interest EU	0.075*** (0.010)	0.075*** (0.010)	0.075*** (0.010)	0.075*** (0.010)
Interest EPE campaign	0.037*** (0.009)	0.036*** (0.009)	0.037*** (0.009)	0.036*** (0.009)
IPC politics	-0.032** (0.012)	-0.033** (0.012)	-0.032** (0.012)	-0.033** (0.012)
IPC EU	-0.001 (0.013)	-0.001 (0.013)	-0.001 (0.013)	-0.001 (0.013)
Government satisfaction	0.297*** (0.015)	0.296*** (0.015)	0.297*** (0.015)	0.296*** (0.015)
Economic evaluations	0.214*** (0.016)	0.213*** (0.016)	0.215*** (0.016)	0.213*** (0.016)
Exposure performance visibility		0.241* (0.099)		0.241* (0.100)
Exposure performance tone			-0.002 (0.004)	-0.000 (0.004)
-2LL	17465.821	17459.834	17465.584	17459.833
AIC	17491.821	17487.834	17493.584	17489.833

Note: Coefficients are based on ML estimation, with standard errors in parentheses. N = 2189. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; + $p < .1$.

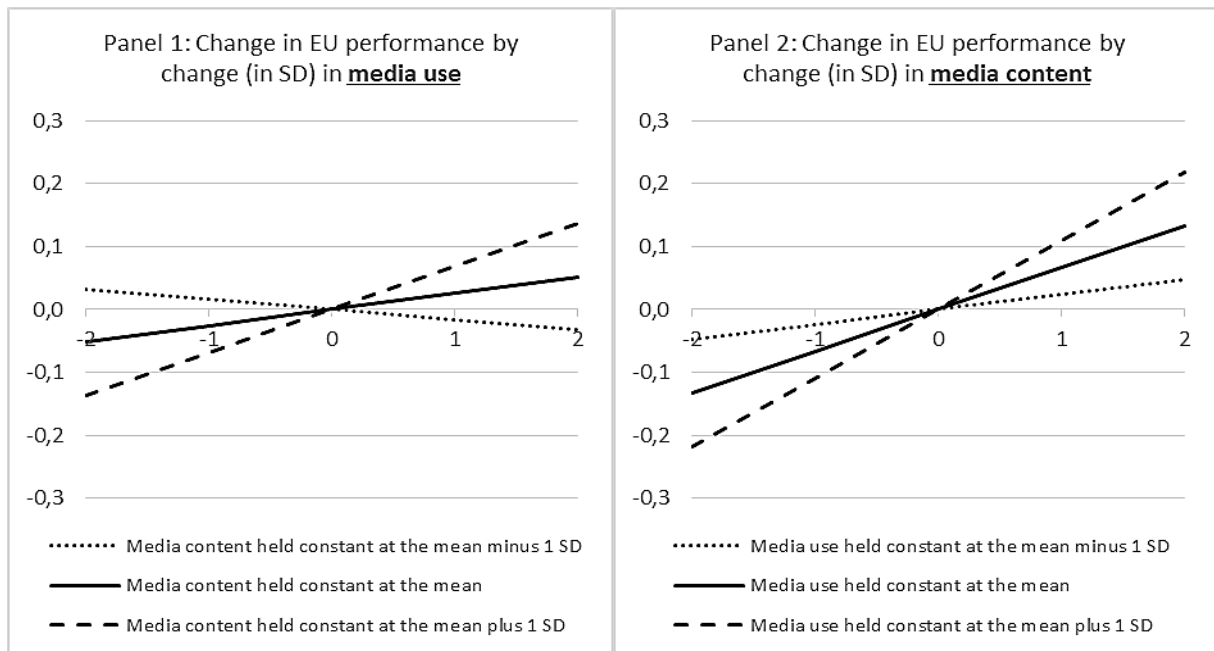


Figure 7. The graphs represent the expected change in EU performance evaluations based on the model. In the left panel, the expected change is shown while keeping the media content constant (represented by the three different lines, keeping the media constant at three different levels) and by change in standard deviations in media use (represented in the x-axis). In the right panel, media use is kept constant, while varying EU visibility in the media content.

average media outlet. If a respondent would increase his/her use of all media outlets by one standard deviation, the model predicts an increase in EU performance evaluations of 0.157.

In the second panel of Figure 7 we show the predicted change in EU evaluations by change in *media content*, while keeping measures of media use constant. The graph shows that if a media outlet started to feature one standard deviation more coverage of the EU, average users of that outlet are predicted to move 0.067 item steps towards positive performance evaluations. Again this is quite a modest change, but for a heavy user (plus one standard deviation), the model predicts a change of .109; and if all outlets would increase their coverage by one standard deviation, the EU performance evaluation of an average media user is expected to increase by .400. Comparing the first and second panel we see that, within the variation we find in our sample, change in media coverage has a stronger impact than change in media use.

Exposure to EU performance evaluations does not seem to affect citizens' general evaluations of EU performance, with (see model 4) or without (see model 3) exposure to EU performance visibility in the model. Adding exposure to evaluations to the model does not improve the model (comparing model 3 to model 1: $\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 0.237$, $p = .626$; comparing model 4 to model 2: $\chi^2_{(df=1)} = 0.002$, $p = .966$), nor does evaluation exposure have a significant effect (model 3: $b = -0.002$, $se = 0.004$, $p = .626$; model 4: $b = -0.000$, $se = 0.004$, $p = .966$). We do see that the effect of exposure to EU performance visibility remains significant when adding exposure to evaluations to the model,

and is of comparable size ($b = 0.241$, $se = 0.100$, $p = .016$). Thus, respondents are affected by whether the news they consume reports about EU performance, but not by exposure to general media evaluations.

7. Discussion

Corroborating general and popular impressions, it is safe to say that public opinion—including in the Netherlands—became more negative towards the EU and European integration between 2009 and 2013. The decrease in support is observed across-the-board (De Vreese et al., 2016), but the greatest magnitude is for the performance dimension. Turning to the media, the analysis of the news coverage suggests that EU topics were not highly salient in the news during the six-month period though direct comparisons are difficult, since from previous research we know most about the final weeks before the election (e.g., Schuck et al., 2011). Considering the increased stakes of the EP elections in 2014, it is perhaps surprising that media salience was not higher. The elected parliament gained significant influence, for example in the right to (co-)appoint the President of the European Commission. Moreover, the Dutch campaign much like the British campaign, was characterized by heated debates about the EU that featured strong Anti-EU parties. Yet, coverage on the EU only made up 2% of the coverage in the political section over the course of six months, which means that the EU was largely invisible to most Dutch citizens in the period leading up to the elections. In line with previous research we find that EU news is either neutral or slightly negative.

In terms of development in EU attitudes—as a function of exposure to news during the period of analysis—we focused on the *performance* dimension and, by combining detailed content analysis data with panel survey data, found positive effects of exposure to news that was less negative (see also de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2016). This combination of data and its linkage at the individual level are among the closed approximations of media effects in an observational setting (Slater, 2004, 2015). Using these detailed exposure measures that allow to pinpoint exposure to specific content and identifying effects of this exposure, while simultaneously controlling for all time-invariant factors like general political interest, is one advantage of our design.

Another noteworthy finding of our study is that even though coverage about the performance of the EU was rather negative, exposure to this coverage has a *positive* effect on attitudes towards the performance of the European Union. Although this finding seems counter-intuitive, there are two explanations that might explain this observation. First, regardless of the evaluation, coverage about the performance of the EU means that media users are exposed to news items about functioning institutions that actively shape policy in the European context. In contrast to other news items about the EU that cover the EU from a national perspective, news items about the performance of the EU portray European institutions as a supra-national actor that has the potential to bring about change. This could lead to a more positive evaluation of the performance of these EU institutions. On a more general level this is an example of how seeing the “EU in action” in the news mitigates the overall negative developments otherwise found in EU attitudes. Second, when comparing the evaluation of the different dimensions in the news coverage, it becomes apparent that performance was evaluated *less negatively* than other dimensions. This means that the performance of the EU stood out as one of the more successful dimensions of the EU in contrast to other dimensions. Our results here are only partially in line with the work by Desmet et al. (2015) who *did* find effects of evaluative news. They found that when news tone converges and creates a one-sided evaluative news coverage, whether positive or negative, this affects individual EU evaluations. Future research should further explicate the conditions under which visibility or evaluations constitute the driving effect.

We believe that our Dutch case study is an interesting case to learn from because public opinion is variable with respect to the EU. More importantly, regardless of the absolute level of EU evaluation in a specific case, we believe we may draw inferences about the underlying dynamics we are studying beyond the Dutch case.

Taking a step back we believe that our study is informative for research looking at the democratic deficit of the EU and current EU developments. In past research we have seen how national yardsticks are important for

evaluating the EU. Desmet et al. (2012) and Hobolt (2012) both demonstrated this empirically and cross-nationally. As the EU takes more of a centre stage in politics—and as citizens in turn become more aware of the functioning of the EU and its institutions—the evaluations of the performance of the EU is likely to not only carry more weight for general opinions about the EU and EU democracy, but perhaps also for domestic politics and democracy. This dynamic hints at what van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) dubbed the ‘sleeping giant’ (see also de Vries, 2007) more than a decade ago, referring to the potential ability of EU politics to shape national politics. Indeed recent evidence (Miklin, 2014) suggests that in the wake of the crisis, the saliency of European issues has increased (although the incentive structure is still such that for mainstream parties it can be more functional to suppress EU topics).

Our study also shows that EU attitudes are quite subject to change. This may happen during an election campaign or over a longer period of time in response to both real world developments and media coverage (see also Van Klingeren, Boomgaarden, Vliegert, & de Vreese, 2015). This is informative as scholarship on EU public opinion moves forward: 2014 might have been a cross-road election, but much of what shaped the particular dynamics of that campaign started much earlier.

Acknowledgments

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Dr. Claes de Vreese

Claes de Vreese is Professor and Chair of Political Communication at ASCoR at the University of Amsterdam. He is the founding Director of Center for Politics and Communication (www.polcomm.org). His research interests focus on political journalism, media effects, public opinion and electoral behaviour. His most recent (co-authored) books are *Political Journalism in Comparative Perspective* (Cambridge UP) and *(Un)intended Consequences of European Parliament Elections* (Oxford UP).



Dr. Rachid Azrout

Rachid Azrout is a researcher of Political Communication at the Department of Communication Science at the University of Amsterdam. His research focuses on public opinion and media effects, with a special interest on minority issues and the European Union.



Dr. Judith Moeller

Judith Moeller is a Postdoctoral researcher at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research. In her research she focuses on the effects of political communication, with an emphasis on effects on adolescents and young adults. She is also interested in comparative research in political communication.

Appendix
Table A. Reliability scores CA variables.

	Holsti
EU visibility	0.92
EU evaluation	0.61
EU performance evaluation	0.65

Note: Reliability scores EU visibility and EU evaluation are based on 16 articles; reliability scores EU performance evaluation is based on 11 articles.

Table B. Descriptive measures of the control variables.

		N	M	SD
Raw news exposure "In a typical week, how many days do you watch the following TV programs/read the following newspapers and magazines or listen to the news on the radio/read about politics on the Internet through one of the following sources?"	t = 1	2189	9,56	6,08
	t = 2	1819	9,79	6,02
	t = 3	1537	9,38	6,05
	t = 4	1379	9,30	6,16
Interest EU: "How interested are you in the following themes? The European Union."	t = 1	2189	3,38	1,61
	t = 2	1819	3,28	1,57
	t = 3	1537	3,09	1,52
	t = 4	1379	3,04	1,60
Interest EPE campaign: "Elections for the European Parliament are (/were) held in May 2014. How interested are you in these elections?"	t = 1	2189	3,39	1,72
	t = 2	1819	3,46	1,75
	t = 3	1537	3,32	1,73
	t = 4	1379	3,32	1,87
IPC politics: "How often do you talk about politics with family, friends, or colleagues?"	t = 1	2189	3,44	1,55
	t = 2	1819	3,61	1,55
	t = 3	1537	2,79	1,37
	t = 4	1379	3,06	1,48
IPC EU: "How often do you talk about the European Union with family, friends, or colleagues?"	t = 1	2189	2,57	1,42
	t = 2	1819	2,59	1,41
	t = 3	1537	2,18	1,22
	t = 4	1379	2,41	1,36

Table B. Continued.

		Eigenvalue	Cronbach's alpha	n	M	SD	
Economic evaluations (1-7 scale, high value is positive evaluation):	t = 1	2.24	0.83	2189	3.80	1.05	
	t = 2	2.19	0.82	1819	3.94	0.98	
	(1) "Looking at the economic situation in the Netherlands, do you think the situation will be better or worse twelve months from now?"	t = 3	2.32	0.85	1537	3.95	1.03
	t = 4	2.31	0.85	1379	3.91	1.03	
(2) "How about if you think of the European Union, do you think that twelve months from now the economic situation in the EU will be better or worse?"	(3) "How about your personal situation: Do you think that twelve months from now your personal economic situation will be better or worse?"						
	Government satisfaction (1-7 scale, high value is positive evaluation):	t = 1	3.26	0.87	2189	3.17	1.06
		t = 2	3.22	0.86	1819	3.21	1.05
(1) "The current national government is doing a good job."	t = 3	3.42	0.88	1537	3.26	1.10	
"And how well do you think the government is handling the issue of...(2) European integration; (3) the economy; (4) the environment; (5) immigration.	t = 4	3.46	0.89	1379	3.25	1.10	

Article

Has Eurosceptic Mobilization Become More Contagious? Comparing the 2009 and 2014 EP Election Campaigns in The Netherlands and France

Maurits Meijers^{1,*} and Christian Rauh²

¹Hertie School of Governance, 10117 Berlin, Germany; E-Mail: meijers@hertie-school.org

²Research Unit Global Governance, WZB Berlin Social Science Center, 10785 Berlin, Germany;
E-Mail: christian.rauh@wzb.eu

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

With the lingering Euro crisis, personalized competition for the Commission presidency, and a surge of Eurosceptic parties, the 2014 European Parliament elections took place against an unknown level of European Union politicization. How does this changing context affect the supply side of party competition on European issues in EP election campaigns? This article compares the 2014 and 2009 EP elections in two EU founding members with high electoral support for radical left and radical right Euroscepticism—France and the Netherlands. We study publically visible patterns of partisan mobilization in the written news media with semi-automated content analyses. The data indicate that visible party mobilization on EU issues was on average not significantly higher in 2014. While particularly mainstream and especially incumbent parties publically mobilize on European issues during both campaigns, the radical right's mobilization efforts have become more visible during the 2014 elections. Examining the temporal dynamics within electoral campaigns, we show that the Eurosceptic fringes exhibit significant contagion effects on the mainstream parties, but that the extent of this contagion was surprisingly lower in the 2014 campaign. As a result, the increasing EU politicization between the 2009 and 2014 electoral contests has not resulted in an enhanced and more interactive supply of partisan debate about Europe.

Keywords

EP elections; EU politicization; Euroscepticism; partisan mobilization

Issue

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1. Introduction

Electoral accountability is key for the democratic quality of European integration. Yet, although the powers of the European Parliament (EP) have strongly increased in recent decades (Rittberger, 2012), the corresponding election campaigns are conventionally seen as ‘second-order’ contests, during which political competition is mainly driven by domestic issues (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Yet, recent integration literature raises doubts on whether a key assumption of this model—that vot-

ers ascribe little relevance to the EU—still holds. By contrast, observers from different camps note that the politicization of European issues is augmenting (De Wilde, 2011; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Hutter & Grande, 2014; Rauh & Zürn, 2014; Statham & Trenz, 2013). These works show that the consecutive authority transfers from member-states to the EU have made European questions more salient and contested among the wider citizenry. Yet, has this societal politicization also been met by a greater supply of political debate about Europe, and has it affected the degree to which main-

stream parties react to Eurosceptic challenger parties?

We approach this question by comparing the 2009 and 2014 EP election campaigns. In between these contests, the societal demand for political debate about Europe has arguably grown. European elites attempted to increase the consequentiality of the 2014 electoral contest with the ‘Spitzenkandidaten’ initiative (Hobolt, 2014). More importantly, the 2014 elections took place against the backdrop of the Euro crisis, which created high and sustained public salience of European issues over a period of almost five years. In addition, the increased electoral relevance of distinct anti-European parties stands out: in the run up to the 2014 EP elections Eurosceptics performed well in many national election polls.

To assess whether and how this changing context has affected the supply of public partisan debate on Europe, we examine the media coverage of the election campaigns in two EU founding states with significant national Eurosceptic challenger parties—France and the Netherlands. In modern ‘audience democracies’ (Manin, 1997) mass media constitute a crucial arena linking political elites and the wider electorate (e.g. de Vreese, 2001; Statham & Trenz, 2013). Parties try to set the electoral agenda in this arena by making their preferred issues visible to the broader citizenry (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Strömbäck, Maier, & Kaid, 2011; Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw, 2004). Hence, our research interest guides us to mediatized partisan mobilization efforts on European issues.

Using semi-automated procedures we retrieved co-occurrences of party actors and keywords for European issues in a large corpus of articles published in six French and Dutch newspapers in the seven weeks preceding each EP election. Based on this data we, first, study the supply of European issues by Eurosceptic challengers and mainstream parties during and across both EP campaigns. Second, we assess temporal contagion effects of mediatized Eurosceptic mobilization on publically visible mainstream party emphasis of EU issues.

The article is structured as follows. We first discuss the changing context of EP elections before deriving detailed expectations from the literature on partisan competition and mediatization. The subsequent section details our empirical strategy. Then, after presenting our findings, we summarize the major implications in the concluding section. The analyses show that the degree of publically visible partisan mobilization efforts on European issues was on average not significantly higher during the 2014 EP campaign. Whereas particularly incumbent parties made European issues visible in both periods, parties from the radical right stepped up their mobilization efforts during the 2014 campaigns in France and Netherlands. The Eurosceptic radical right exhibit significant contagion effects on mainstream party emphasis of European issues in the short-run, but the extent of this contagion was, surprisingly, lower in

the 2014 campaign. The results suggest that the potentially higher salience of EU issues among the electorate is not met by a growing and more interactive supply of corresponding partisan debate.

2. EP Elections in Context: EU Politicization and Mediatization

Since the seminal work of Reif and Schmitt (1980) on the first direct EP election, these electoral contests have often been described as ‘second-order’ elections. The second-order model attributes the low voter turnout as well as the gains of smaller parties and the losses of national incumbents during EP elections to a lack of interest on part of the electorate (Marsh & Mikhaylov, 2010, p. 13; Reif & Schmitt, 1980, p. 9). Since voters are assumed to ascribe little political relevance to the EU and the EP in particular, the model expects that voters use EP elections mainly to punish their domestic governments. Respective partisan campaigns should thus primarily invoke domestic conflicts rather than revolving around European issues (Van der Brug & Van der Eijk, 2007; Van der Eijk, Franklin, & Marsh, 1996).

Yet, the view that EP elections lack European content has received a couple of dents over the course of integration. There is evidence that individual vote choices during more recent EP elections are driven by individual preferences on European issues (Hobolt, Spoon, & Tilley, 2009; Rohrschneider & Clark, 2008). Moreover, EP elections in younger EU member states display a lower degree of protest votes against incumbent governments (Koepeke & Ringe, 2006). And most importantly, parties with clear-cut, outspoken positions on European integration tend to fare better in more recent European elections (Hix & Marsh, 2007, p. 503; Ferrara & Weishaupt, 2004).

Such findings qualify the expectation that EP election campaigns are not about Europe at all. Moreover, they are in accordance with recent works that attest to a growing EU politicization defined broadly as ‘an increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards policy formulation within the EU’ (De Wilde, 2011). Such perspectives argue that the extension of supranational political authority over the consecutive EU treaty revisions have triggered sustained societal demands for more political debate on European issues (De Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Rauh, 2015). Others claim that it is the increased relevance of national identity conflicts that raises the public contentiousness of European questions (Kriesi et al., 2012). In any case, EU politicization implies that European ‘decision making has shifted from an insulated elite to mass politics’ (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 13). Against this backdrop, recent EP elections provide a window of opportunity for political entrepreneurs willing to profit from mobilizing on European questions (Treib, 2014).

To assess whether this context offers voters more debate on Europe, a focus on media coverage of EP election campaigns is crucial. Public media play a central role in the way modern democracies function (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; McCombs & Shaw, 1972), since it is only in the public sphere that latent societal conflicts become manifest and alternative political choices are revealed (Koopmans & Statham, 2010, p. 44; Meijers, 2013, p. 3). Particularly during election campaigns, the media constitute the central arena in which parties can offer political alternatives to voters (Strömbäck et al., 2011). Just as parties compete over which issues are on the political agenda (Carmines & Stimson, 1986; Schattschneider, 1960), they also engage in a struggle over the visibility of ‘their’ issues and positions in the public sphere (Koopmans, 2004, p. 373).

With regard to European integration, Van Spanje and de Vreese (2014) argue that media evaluations of the European Union influenced vote choices in the 2009 EP election (see also Vliegthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden, & de Vreese, 2008). Similarly, Hobolt and colleagues find that a Eurosceptic tone in the media coverage of an EP campaign spurs the level of voter defection from mainstream parties (Hobolt et al., 2009). More generally, the extant literature demonstrates that media visibility matters for the electoral fortunes of parties (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998; Hopmann, Vliegthart, De Vreese, & Albæk, 2010)—especially for challengers propagating new issues on the electoral map (e.g. Koopmans & Muis, 2009; Vliegthart, Boomgaarden, & Van Spanje, 2012; Walgrave & De Swert, 2004). In sum, mediatized partisan mobilization on European issues is in fact consequential for voters’ preferences.

Unsurprisingly, most recent studies of EU-related partisan mobilization focus therefore on mediatized conflicts (Hutter & Grande, 2014; Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012; Statham & Trenz, 2013). But not all purposive mobilization efforts of political parties—as for example expressed in speeches, manifestos or press releases—will make it onto the media agenda (Hopmann, Van Aelst, & Legnante, 2012). Since the seminal work by Galtung and Ruge (1965) we know that journalists and editors act as gatekeepers. Competitive pressures and space constraints in media outlets lead to a selective coverage of political developments. Whether the media consider a particular event ‘newsworthy’ will depend, among other things, on the expected relevance of the action for the medium’s primary audience, on the level of conflict associated with the event, on the possibilities for dramatization and personalization, as well as on the perceived standing of the involved actors (Galtung & Ruge, 1965, pp. 65-72). When assessing the supply side of publically visible partisan debate on Europe, such media logics have to be taken into account. Yet, media actors still can ultimately only select from the menu of mobilization efforts that political

parties offer. Moreover, during election periods political parties exert particular influence on the media agenda rather than the other way around (e.g. Brandenburg, 2002; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006).

3. Theorizing Mediatized Partisan Mobilization Efforts in Recent EP Campaigns

The political developments between the 2009 and 2014 EP campaigns have arguably amplified such politicization and mediatization dynamics. First, between 2009 and 2014 the Greek deficit turned into a full-fledged European financial and monetary crisis. The numerous supranational emergency measures and their immense inroads into national budgetary autonomy have made supranational authority clearly tangible for the wider European publics—thereby spurring the societal politicization of European integration to an unprecedented degree (Rauh & Zürn, 2014). Second, European elites from the European Commission and particularly the European Parliament sought a more proactive approach in the run-up to the 2014 election. The ‘Spitzenkandidaten’ initiative, in which each of the EP’s major political groups selected a common lead candidate, aimed to increase the perceived consequentiality of the elections (Hobolt, 2014).

For political parties, this should have signalled a higher salience of European questions among the electorate, which in turn creates incentives to emphasize European issues for electoral reasons. For media gatekeepers, it should have signalled a higher relevance of European issues among readers and more conflict potential among political elites, which increases news value. Hence both from a partisan competition as well as from mediatization perspective it can be expected that:

H1.1: The degree of publically visible partisan mobilization efforts on European issues in EP election campaigns is higher in 2014 than in 2009.

This effect will hardly be uniform across all parties, however. From a party competition perspective, saliency theory (Budge, 1982; Dolezal, Ennsner-Jedenastik, Müller, & Winkler, 2014) underlines that parties do not only compete on particular positions but also on which issues to emphasize in the first place (Carmines & Stimson, 1986; Schattschneider, 1960). Here it is conventionally assumed that mainstream parties downplay European issues, since they are faced with more diverse opinions among their constituencies and cannot map European issues easily on the domestically dominating left-right dimension (de Vries, 2007; Statham & Trenz, 2013; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 2004). In contrast, smaller anti-European parties can afford to or even profit from firmly rejecting the integration project (de Vries & Edwards, 2009; Hobolt & de Vries, 2015; Van de Wardt, de Vries, & Hobolt, 2014).

However, this constellation does not necessarily hold during mediatized EP election campaigns. When voter attention is at least partially directed to European questions, incumbent parties, in particular, may see themselves as being forced to address these issues as they accrue from their governmental responsibility and their participation in Brussels' decision-making. In addition, mainstream parties that hold or expect to hold governmental responsibility might consider that 'tying their hands' in front of national publics creates bargaining advantages at the supranational level (Bailer & Schneider, 2006). In other words, mainstream and particularly incumbent parties face electoral incentives to justify and defend their past and future actions in Brussels (cf. Braun, Hutter, & Kerscher, 2015; Rauh, 2015; Senninger & Wagner, 2015).

From a mediatization perspective, moreover, not all political parties have equal chances to place their preferred issues on the media agenda (Brandenburg, 2002; Hopmann, Elmelund-Praestekaer, Albaek, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2012; Tresch, 2009). Since Galtung and Ruge's (1965) original argument on the positive effect of an actor's political standing on the news value of corresponding events, it has repeatedly been shown that both party size and political power affect the degree of partisan media coverage (e.g. Green-Pedersen, Mortensen, & Thesen, 2015; Hopmann, de Vreese, & Albaek, 2011; Tresch, 2009). In particular, whether a party is in government or not substantially affects its presence in the news (Brandenburg, 2005; Green-Pedersen et al., 2015; Hopmann et al., 2011; Schoenbach, De Ridder, & Lauf, 2001). We expect this to also hold for the EP election campaigns (see also Jalali & Silva, 2011). Again, strategic partisan incentives and media logic arguments arrive at similar expectations:

H1.2: During EP election campaigns, mainstream parties' mobilization efforts on European issues are more visible than those of smaller radical parties.

H1.3: During EP election campaigns, governing parties' mobilization efforts on European issues are more visible than those of opposition parties.

But also with regard to selective partisan emphasis, the politicization argument developed above predicts substantial differences between the 2009 and 2014 EP elections. The Eurocrisis and the 'Spitzenkandidaten' initiative present specific issue ownership advantages for both radical right and radical left parties, which likely motivates these parties to place 'their' European issues on the media agenda. First, redistributing large amounts of national funds to other EU member-states and the indirect election of the Commission president signal strong steps towards further political integration. This is likely to foster Eurosceptic mobilization by the radical right on the basis of their traditional sovereign-

ty-related arguments 'against Europe'. Second, the supranational emergency responses to the Euro crisis strongly emphasised austerity politics. This should serve the mobilization of EU-related socio-economic questions along the traditional arguments of the radical left (de Vries & Edwards, 2009). To the extent that the Eurosceptic fringes exploit this mobilization potential, they confront their mainstream contenders. Such conflict, in turn, increases the news value from the perspective of media gatekeepers. We thus expect that:

H1.4: Mobilization efforts on European issues by radical right and radical left parties are more visible in the EP Elections in 2014 than in the 2009 campaign.

Yet, a sole concentration on selective partisan emphasis seems too static. Election campaigns should also be regarded as dynamic processes (Brandenburg, 2002, p. 40). The literature on partisan competition argues that mainstream parties do not only devise their strategies in the face of changing public opinion, but also react to other parties' behaviour (Adams, 2012). Challenger parties, which open new dimensions of political competition, can provoke mainstream reactions—both in terms of positional changes as well as issue emphasis adaptations (Bale, Green-Pedersen, Krouwel, Luther, & Sitter, 2010; Hobolt & de Vries, 2015; Meguid, 2005; Van Spanje, 2010).¹

Recent work on the topic shows that the success of Eurosceptic radical parties, both from the radical left and radical far right, is capable of influencing mainstream parties to tone down their overall support for European integration (Meijers, 2015). Moreover, Van de Wardt (2015) shows, for the case of Denmark, that parliamentary activities of challenger parties on European integration provoke salience shifts by mainstream parties. Thus, given the higher salience and higher polarization of European issues among the wider electorate, mainstream parties should have an incentive to react to publically visible mobilization efforts from their Eurosceptic challengers.

But the literature on party emphasis of EU issues has so far mainly focused on highly aggregated cross-national comparisons or extended time frames (De Wilde, 2010; Höglinger, 2012; Hutter & Grande, 2014). We assert that our understanding of Eurosceptic contagion is improved by also analysing the micro-level dynamics *within mediatized election campaigns*. This is of particular relevance here because the news media are prone to cover dynamic, conflictual relationships

¹ It is also possible that challenger parties react to mainstream party behaviour (see Van de Wardt, 2015). Yet, since mainstream parties are the ones that hold office and, ultimately, control the decision-making process the literature has focused on the impact of fringe parties on the established political forces.

(Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Analogous to the aggregate findings on responsive partisan behaviour, we also expect contagion effects to be visible in the news media:

H2.1: The more mobilization efforts on European issues from radical left and the radical right parties are visible at time $t-1$, the more mainstream party emphasis of European issues is visible at time t .

Such contagion is, however, unlikely to be constant across Eurosceptic parties. The different camps oppose European integration on fundamentally different grounds. The radical right rejects the EU on the basis of identity and sovereignty concerns, while the radical left rejects the EU on the basis of its ingrained market-liberal policies (de Vries & Edwards, 2009). In line with arguments that party competition over cultural issues is becoming more salient (Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Kriesi, 2007), Meijers (2015) has shown that the 'contagion effect' of Eurosceptic success was stronger for the radical right than for the radical left. The radical right's cultural arguments against Europe do not only influence the centre-right, but can also provoke accommodative reactions from the centre-left parties (cf. Van Spanje, 2010). The reason is that the traditional supporters of the centre-left—the working-class—are likely to adhere to more culturally conservative stances as well (Bale et al., 2010). Radical left critiques of a 'neoliberal' bias in the integration process, in contrast, may be co-opted by the centre-left (Statham & Trenz, 2013, p. 139) but are unlikely to strike a chord among the centre-right. Hence, mobilization of European issues from the radical right should be more contagious for mainstream parties than similar efforts from the radical left.

Also from a media perspective it is to be expected that mediatized radical right mobilization is more capable of affecting the level of visible mainstream party EU issue emphasis. In particular the Dutch and the French radical right parties are 'media savvy' because they rely on a strongly personalized leadership and a highly confrontational political style (Mazzoleni, 2007; see also de Lange & Art, 2011). The radical left, on the other hand, is more fragmented and generally characterized by less conspicuous leadership—at least in the French and Dutch cases. Hence, we expect that:

H2.2: The effect of visible radical right mobilization on European issues at time $t-1$ on mediatized mainstream party mobilization on EU issues at time t is greater than the effects of visible radical left EU mobilization.

The extant literature has furthermore emphasized that contagion effects depend on both the electoral support of radical parties and their anticipation of electoral advantages by raising the salience of European issues

(Meijers, 2015). Following the above arguments on the increasing public politicization of European integration between 2009 and 2014, we argue that both the electoral strength of challenger parties and their possible gains from raising European issues further should have grown during the Eurocrisis and the 'Spitzenkandidaten' initiative. Indeed, polls at the beginning of the campaigns show that Eurosceptic challengers could have expected large gains in the 2014 elections.² From a media perspective, more electoral support increases the political standing and the audience relevance of these challenger parties. Thus, we finally expect that:

H2.3: The contagion effect of visible radical left and radical right EU mobilization on mainstream parties is greater in the 2014 than in the 2009 campaign.

4. Data and Methods

The theoretical discussion guides the case selection to EU member states with sizeable electoral support for Eurosceptic radical parties on both extremes of the political spectrum. We therefore focus on France and the Netherlands. Both countries are founding members of the European Communities and share a comparable history of being subject to supranational authority. In both countries, Eurosceptics from both sides have been relatively successful in recent years. Moreover, Eurosceptic mobilization in both countries has repeatedly affected the progress of European integration, most notably with the popular rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in 2005. This makes France and the Netherlands apt cases to study the public supply of partisan mobilization on Europe.

We cover the main Eurosceptic parties as well as the principal centre-left and centre-right mainstream parties in these countries (see Table 1). Since the French radical left is traditionally very fragmented, four political parties are included in this group. Since our hypotheses compare publically visible mobilization efforts of mainstream parties, which regularly alternate in government, with radical Eurosceptic mobilization attempts, a number of smaller parties, such as MoDem in France and the D66 in the Netherlands, have not been included. Although these parties have enjoyed noteworthy successes in EP elections, they represent minor domestic political forces and cannot be easily dichotomized into the mainstream-challenger distinction.

² For Dutch election polls from April 2014, see <http://www.tns-nipo.com/nieuws/persberichten/d66-leidt-landelijk-pvv-in-europa> (accessed September 23, 2015). For French election polls from May 2014 see <http://tnova.fr/sondages/exclusif-sondage-ipsos-steria-pour-le-monde-le-cevipof-et-terra-nova-elections-europeennes-2014-barometre-quotidien-d-intentions-de-vote-18-mai> (accessed September 24, 2015).

Table 1. List of parties included in the analysis.

	Mainstream parties		Radical parties	
	Centre-left	Centre-right	Radical Left	Radical Right
France	PS (+)	UMP (#)	PdG; PCF; LO; LCR/NPA	Front National
The Netherlands	PvdA (# +)	CDA (#); VVD (+)	SP	PVV

Note: parties marked with (#) and (+) were incumbents in 2009 and 2014, respectively.

Our analyses rely on an original dataset that captures the co-occurrences of these political parties and European integration issues during the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament election campaigns in the French and Dutch written news media. The newspaper selection follows Koopmans and Statham (2010, p. 51). It covers *Le Monde* and *De Volkskrant* as the major left-leaning and *Le Figaro* and *Algemeen Dagblad* as the major right-leaning newspapers in France and the Netherlands respectively. Since neither country has a typical tabloid paper, we take *L'Humanité* and *De Telegraaf* as the most similar substitutes (Koopmans & Statham, 2010).

Through this diverse newspaper sample we at least implicitly control media selection effects due to varying outlet audiences. But we have to note that the Dutch and French media systems differ (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The decreasing state influence on the media in the Netherlands is contrasted by the bi-partisan divide in the French print media and the strong ties the media has with the French government. We thus expect that political reporting in general and particularly the predominance of mainstream and incumbent parties is more pronounced in the French case (cf. H1.2 and H1.3). Note, however, that our hypotheses do not predict cross-national differences but solely address differences across parties and election campaigns within countries.

The analyses rely on the daily issues of these newspapers during the hot phase of each campaign in the seven weeks before each election day. We identified relevant articles in the LexisNexis database by specific search strings requiring that an article (in headline or body) contain at least one keyword relating to the partisan actors in question *and* at least one keyword indicating an issue about European integration (see Appendices A1 and A2 for the full lists). These keywords were identified with reference to the codebooks from previous studies (Hutter & Grande, 2014; Koopmans, 2002; Rauh, 2015) and include inflections commonly used in the French and Dutch languages. In total, we examine 6,174 newspaper articles from six major newspapers in four seven-week periods preceding the elections.

Automated scripts store these raw text data in data frames with one time stamped observation per article. From each observation, we then automatically retrieved all sentences that contained at least one European integration keyword and then assessed whether a specific party group was also mentioned in this re-

duced textual data. For each article we thus capture whether a centre-left, centre-right, radical left or radical right actor occurred at least once within a grammatical sentence that also contains a keyword on European integration.

We take such co-occurrences as a proxy for publicly visible incidences of partisan efforts to mobilize on European integration. It seems plausible that if a party takes a newsworthy stance on a European issue on a given day, this will be reflected at least once in a journalistic sentence that includes both the party and the EU marker. A cursory overview of our actual hits in the newspaper corpus confirms that this is by and large true. The overview indicates a few false positives where journalists ascribe some link between a party and an EU issue without actual partisan action. The counts thus slightly overestimate partisan mobilization, which, however, should affect all party groups alike. This is further bolstered by systematically comparing our data with hand-coded data collection efforts of the first author in an earlier project on the 2014 elections. We find positive and significant correlations between our automatically retrieved counts and these manually identified data across party groups and countries.³ In sum, our measure adequately corresponds to partisan mobilization efforts on European issues.

This data was finally aggregated to the daily level. Accordingly, the unit of analysis is the number of articles per party and day in which at least one incidence of party mobilization on Europe is observed. This allows comparisons across party groups and election periods needed for hypotheses 1.1–1.4. For the contagion effects hypothesised in H2.1–2.3, the dependent variable is operationalized as the total number of articles per day in which mainstream party actors appear in the immediate context of European integration. The independent variables are an incumbency dummy as well as the number of co-occurrences of radical left or radical right actors and EU issues, lagged by one day.

Our estimations thus deal with discrete, non-negative values. The data, in addition, is highly overdispersed meaning that the variance of the count variables exceeds their mean (see Appendix A4). This is common for event counts where many observations have a value of zero, but it violates the assumption of

³ The manually and automatically retrieved counts of partisan mobilization efforts correlate on average with .4 (396 party/day observations). For more detailed comparisons across countries and party groups see Appendix A3.

statistical independence in the observed events and can inflate coefficient significance. To study contagion effects, we thus employ negative binomial regression models which include a parameter that reflects the unobserved heterogeneity in the observations (Long & Freese, 2001, p. 243). The data is structured as a panel, with 'days' being the time variable and 'party' the cross-sectional identifier.⁴ To address serial correlation issues, a lagged dependent variable has been included in each model. In order to be able to control incumbency effects explicitly, we estimate random effects models and check robustness of our findings also for a partisan fixed effects model (Appendix A5).

⁴ Since the data is made up of consecutive days, the panels are strongly balanced. For the Netherlands the number of daily observations is slightly lower since none of the analysed newspapers are published on Sundays.

5. Empirical Results

Figure 1 plots the mean daily count of publically visible partisan mobilization on European issues with bootstrapped 95 per cent confidence intervals. In view of the increased public politicization during the Euro crisis and the new procedure of binding the Commission president to EP election results, we had initially expected that the average aggregate levels of partisan mobilization on European issues would be higher in 2014 than in 2009. The daily counts of mediatized mobilization on European issues across all parties in Figure 1 have slightly heightened from 1.65 to 1.8 in France and from 0.45 to 0.52 in the Netherlands. But since these differences are negligible and far from reaching statistical significance, Hypothesis 1.1 is not supported in our data.

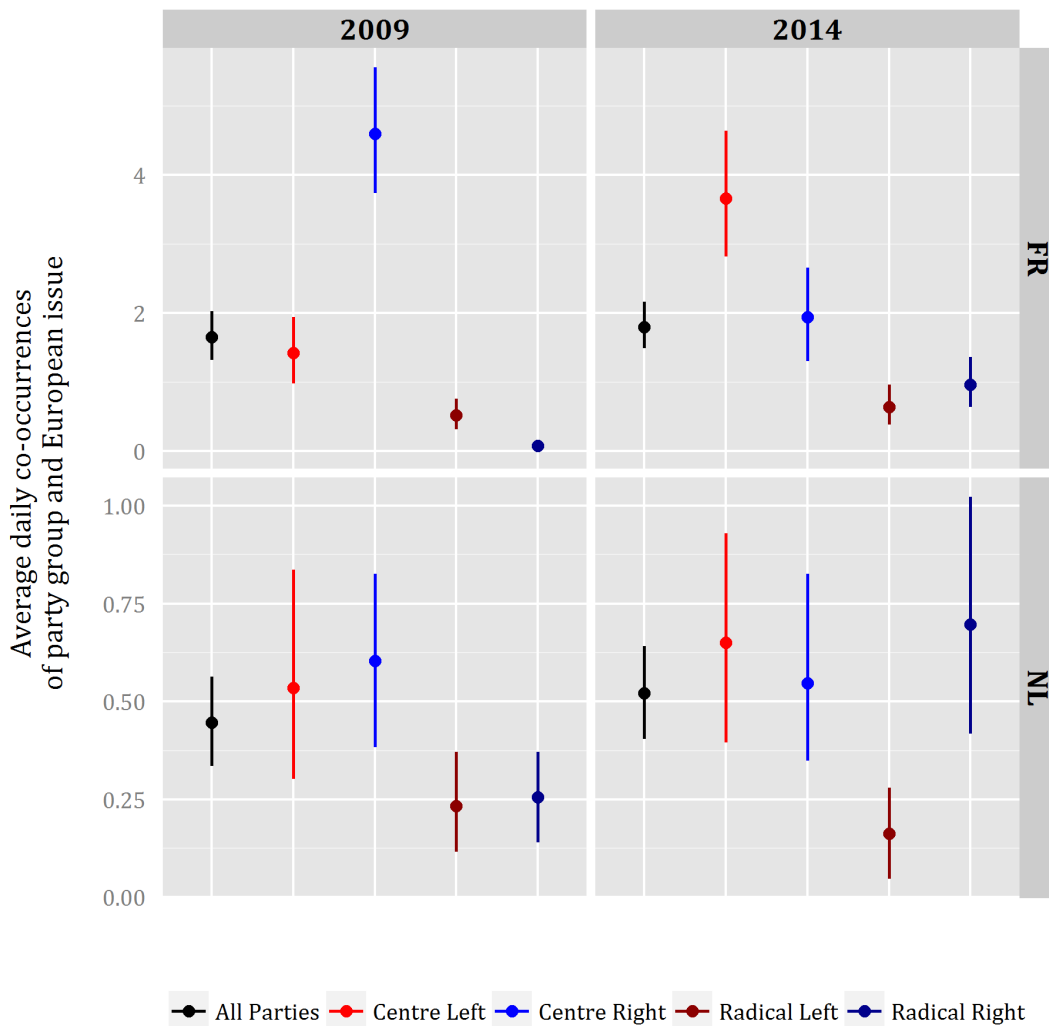


Figure 1. Average daily co-occurrences of party groups and European issues. Note: the scales for the Netherlands and France differ for presentation purposes.

How does this picture differ across party groups? In contrast to the traditional expectation that mainly fringe parties mobilize on European issues (de Vries, 2007; Statham & Trenz, 2013; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 2004), our hypotheses 1.2 and 1.3 predicted that mainstream and particularly incumbent parties have greater incentives as well as greater chances to mobilize European issues in the public media (e.g. Hopmann et al., 2011). This expectation is fully confirmed for France in the upper panel of Figure 1—in the media coverage of both election campaigns, the centre-left and the centre-right are associated with European issues much more frequently than their radical counterparts. This data also underlines the hypothesized incumbent effect. Mobilization efforts by the UMP, the centre-right governing party during Sarkozy’s presidency, were particularly visible in the 2009 campaign. In 2014, the roles reversed and the daily EU mobilization efforts by the then governing centre-left PS became predominant. Hence, the higher visibility of the centre-left in France is an incumbency effect. The French case thus confirms our expectations that mainstream and especially incumbent parties publically mobilize on Europe.

In the Netherlands (lower panel of Figure 1), the mean level of centre-right and centre-left mobilization efforts on European issues also clearly exceeds the observed levels for the radical challenger parties in 2009. However, compared to the French case, the overall picture is less clear-cut. First, conclusions about the incumbency effect are hampered by the fact that the centre-right category comprises both the Christian democrats (CDA) and the conservative liberals (VVD), which were in government only in 2009 or 2014, respectively. We thus treat these parties separately in the regression analyses below. Second, in 2014 the mean daily EU mobilization efforts by the radical right party (PVV) exceed the levels of mainstream mobilization efforts, though this difference is not statistically significant.⁵

The observed surge of the public EU mobilization efforts by the PVV in 2014 points to the expectation that the increased politicization of European integration between the 2009 and 2014 elections created favourable opportunity structures to mobilize European issues for the radical Eurosceptic parties (H1.4). But the radical left mobilization of European issues did not significantly change across the two election campaigns.

⁵ The fact that our findings on these hypotheses diverge across both countries is consistent with literature showing that uneven power distributions among political parties in national systems is mirrored in differing mobilization potentials (e.g. Schoenbach et al., 2001). In the highly uneven, presidential system in France, incumbent parties enjoy distinct advantages in terms of mobilization potentials. On the contrary, the Dutch proportional representation system, where political power is more equally distributed, seems to produce more equitable arenas for public mobilization efforts.

This echoes claims that the Euro crisis did not offer opportunities for fundamentally re-thinking the structure of the European economy (Schmidt & Thatcher, 2013). Moreover, the finding that the radical left was not able to mobilize significantly more resonates well with the view that cultural aspects of European integration have become more pervasive than socio-economic conflicts (Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Meijers, 2015).

And indeed, the data demonstrate that visible radical right EU mobilization in the 2014 campaign is higher than in 2009 and that this difference is statistically significant. In the media coverage of the 2009 French election campaign, the radical right was associated with European issues on average only 0.16 times a day. In 2014, this surged to a daily average of 0.96 publically visible mobilization efforts from the radical right. Expressed differently, while the media coverage of the French 2009 campaign supplied radical right stances on Europe only on roughly every sixth day, such signals increased to an almost daily frequency in 2014. Similarly, in the Netherlands the higher degree of average daily radical right mobilization efforts on Europe is also sizeable and statistically significant (from 0.25 daily counts in 2009 to 0.7 in 2014). As shown, this extended visibility of the Dutch radical right’s mobilization efforts on Europe even surpasses the levels of their major national mainstream competitors in the most recent EP election campaign. In line with hypothesis 1.4, thus, this suggests that both Le Pen’s Front National and Wilders’ PVV used the politicized context of 2014 elections much more strongly to publically communicate their stances on actual European questions. But has this increased Euroscepticism from the radical right also become more contagious for other actors in the debate?

To tackle this question, we now focus on our hypotheses addressing the micro-level dynamics *within electoral campaigns*. The results of the negative binomial regression analyses are reported in Table 2. Rather than the originally estimated logarithm of the expected event count, we report exponentiated coefficients in this table. These figures express the more straightforward incidence rate ratios. That is, they show how one unit increase in the independent variables (radical left and radical right mobilization at $t-1$ as well as incumbency) affects the rate by which the event of interest—publically visible mainstream mobilization efforts on European issues—occurs. Hence, values below 1 signal a negative relationship and values above 1 a positive relationship. This standardization allows us to compare effect sizes across models.⁶

⁶ Since the standard errors of the exponentiated coefficients are not meaningful, the standard errors of the regular negative binomial regressions coefficients are reported. This does not affect the significance of the results, since the associated t -values are identical.

Table 2. Negative binomial panel regression results.

	Daily co-occurrences of Mainstream parties and EU issues			
	France		The Netherlands	
	2009 Model 1	2014 Model 2	2009 Model 3	2014 Model 4
Lagged DV (t-1)	1.024 (0.0288)	1.053 ⁺ (0.0286)	0.835 (0.194)	1.096 (0.100)
EU Statements Rad. Left (t-1)	1.163 (0.100)	1.140 [*] (0.0598)	0.630 (0.384)	1.167 (0.289)
EU Statements Rad. Right (t-1)	2.256 ^{**} (0.223)	1.159 [*] (0.0672)	2.215 [*] (0.325)	1.381 [*] (0.127)
Incumbent	3.083 ^{**} (0.212)	1.792 ^{**} (0.188)	0.743 (0.301)	2.023 [*] (0.339)
Constant	1.139 (0.349)	1.030 (0.313)	0.775 (0.447)	0.599 (0.589)
No. observations	98	98	126	126
No. of Days	49	49	42	42
Wald Chi ²	60.11 ^{**}	46.70 ^{**}	8.01 ⁺	15.48 ^{**}
Log likelihood	-195.95	-199.26	-128.21	-124.67

Note: exponentiated coefficients (Incidence rate ratios); Standard errors in parentheses; ⁺ $p < 0.10$, ^{*} $p < 0.05$, ^{**} $p < 0.01$.

The results for France in the left panel of Table 2 show that the overall rather limited mobilization efforts on EU issues from the radical left also triggered only limited responses from the mainstream parties. In 2009 the effect fails to reach statistical significance, in 2014 radical left statements at t-1 raise the propensity of mainstream party EU mobilization by 14 per cent at t=0. The contagion effects of the French radical right, in contrast, are more sizeable and statistically robust. In 2009, Front National statements on European issues made mainstream party EU statements almost 2.3 times more likely on the subsequent day. Robust contagion effects from the radical right can also be shown for the 2014 election in France, but their absolute size declined to, approximately, 16 percentage points.

In the Dutch campaigns, we find no significant contagion effects from the radical left. But like the French cases, the Dutch radical right was also able to spur mainstream party reactions by its EU mobilization while the size of this contagion effect declined as well. In 2009, mediatized radical right mobilization efforts on EU issues at t-1 substantially affect co-occurrence of mainstream parties and EU issues on the following day, increasing the expected number of corresponding counts by more than 120 percentage points. In 2014, this contagion effect of radical right mobilization on European issues is still significant but amounts to only 38 percentage points.⁷

Besides the fact that our respective control variable largely confirms expectation that particularly parties in

government are associated with EU issues in the media (H1.3), the models contradict claims that radical parties have no leverage over the extent to which mainstream parties address European issues (Green-Pedersen, 2012; Hutter & Grande, 2014). In line with our hypotheses 2.1 and 2.2 we demonstrate cross-temporal contagion effects, and as expected in extant research they are much more pronounced for the radical right than for the radical left (Bale et al., 2010; Meijers, 2015; Van Spanje, 2010). Much to our surprise, however, the higher public salience of EU issues during the period of the seventh European Parliament has not strengthened these contagion effects as suggested by H2.3. While radical right contagion remained significant, its absolute size declined if we compare the 2014 EP election campaign to the 2009 campaign. Thus an increased societal EU politicization does not automatically translate into a more interactive partisan debate about EU issues (Rauh & Zürn, 2014).

6. Conclusions

At first sight, our systematic comparisons of mediatized partisan mobilization efforts on European issues during the French and Dutch EP election campaigns in 2009 and 2014 result in a complex picture. Most importantly, the overall publically visible partisan debate on European issues was not significantly higher in the 2014 campaign. Distinguishing different party groups, we observe a rather stable dominance of mainstream and particularly incumbent parties. The major change from the 2009 to the 2014 EP elections in both countries, however, is a clearly heightened visibility of radical right mobilization efforts on European issues. Yet, this has not increased the responsiveness of mainstream parties as the analysis of cross-temporal contagion ef-

⁷ We have additionally estimated reversed models in order to detect whether there is a reciprocal relationship between mainstream and challenger mobilization efforts. These are reported in Table A6.1 in the appendix. Only for the Netherlands in 2014 was such a reciprocal effect found.

fects underlines. To be sure, we demonstrate significant short-term contagion from the fringes of the party spectrum to the mainstream parties across both countries and elections, but the size of these contagion effects has manifestly declined from the 2009 to the 2014 EP election campaigns.

This article has provided innovative and robust findings with regard to the inter-party dynamics and patterns of parties' mobilization efforts during mediatized EP election campaigns. It is unclear, however, to what extent these patterns of visible mobilization are mediated by the type of EU issue. Future research should take this into account when examining the inter-party dynamics in EP campaigns. Moreover, the data presented draws on aggregated visibility levels from quality and non-broadsheet newspapers and has not focused on the tone of the news articles in question. Hence, the extent to which outlet type and the characteristics of the news coverage affect patterns of visible party competition should be further explored. Moreover, future research efforts should ascertain whether the patterns found for France and the Netherlands are generalizable to other EU member states.

Nevertheless, with respect to electoral accountability in EP elections, our analysis of the supply side of political debate on Europe in member-states with high support for Eurosceptics should be enough to stir normative concern. While European questions have become much more salient for the wider citizenry between the 2009 and 2014 EP election campaigns (Rauh & Zürn, 2014), our data show that the partisan supply of political alternatives or justifications on European issues has not followed suit. Despite the profound socio-economic repercussions of the Eurocrisis and despite the attempt to increase the consequentiality of the vote choice by installing lead candidates, neither the radical left nor most mainstream parties seemed willing or able to step up their mobilization game on European issues in the 2014 electoral contests. The fact that the French centre-left did emphasize EU issues more is best explained by the incumbency effect rather than heightened purposive EU issue emphasis. As such, the mobilization potential has apparently been left to radical right parties that oppose supranationalization on cultural grounds.

Thus, increased radical right mobilization in conjunction with the declining contagion effects on mainstream parties suggests that the 2014 EP elections in France and the Netherlands did not result in a broader publically visible and more interactive debate about European issues. In this light, the most recent election campaigns for the European Parliament hardly provided an effective antidote to citizen alienation from common political decision-making in Europe.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Maurits J. Meijers

Maurits J. Meijers is a doctoral researcher at the Hertie School of Governance Berlin in Germany. His research focuses on the patterns of interdependent party competition strategies in both domestic and supranational electoral and legislative settings. His doctoral dissertation expounds the ways in which Eurosceptic challenger parties affect mainstream party attitudes toward European integration. His publications include "Contagious Euroscepticism. The impact of Eurosceptic support on mainstream party positions on European integration" (*Party Politics*).



Dr. Christian Rauh

Christian Rauh is a fellow at the Global Governance Research Unit at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center. He writes and teaches on policy-making in the EU, the politicization of supra- and international decision-making, as well as on quantitative text analysis. Recent publications include "Communicating supranational governance? The salience of EU affairs in the German Bundestag, 1991–2013" (*European Union Politics*) and "A responsive technocracy? EU politicisation and the consumer policies of the European Commission" (ECPR Press, 2016).

Appendix A1. Party identification dictionary.

Table A1.1. French keywords (names and individuals) for party identification.

Group	Party names	Key individuals	Type of individual
Centre Left	Parti socialiste	Cambadélis	Leader (2014 only)
	PS	Désir	Leader (2014 only)
		Aubry	Leader (2009 only)
		Ayrault	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Bricq	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Duflot	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Fabius	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Filippetti	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Fioraso	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Fourneyron	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Hollande	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Le Drian	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Le Foll	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Lebranchu	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Lurel	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Martin	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Montebourg	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Moscovici	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Pinel	Incumbent (2014 only)
		Sapin	Incumbent (2014 only)
	Taubira	Incumbent (2014 only)	
	Touraine	Incumbent (2014 only)	
	Vallaud-Belkacem	Incumbent (2014 only)	
	Valls	Incumbent (2014 only)	
Centre Right	UMP	Sarkozy	Leader / Incumbent
	Union pour un mouvement populaire	Copé	Leader (2014 only)
		Bertrand	Leader (2009 only)
		Albanel	Incumbent (2009 only)
		Alliot-Marie	Incumbent (2009 only)
		Barnier	Incumbent (2009 only)
		Borloo	Incumbent (2009 only)
		Boutin	Incumbent (2009 only)
		Darcos	Incumbent (2009 only)
		Fillon	Incumbent (2009 only)
		Kouchner	Incumbent (2009 only)
		Lagarde	Incumbent (2009 only)
		Morin	Incumbent (2009 only)
		Pécresse	Incumbent (2009 only)
	Woerth	Incumbent (2009 only)	
Radical Left	FdG	Laurent	Leader (2014 only)
	FG	Buffet	Leader (2009 only)
	Front de Gauche	Arthaud	Leader
	Front de gauche pour changer d'Europe	Besancenot	Leader
	Gauche Unitaire	Laguiller	Leader
	GU	Mélenchon	Leader
	LCR	Picquet	Leader
	Ligue communiste révolutionnaire	Poupin	Leader
	LO		
	Lutte (O o)uvrière		
	Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste		
	NPA		
	Parti communiste français		
	Parti de Gauche		
	PCF		
PdG			
PG			
Radical Right	FN Front National FRONT NATIONAL	Le Pen	Leader

Table A1.2. Dutch keywords (names and individuals) for party identification.

Group	Party names	Key individuals	Type of individual			
Center Left	Partij van de Arbeid PvdA	Samsom	Leader (2014 only)			
		Spekman	Leader (2014 only)			
	Center Left	PvdA	Bos	Leader (2009 only)		
			Asscher	Incumbent (2014 only)		
			Bussemaker	Incumbent (2014 only)		
			Dijsselbloem	Incumbent (2014 only)		
			Plasterk	Incumbent (2014 only)		
			Ploumen	Incumbent (2014 only)		
			Timmermans	Incumbent (2014 only)		
			Cramer	Incumbent (2009 only)		
			Koenders	Incumbent (2009 only)		
			Plasterk	Incumbent (2009 only)		
			ter Horst	Incumbent (2009 only)		
van der Laan	Incumbent (2009 only)					
Center Right	Christen-Democratisch Appèl CDA	Bruma	Leader (2014 only)			
		Balkenende	Leader (2009 only)			
	Center Right	CDA	Verhagen	Incumbent (2009 only)		
			Hirsch Ballin	Incumbent (2009 only)		
			Eurlings	Incumbent (2009 only)		
			van der Hoeven	Incumbent (2009 only)		
			Verburg	Incumbent (2009 only)		
			Donner	Incumbent (2009 only)		
			Klink	Incumbent (2009 only)		
			Center Right	Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie VVD	Rutte	Leader
					Kamp	Incumbent (2014 only)
					Hennis-Plasschaert	Incumbent (2014 only)
					Schippers	Incumbent (2014 only)
Schultz van Haegen	Incumbent (2014 only)					
Blok	Incumbent (2014 only)					
Radical Left	Socialistische Partij SP	Opstelten	Incumbent (2014 only)			
		Marijnissen	Leader (2009 only)			
Radical Right	Partij voor de Vrijheid PVV	Roemer	Leader (2014 only)			
		Wilders	Leader			

Appendix A2. European integration dictionaries.
Table A2.1. French keywords marking European integration issues.

les européennes	Banque centrale européenne	([:alpha:])*avis europée[:alpha:])* affaire[:alpha:])* européen[:alpha:])* agenda européen	mesur[:alpha:])* européen[:alpha:])* monnaie commune
électio[:alpha:])* au parlement européen	BCE		
électio[:alpha:])* européen[:alpha:])* scruti[:alpha:])* européen[:alpha:])*	budget de l'Union européenne CJCE CJUE	avis de l'ue budget de l'UE	norme[:alpha:])* européen[:alpha:])* orientatio[:alpha:])* de l'UE orientatio[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])*
commissaire de l'UE Commissaire européen[:alpha:]}{0,1} conseil des ministres européen	Commission européenne Conseil européen Cour de justice de l'Union européenne	compétenc[:alpha:])* de l'UE compétenc[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* crise de la dette	Pacte de stabilité et de croissance politique de l'UE politique de l'Union européenne
déput[:alpha:])* au Parlement européen députe au Parlement européen	Cour de justice des Communautés européennes cour de justice européenne	crise de l'euro décisio[:alpha:])* de l'ue	politique étrangère et de sécurité commune politique étrangère et de sécurité européenne
députe européenne[:alpha:])* eurodépute	Cour des comptes européenne eta[:alpha:])* de l'ue	décisio[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* Directiv[:alpha:])* de l'UE	politique européenne procedur[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* programme européen
MPE Parlement européen	etat[:alpha:])* membre[:alpha:])* de l'UE etat[:alpha:])* membre[:alpha:])* de l'Union européenne eurogroupe	Directive de l'Union européenne droit de l'ue	recommandatio[:alpha:])* de l'ue
président de la Commission président de la Banque centrale européenne Président du Conseil européen	executi[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* FEDER fonctionnair[:alpha:])* de l'ue	droit de l'union européenne droit européen engagement[:alpha:])* européen[:alpha:])* fonds ([:alpha:])*)europé[:alpha:])* juridique de l'UE	recommandatio[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* règle[:alpha:])* européen[:alpha:])* règlemen[:alpha:])* de l'ue règlemen[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* Schengen
coopération européenne intégration européenne	Fonds européen de développement régional Fonds social européen	juridique européenne[:alpha:])*	stratégi[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* stratégie de l'UE subside[:alpha:])* de l'ue subside[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* subvention[:alpha:])* de l'ue
projet européen traité d'Amsterdam	FSE Haut-Représentant[:alpha:])* institutio[:alpha:])* de l'ue	l'euro législat[:alpha:])* de l'UE législat[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* lo[:alpha:])* de l'ue	subvention[:alpha:])* de l'ue subvention[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])*
constitution européenne fonctionnair[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* TCE	institutio[:alpha:])* européen[:alpha:])* organ[:alpha:])* de l'UE organ[:alpha:])* européen[:alpha:])*	lo[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* Mandat europé[:alpha:])*	subvention[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])*
TECE trait[:alpha:])* de l'UE trait[:alpha:])* de l'Union européenne trait[:alpha:])* europée[:alpha:])* traité de Lisbonne traité de Lisbonne traité de Maastricht	Parlement européen pays de l'ue sommet européen UEM Union économique et monétaire Union européenne union monétaire	marché intérieur de l'UE marché intérieur de l'Union européenne marché intérieur européen marché unique européen marché unique de l'UE marché unique de l'Union européenne	
traité de Nice traite de Rome de 2004 traite de Rome II traite établissant une constitution pour l'Europe traité sur l'UE traité sur l'Union européenne	zone euro		

Table A2.2. Dutch keywords marking European integration issues.

(E e)uropese verkiezingen	(E e)uropese lidsta([[alpha:]])*	(EU eu)-richtlijn([[alpha:]])*	(E e)uropese aanbeveling([[alpha:]])*
verkiezingen voor het (E e)uropees Parlement	(EU eu)-lidsta([[alpha:]])*	(E e)uropese regel([[alpha:]])*	(EU eu)-advie([[alpha:]])*
(E e)uropese Parlementsverkiezingen	(E e)uropese Unie	(E e)uropese richtlijn([[alpha:]])*	(E e)urope([[alpha:]])*
			advie([[alpha:]])*
	(E e)uropese Commissie	(EU eu)-begroting	(E e)uropese beleidslijn([[alpha:]])*
(ecb ECB)-directie	(E e)uropees Parlement	(E e)uropese begroting	(EU eu)-beleidslijn([[alpha:]])*
			(E e)uropese competentie([[alpha:]])*
commissievoorzitter	(E e)uropese Raad	Schengen	(EU eu)-competentie([[alpha:]])*
	Hof van Justitie van de		(E e)uropese rechtsorde
(E e)uropese ministerraad	(E e)uropese Unie	de (E e)uro	
Raad van Ministers	(E e)uropees Hof van Justitie	(E e)uropese grondwet	
voorzitter van de (E e)uropese Centrale Bank	(E e)uropese Rekenkamer	(E e)urocrisis	(EU eu)-rechtsorde
	ECB	schulden crisis	(E e)uropese strategie([[alpha:]])*
		(E e)uropese instelling([[alpha:]])*	(EU eu)-strategie([[alpha:]])*
(E e)uropese commissaris	(E e)uropese Centrale Bank		
	(E e)uropees Fonds voor Regionale Ontwikkeling	(EU eu)-instelling([[alpha:]])*	(EU eu)-verdrag([[alpha:]])*
Eurocommissaris	EFRO	(EU eu)-organen	(E e)uropese politiek
EU commissaris	(E e)uropees Sociaal Fonds	(E e)uropees orgaan	(EU eu)-politiek
(EU eu)-parlementariër		(E e)uropese maatregel([[alpha:]])*	
	ESF		(E e)uropese binnenmarkt
			(E e)urope([[alpha:]])*
(E e)uropese raadsvoorzitter	Euro zone	(EU eu)-maatregel([[alpha:]])*	programm([[alpha:]])*
Voorzitter van de (E e)uropese Raad	Eurozone	(E e)urope([[alpha:]])*	
		Manda([[alpha:]])*	(EU eu)-subsi([[alpha:]])*
	stabiliteits- en groeipact	EU manda([[alpha:]])*	(E e)uropese subsidi([[alpha:]])*
(E e)urope([[alpha:]])*	EU ([[alpha:]])*(gemeenschappelijk buitenlands
verdrag([[alpha:]])*)*fonds([[alpha:]])*	(E e)uropese top	en veiligheidsbeleid
	(E e)urope([[alpha:]])*	EU top	(E e)uropees buitenlands en
Verdrag van Maastricht	fond([[alpha:]])*		veiligheidsbeleid
		(E e)urogroep	(EU eu)-voorschrift([[alpha:]])*
Verdrag van Amsterdam	structuurfond([[alpha:]])*		Europe([[alpha:]])*
		(E e)uropees recht	Voorschrift([[alpha:]])*
Verdrag van Nice	monetaire unie		(E e)uropese norm([[alpha:]])*
		(EU eu)-recht([[alpha:]])*	
Verdrag van Lissabon	gemeenschappelijke munt		EU norm([[alpha:]])*
(E e)uropese ambtena([[alpha:]])*	(EU eu)-orgaan	(EU eu)-wetgeving	(E e)uropese betrokkenheid
	(E e)uropese organen	(E e)uropese wetgeving	
(E e)uropese integratie	(EU eu)-ambtena([[alpha:]])*	(EU eu)-wet	EU betrokkenheid
(E e)uropese samenwerking	hoge vertegenwoordiger	(E e)uropese wet([[alpha:]])*	
(E e)uropese executieve	(E e)uropese project	(EU eu)-regelgeving	
	(EU eu)-land([[alpha:]])*	(E e)uropese regelgeving	
	(EU eu)-sta([[alpha:]])*	(EU eu)-regel([[alpha:]])*	
		(E e)urope([[alpha:]])*	
	(E e)uropees Hof van Justitie	besluit([[alpha:]])*	
	(EU eu)-gerechtshof	(EU eu)-besluit([[alpha:]])*	
	(E e)uropese procedur([[alpha:]])*	(E e)uropese beschikking([[alpha:]])*	
	(E e)uropese interne markt	(EU eu)-beschikking	
		(E e)uropese verordening([[alpha:]])*	
	(E e)uropese eenheidsmarkt	(EU eu)-verordening	
	(E e)uropese agenda		

Appendix A3. Comparison automated and manual coding.

To validate our automated measure of mediatized partisan mobilization presented in Section four of the article, this appendix compares it to a set of hand-coded data gathered by the first author in an earlier project on the 2014 EP elections in France and the Netherlands. Here a human coder identified acts of partisan mobilization in newspaper articles along the nuclear sentence approach (Kleinnijenhuis, De Ridder, & Rietberg, 1997). This is very close, but not identical to the aims of the measure proposed in this article. First, the manually coded data only capture direct, literal party statements whereas our data also includes journalistic attributions. Second, the manually coded data rely on slightly different newspaper samples excluding *L'Humanité* for France but including *NRC Handelsblad* and *Het Financieele Dagblad* for the Netherlands.

Thus, the human coded data present a more conservative measure of partisan mobilization on the one hand and may be subject to different newspaper biases on the other. But if our claim is correct that our automated measure by and large captures partisan efforts to mobilize on Europe, they should be systematically related to the event counts retrieved by this human data collection. We thus merged both data sets for the overlapping 396 daily observations during the 2014 EP election campaign to compare the results.

Figure A3.1 plots the linear relationships between the automated and the manually coded counts. Specifically, the graph shows the relationship between the daily counts of articles containing automatically retrieved co-occurrences of political party and EU keywords and the daily count of articles containing manually coded party statements on European integration. In fact, our counts are on average somewhat higher as assumed above. But across countries and also across party groups they are positively and significantly related to the manually coded information. This does not fully hold for the radical left in France which has a limited number of observations in both data sets: the relationship is still positive but closely fails to reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Yet, all in all these findings make us even more confident that our measures tap into the dynamics we are interested in.

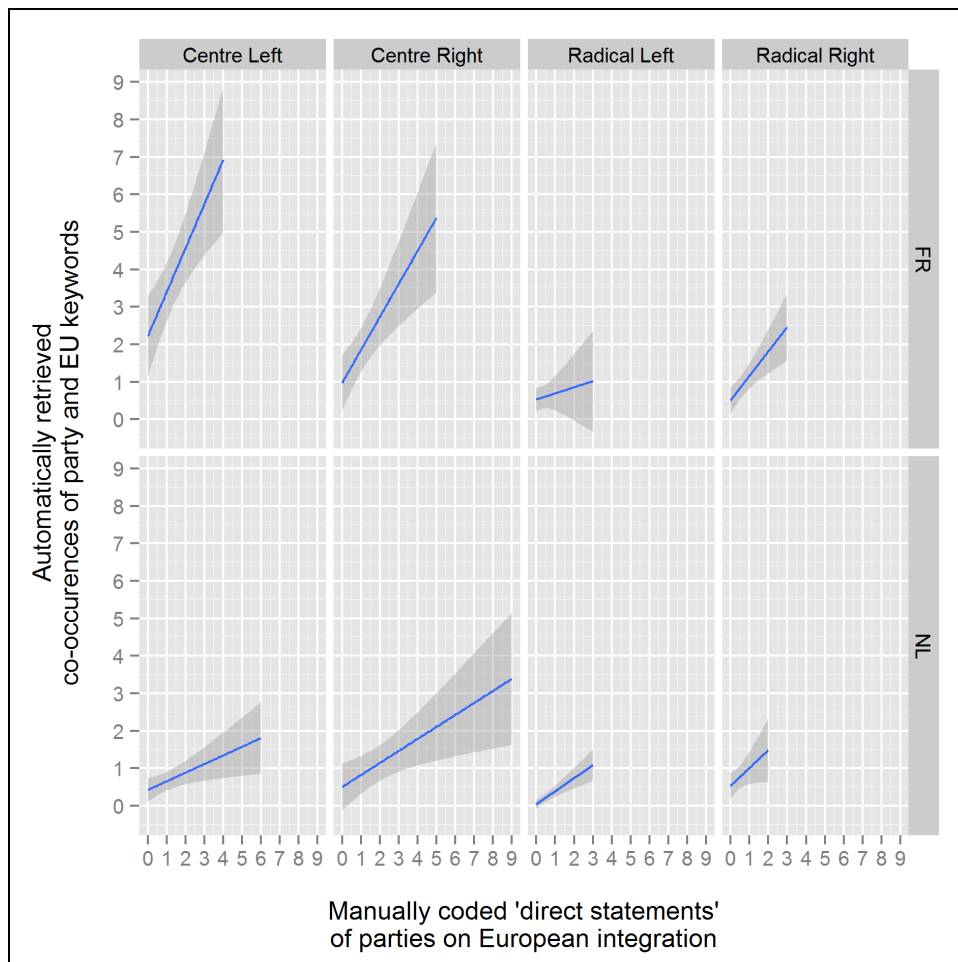


Figure A3.1. Comparing automated and manual coding in the 2014 EP elections. Note: The graph plots the linear correlation between the daily counts of articles containing automatically retrieved co-occurrences of political party and EU keywords and the daily count of articles containing manually coded party statements on European integration.

Appendix A4. Descriptive statistics.

The descriptive statistics used to calculate Figure 1 in the article, which plots the average daily co-occurrences of party groups and European issues, are presented in Table A4.1. To be sure, Figure 1 in the article shows the daily main of co-occurrences of party groups and European issues, whereas Table A4.1 shows the sum of all co-occurrences of party groups and European issues per party for each country/election.

Table A4.1. Descriptive statistics of party and EU keyword co-occurrences at article level.

	France		The Netherlands	
	2009	2014	2009	2014
Centre-Right	920	388	150/110	65/170
Centre-Left	284	732	115	140
Radical Right	16	192	55	150
Radical Left	104	128	50	35
N	1324	1440	480	560

Note: Table shows the total number of articles with co-occurrences of party keywords with EU keywords in the same grammatical sentence. The centre-right category for the Netherlands comprises both centre-right parties and first reports CDA results followed by the VVD results (CDA/VVD).

Table A4.2 shows a tabulation of the descriptive statistics of the dependent variable of the negative binomial panel regression models (see Table 2 in the article). The table shows that we are dealing with highly over-dispersed data—indicated by the fact that the variance of the count variables is greater than their mean.

Table A4.2. Descriptive statistics of the dependent variable.

	France		The Netherlands	
	2009	2014	2009	2014
Mean	3.01	2.8	0.58	0.58
Variance	9.42	9.09	1.07	1.04
N	100	100	129	129

Note: Table shows the mean and the variance for the dependent variable in the negative binomial panel regression models, i.e. the number of co-occurrences of party and EU keywords per day for the mainstream parties.

Appendix A5. Robustness check.

The models in the main article are negative binomial regression models calculated with random effects. The decision to opt for random effects models rather than fixed effects models was informed by our substantive interest to include an incumbent dummy in the models. Since we have a low number of panels in both cases, this would result in perfect and near multicollinearity of the models in the French and Dutch cases respectively. To ensure that our models are robust to more stringent, fixed effects specification, we have re-calculated the models with party fixed effects, which limit the calculated variation to within party variation only. These models are shown in Table A5.1 and do lead to the same substantial interpretations presented in the main text of the article.

Table A5.1. Negative binomial panel regression results.

	Daily co-occurrences of Mainstream parties and EU issues			
	France		The Netherlands	
	2009 Model 1	2014 Model 2	2009 Model 3	2014 Model 4
Lagged DV (t-1)	1.031 (0.0307)	1.057 ⁺ (0.0312)	0.837 (0.164)	1.081 (0.110)
EU Statements Rad. Left (t-1)	1.172 (0.118)	1.140 [*] (0.0682)	0.635 (0.245)	1.194 (0.346)
EU Statements Rad. Right (t-1)	2.303 ^{**} (0.522)	1.159 [*] (0.0788)	2.210 [*] (0.723)	1.375 [*] (0.178)
Constant	2.470 [*] (0.953)	1.375 (0.415)	0.585 (0.232)	0.944 (0.489)
No. observations	98	98	126	126
No. of Days	49	49	42	42
Wald Chi ²	17.44 ^{**}	31.93 ^{**}	7.0 ⁺	9.73 ⁺
Log likelihood	-190.89	-192.87	-119.66	-116.04

Notes: Exponentiated coefficients (Incidence rate ratios); Standard errors in parentheses; Model includes party fixed effects (not shown); ⁺ $p < 0.10$, ^{*} $p < 0.05$, ^{**} $p < 0.01$.

Appendix A6. Reverse models.

With regard to the interaction between party campaigning, the substantive focus of this article is on the impact of Eurosceptic challenger parties' visible mobilization efforts on the visibility mainstream party mobilization. Table A6.1 nevertheless shows the estimates of the reverse model: whether visible mainstream party mobilization on EU issues affects the extent to which Eurosceptic challenger parties visibly address European issues. Unlike the main models presented in Table 2 and Table A5.1, not all reverse models are significant. Only the 2014 models for both countries have significant Wald Chi² estimates—indicating overall model significance. Looking at the French model for the 2014 EP campaign, it becomes apparent that visible mainstream party EU mobilization efforts do not affect the degree of visible mobilization efforts of the Eurosceptic challenger parties. In the Dutch 2014 EP campaign, we do find significant effects. Both the statement by the Dutch centre-left and by the centre-right party VVD affect the extent to which Eurosceptic parties visibly emphasize EU issues in the written news media.

Table A6.1. Reverse negative binomial panel regression results.

	Daily co-occurrences of Eurosceptic challenger parties and EU issues							
	France				The Netherlands			
	2009		2014		2009		2014	
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	Coef.	IRR	Coef.	IRR	Coef.	IRR	Coef.	IRR
Lagged DV (t-1)	0.0992 (0.0716)	1.104	0.0708 (0.0502)	1.073	0.240 (0.533)	1.272	-0.0346 (0.233)	0.966
EU Statements Centre Left (t-1)	-0.0402 (0.0615)	0.961	0.0295 (0.0389)	1.030	-0.0463 (0.513)	0.955	0.430* (0.206)	1.537
EU Statements Centre Right (t-1)	-0.0348 (0.0622)	0.966	0.0224 (0.0440)	1.023				
EU Statements CDA (t-1)					-0.0446 (0.262)	0.956	-0.0273 (0.331)	0.973
EU Statements VVD (t-1)					-0.121 (0.415)	0.886	0.182* (0.100)	1.200
Constant	0.716* (0.324)		0.268 (0.295)		14.53 (1971.9)		-0.000390 (0.935)	
No. obs.	98		98		84		84	
No. of Days	49		49		42		42	
Wald Chi ²	3.92		23.35**		0.48		9.63*	
Log likelihood	-195.85		-195.33		-43.55		-59.85	

Notes: Coefficients and exponentiated coefficients (IRRs) shown; Standard errors in parentheses; Model includes party fixed effects (not shown); + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Article

The Impact of the Explosion of EU News on Voter Choice in the 2014 EU Elections

Jan Kleinnijenhuis* and Wouter van Atteveldt

Department of Communication Science, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 1081HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands;
E-Mails: j.kleinnijenhuis@vu.nl (J.K.), w.h.van.atteveldt@vu.nl (W.v.A.)

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

The European elections in 2014 were the first to be held after a long period in which EU-related news was prominent in the media. They were held after years of daily news about the euro crisis and after months of news about the popular uprising in the Ukraine against president Yanukovych, who had refused to sign the association agreement with the EU. This could have invited political parties to overcome the usual problem of low salience of EU issues by strongly profiling themselves on EU issues. Turnout at the 2014 EU elections, however, remained low, hinting that parties were unable to convert the attention for European issues into enthusiasm for their party at the European elections. This paper asks how vote choice was influenced by party campaigning on EU related issues. A news effects analysis based on a content analysis of Dutch newspapers and television, and on a panel survey among Dutch voters revealed that EU issues functioned as wedge issues: the more strongly parties were associated in the news with the euro crisis and the Ukraine, the less they succeeded in mobilizing voters.

Keywords

elections; European Parliament; media content analysis; news effects; panel survey; Ukraine; vote choice

Issue

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1. Introduction

“Hier schlägt das Herz europäisch und dieser Herzschlag, der hier europäisch schlägt, wird auch bei uns in Europa, in Deutschland, in Berlin gehört. Uns ist das Schicksal der Ukraine nicht gleichgültig” [Here the heart beats European, and this heartbeat, which sounds European, is heard by us in Europe, in Germany, in Berlin. We are not indifferent to the fate of Ukraine]. German Minister of Foreign Affairs Guido Westerwelle in his speech to protesters at Euro-aidan, December 4th 2013

For the first time in the history of European elections since 1979, EU related news was prominent in news-

paper and television news in the months preceding the European Elections of May 2014. Developments in the Ukraine became the foremost important topic in the news due to the popular uprising against president Yanukovych, who had cancelled the Ukraine’s association treaty with the EU. News about EU support for the revolt followed, for example news about the visits to Euromaidan of among others the German foreign minister Westerwelle and MEP Verhofstadt in December 2013. The news media provided extensive coverage of president Yanukovych’s retreat in February 2014, the signing of the political part of the association treaty between the EU and the new government in Kiev on March 21st 2014, the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the insurrection in eastern Ukraine. EU re-

lated news on the Ukraine came on top of EU related news about the financial crisis of 2007–2008 and the euro crisis of 2010–2012.

On the basis of the increase in EU related news one could have expected that political parties would have been able to convert the massive attention for European issues into enthusiasm for the EU issue positions of their party at the European elections: many studies showed or at least suggested that a poor EU visibility as indicated by a low amount of EU related news in previous EU election campaigns contributed to a low turnout in earlier EU elections (De Vreese, 2003; De Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, & Boomgaarden, 2006; Lefevere & Van Aelst, 2014; Schuck, Vliegthart, & De Vreese, 2016; Schuck, Xezonakis, Elenbaas, Banducci, & De Vreese, 2011; Van Spanje & De Vreese, 2014; Wilke & Reinemann, 2005). The research question of this article is how vote choice was influenced by parties' profiling on EU related issues. In what direction and to what extent was the vote for a party affected by the news coverage of that party's stance on EU issues such as support for the EU debt nations to solve the euro crisis; or a treaty with the Ukraine, against the will of Russia?

This study adds to the recent literature which shows that issue voting matters in a European context (e.g. Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Van de Wardt, De Vries, & Hobolt, 2014) and to the literature on effects of the visibility and the tone of EU related news (e.g. Azrout, Van Spanje, & De Vreese, 2012; Van Spanje & De Vreese, 2014). The unique contribution is to show that the amplification of parties' issue positions on EU related is-

ssues in the news media matters for electoral support—albeit not in a straightforward “more is better” fashion.

2. The Ukraine and the Euro Crisis in the 2014 EU Election Campaign

The Netherlands is an interesting case to study the impact of the attention for European issues, because of strong variation over time. In the years before the Dutch ‘no’ to the European constitutional treaty in 2005 the EU was not an important or controversial issue in the news. During the euro crisis enthusiasm for the EU diminished further. The declining enthusiasm for EU politics can be seen from Figure 1, which shows the decrease in turnout from 58.1% in 1979 down to 36.8% in 2009.

Figure 1 shows also the development of EU-visibility for Dutch citizens, as indicated by the amount of news coverage on the EU in *De Telegraaf*, which is the most popular newspaper in The Netherlands.¹ Although

¹ De Telegraaf is the Dutch newspaper with the widest circulation, also among the lower educated segments of Dutch society. It's also the newspaper with the highest impact on politics, as measured by the number of Parliamentary questions based on news reports, and it is the only newspaper for which digital content is available from 1979 onwards is available. Attention for the EU in De Telegraaf was measured in each EU election year by the number of news articles about the EU and EU institutions in the five months preceding the EU elections, as operationalized by means of a search query (cf. Appendix) in the Amsterdam Content Analysis Toolkit AMCAT (Van Atteveldt, 2008, cf. <https://amcat.vu.nl/navigator> and <https://github.com/amcat>).

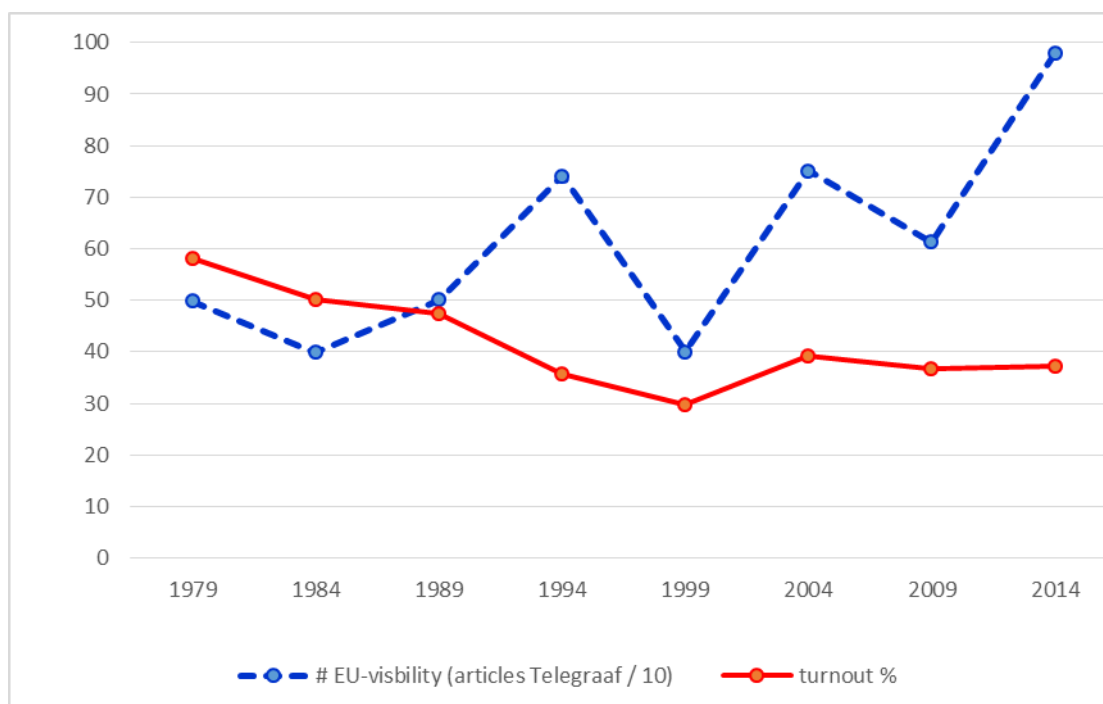


Figure 1. EU visibility in the news preceding the EU elections (5 months) and turnout. EU visibility is defined as the amount of EU news items, as indicated by the number of news items on the EU in *De Telegraaf*, divided by 10 to arrive at a better scale for visualization.

turnout is related to increases or decreases in EU related news, turnout increased only marginally from 36.8% in 2009 to 37.3% in 2014, in spite of the unprecedented amount of EU related news in 2014. Figure 1 shows a long-term negative relationship between the level of EU visibility and EU turnout ($r=-0.35$) in combination with a positive short-term relationship between their first-order differences ($r=+0.48$). This suggests that voters who were not made enthusiastic by any of the political parties in a previous EU election, tend to stay less than enthusiastic, which is known as habitual (non-)voting in the research literature (Franklin & Hobolt, 2011). In 1999 both turnout and EU visibility were very low, but the news was nevertheless soaked with complaints about the “Brussels bureaucracy,” without explaining what the Dutch parties, let alone the Dutch voters, could do about it.

Figure 1 illustrates the central puzzle of this article: why did parties not mobilize their voters on the new EU issues in 2014, given the unprecedented amount of EU news in 2014? We focus on the vote for individual parties rather than on turnout, because this will show whether a specific party’s profile with respect to the new EU issues can affect the mobilization of voters for that party.

2.1. Electoral Consequences of Party Emphasis on EU Issues

Party contestation at the national level is often more attractive for national political parties than competition on EU issues, even in EU election campaigns (Van der Eijk & Franklin, 2004). This is especially true for a multiparty system with coalition governments like the Netherlands. Research from Adam et al. (2014) on party press releases in the twelve weeks that preceded the 2014 European elections shows that only 7% of the Dutch press releases were devoted to international affairs, as compared to 16% of German press releases (Adam et al., 2014). EU issues may drive a wedge within the electorate of a party and within the governing coalition in a multiparty system. Competition on EU issues is primarily used by parties who have never been part of government coalitions (Van de Wardt et al., 2014). In combination with the tendency of media to concentrate on negative news, this results in the paradox that more media attention for Europe may be detrimental for trust in Europe (Van Noije, 2010; Van Spanje & De Vreese, 2014; Vliegthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden, & De Vreese, 2008).

The 2005 Dutch referendum on the EU constitution provides an example. Months before the vested political parties started their short pro-EU campaign, newspapers and television news programs came to report extensively about the expected French “no” because of the French fear for cheap labor from Eastern Europe. This huge increase in media attention for the EU long

before the official campaign contributed to the shift from a pro-European stance towards the Dutch “no” to the EU constitutional treaty (Kleinnijenhuis, Takens, & Van Atteveldt, 2006). This shows the weak role of Dutch political parties in the news about European affairs. In the terminology of Koopmans and Erbe (2004) the low involvement of national actors in European affairs is described as weak *vertical* Europeanisation. Almost all news about the euro crisis was either supranational, with reports about the ECB and the EFSF, or horizontal, with extensive reports about street riots in Athens, the *Bundesverfassungsgericht* in Germany, and long-term interest rates for Spain. The prolongation of the euro crisis culminated in disappointment about EU austerity politics and lower levels of trust (Armingeon & Ceka, 2015). EU news related to Ukraine was also highly horizontal. The media covered soundbites from Euro-maidan and from the speeches of the Russian president Vladimir Putin. Images from the battleground in the Crimea and the Eastern Ukraine became an integral part of prime time television news. Contentious European issues like the Ukraine conflict are often covered widely even in the tabloid press (Pfetsch, Adam, & Eschner, 2010). The vertical dimension in EU news was once more weak, presumably because political parties were afraid of their voters. The popular mood was against Putin, but popular resistance against EU membership for the Ukraine could be expected to be even stronger than in the case of Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.

Hypothesis 1 is based on the expectation that if a party strongly emphasizes the EU, the euro crisis, or the Ukraine, these issues would turn into wedge issues (Van de Wardt et al., 2014), chasing off a significant part of its voters. A party’s emphasis on an issue, or in other words, a party’s involvement in an issue, or a party’s association with an issue in the media used by a voter will be indicated by the number of news items in which the party and the issue co-occur in the media used by that voter.

H1: News coverage of a party’s involvement in the EU (H1a), the euro crisis (H1b), or the crisis in the Ukraine (H1c) in the media used by a voter diminishes that voter’s likelihood to vote for the party.

2.2. Electoral Consequences of Party Emphasis on Old Issue Dimensions

To test whether the vote at EU elections depends on the media portrayal of the involvement of parties in European issues, news on national issue dimensions has to be considered in addition. In line with theories of issue ownership (Petrocik, 1996; Walgrave, Lefevere, & Tresch, 2012) and theories of issue news effects (Kleinnijenhuis, Van Hoof, Oegema, & De Ridder, 2007; Walgrave, Lefevere, & Nuytemans, 2009) it is to be ex-

pected that parties who receive media attention for their issue positions on owned issues, either on the left-right dimension (e.g. taxes, social services) or on the cultural dimension (e.g. immigration, Islam) will profit at the elections. Therefore news coverage in the media used by a voter of a party's stances on the left-right dimension is expected to increase that voter's likelihood to vote for that party. The same is expected to hold for news about the cultural GALTAN dimension (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002; Kriesi et al., 2006, 2008), although the latter is more often debated (Van der Brug & Van Spanje, 2009).

H2: News coverage of a party's involvement with the left-right dimension (H2a) and/or the cultural dimension (H2b) in the media used by a voter increases that voter's likelihood to vote for the party.

We will test whether addressing these common issue dimensions resulted in additional votes, without testing in more detail whether parties emphasized indeed 'their' side of ideological dimensions in line with issue ownership theory (Budge & Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996; Walgrave et al., 2012).

2.3. Electoral Impact of Characteristics of Voters and Parties

We now turn from the supply side of news on EU issues in the media to the demand side of voters who select a party also on the basis of structural factors that play a role in second-order elections, in which votes "are determined more by the domestic political cleavages than by alternatives originating in the EU" (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Voting on the basis of domestic political cleavages leads however to conflicting considerations.

First of all, many voters vote habitually in European elections (Hobolt & Spoon, 2012), based on the party voted for in the last national elections, thus on the basis of prior vote intentions (Van Spanje & De Vreese, 2014).

H3a: Voters tend to vote in European elections for the same party as in the preceding national elections.

Issue voting may however be more prevalent in European elections than in national elections, since strategic considerations about party size and coalition potential matter less in second-order elections (Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996). In EU elections voters tend to cast a sincere vote for the party whose issue positions they like best. The 2014 elections for the European Parliament were held in the mid-term of the national legislative period in the Netherlands. Therefore voters who are disappointed with the party they voted for in the

previous national elections, will presumably vote for a nearby party with which they also agree on the issues (Dassonneville & Dejaeghere, 2014; Kleinnijenhuis & Fan, 1999; Van der Eijk, Schmitt, & Binder, 2005; Van der Meer, Van Elsas, Lubbe, & Van der Brug, 2015). In line with the theory of issue ownership we assume that agreement with a party matters especially on issues that are associated with a party by voters (Walgrave et al., 2012).

H3b: Voters tend to vote for the party with which they agree on the issues that they associate with that party.

Dissatisfied voters in second-order elections tend not to vote, and especially not to vote for government coalition parties (Johnston & Pattie, 2001; Reif & Schmitt, 1980): "Parties in national governments do worse in EP elections, especially when the EP elections take place during the middle of the national election cycle" (Hobolt & Spoon, 2012, p. 703).

H3c: Voters are less likely to vote for a government party than for an opposition party in European elections.

In addition to taking part in the national government, subjective satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the national government has been identified as a major determinant of the vote in second-order elections like the EU elections (Hix & Marsh, 2011; Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996).

H3d,e: The greater a voter's dissatisfaction with government performance, the less likely he or she will vote for any party (H3d), and especially for a government party (H3e).

Education and political knowledge will be included as control variables, since a low level of education and a poor political knowledge lead a lack of enthusiasm to vote for any party in elections for the European Parliament (Lefevere & Van Aelst, 2014).

3. Method

3.1. Content Analysis: Data

The tests of the hypotheses on news effects (H1 and H2) are based on an automated content analysis of news attention from December 2013 until the EU elections at May 22nd 2014, and on a two-wave panel survey shortly before and immediately after the EU elections. Seven national newspapers (Algemeen Dagblad, Het Financieel Dagblad, Metro, NRC Handelsblad, Next, Spits, De Telegraaf, de Volkskrant and Trouw), a free daily (Metro) and NOS television news from the

public broadcaster were included in the analysis. The Netherlands is traditionally a nation with a high readership of national newspapers. Even though this has now dropped to about 50%, in combination with public television news the media analyzed here still reach three quarters of the Dutch voters.

3.1.1. Content Analysis: Operationalization

The automated content analysis is conducted using AmCAT (Van Atteveldt, 2008) using search queries for each of the parties, for the left-right dimension, the cultural dimension, the EU, the financial crisis and the Ukraine conflict. These queries are based on a combination of more elementary concepts, such as crime, and immigration in the case of the cultural dimension. The query formulation procedure that was used to optimize both precision (the percentage of found articles that were correct) and recall (the percentage of all correct articles that was found) gave good results, because the media happen to use fairly unique names and labels to denote Ukraine, the euro crisis, and political parties. The resulting search queries are included in the supplementary materials.

Co-occurrences in a single news items were used to assess whether a party addressed an issue. It should be noted that this measure overestimates the frequency with which parties address an issue, since parties and issues may co-occur in a single news item also for other reasons. Co-occurrence in the same news item of a party and an issue can be conceived as a necessary condition for coverage of a party's issue position on that issue.

3.2. Panel Survey Data

The authors commissioned a panel survey to the Dutch branch of GfK, an international market research organization. 1806 respondents for the first wave of the panel study in July 2012 were drawn from a GfK database of over 50,000 respondents that had agreed to participate in GfK-research. The sample of 1806 respondents was effectively a stratified sample that guaranteed that the sample would be not only a representative sample with regard to socio-demographic variables (age, sex, education), but also with regard to turnout and party choice in the 2010 elections. Respondents from this sample were asked to participate in a new wave shortly before (n=1233, response rate 68%) to assess their media use and immediately after the EU elections to retrieve their vote (n=1160, response rate 64%). New voters who were not of voting age in 2012 were excluded. The 2014 sample was still a representative sample with regard to almost all demographic and political characteristics, with political knowledge and turnout as notable examples. Panel attrition occurred significantly more often among respondents with a lower political knowledge (as measured in the first

wave of the panel survey in July 2012), which explains why turnout according to the post-election sample (65%) is significantly higher than actual turnout (37.3%)—as is the case in almost every panel survey. Since the remaining variance in education, knowledge and turnout is still large, the panel survey data are still perfectly suited to test explanations of party choice at the European Elections² since education and political knowledge can be included as control variables.

3.2.1. Linking Media Content to Respondents in the Panel Survey

For each of the media for which automated content analysis data were available a question was asked in the panel survey whether the respondent had made use of them during the last week. To the users who used a specific medium we attributed the content analysis data for that medium with regard to the emphasis of each party on the EU, the euro crisis, the Ukraine, the left-right dimension and the cultural dimension, in line with for example Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, and De Vreese (2011) and Kleinnijenhuis, Van Hoof, and Oegema (2006). To users who used more than one medium we attributed the sum of the attention scores for the media used. Additional news items are expected to show diminishing impact, which is often modeled with taking logs or square roots of the number of news items. In line with earlier research we opted for square roots (Van Noije, Kleinnijenhuis, & Oegema, 2008). The content analysis data that were attributed to each respondent provide the best possible measure of the news about a party's involvement in various issue domains in the media of individual voters, although the measure still neglects which respondent skipped how many relevant news items from the media that were used.

3.2.2. Operationalisation of Panel Survey Variables

Party choice in the 2014 EU elections was measured in the 2014 post-election survey wave (n=1160). Respondents were asked whether they had voted, and if so, for which party. *Party choice in 2012* was measured as the party one intended to vote for in the first pre-election wave before the national elections of 2012 ra-

² Due to panel attrition the percentage of newspaper readers increased from 51% to 55%, and the percentage voters who either read a newspaper or watched public television broadcasts at least once a week from 73% to 77%. The latter percentages are based on the question whether the respondent used these media during the last week, which still overestimates the actual use. The *unweighted* percentage of 35% abstainers in the post second-order election survey is a good percentage, that is comparable with the *weighted* percentage of 45% of abstainers in the 2009 EU elections in the Netherlands, which was obtained by reweighting the data on socio-demographic characteristics (cf. Lefevere and Van Aelst, 2014, Table 2).

ther than with a 2014 recall measure. *Satisfaction with government policy* was measured by a single 5-point scale, that was re-scaled to the -1...+1-value range. *Incumbency* was measured with a -1...+1-scale, in which the maximum score of 1 was assigned to the government coalition parties PvdA and VVD, a zero to “loyal opposition” parties CU/SGP and D66, and -1 to the remaining opposition parties. Last but not least the agreement on issues between a voter and a party was measured with questions about the association between specific parties and specific issues according to a voter. Respondents were asked: ‘Which of the issues below comes to your mind first if you think about <party i>? And which issue next?’ Respondents could choose from a list of predefined newsworthy issues and were also able to add other issues. Respondents who associated a party with a specific issue were asked: ‘To what degree do you agree or disagree with <party i> with regard to <issue j₁ | issue j₂>’ (Kleinnijenhuis & Pennings, 2001). A 5-point scale was used (disagree fully, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, agree fully), which was linearly transformed to a -1...+1 value range. Overall issue agreement of a voter with a party was measured as the average agreement with a party across all issues that were associated with that party. Note that this measurement in terms of associative issue ownership (Walgrave et al., 2012) applies both to position issues and valence issues (Hobolt & Spoon, 2012). The control variable *education* and *political knowledge* were measured respectively as the highest education that one finished and as the number of correct answers to twelve factual questions about the recognition of four politicians from photos. The three questions per politician dealt with their name, their party affiliation, and their political function (Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.75$). Education and political knowledge were linearly transformed to a 0...1-scale to render their logistic regression coefficients comparable.

3.3. Data Analysis

A multilevel logistic regression analysis is applied to test the hypotheses on potential causes of the decision whether or not to vote for any single party.³

4. Results

4.1. Voter Characteristics, Exposure to Media Content, and Party Choice

Table 1 gives an overview of the mean scores of the variables that will be used to test the hypotheses. Mean scores are presented for abstainers and for the voters of each of the parties in 2014.

Average scores for the abstainers are included in the first row of Table 1. According to the post-election wave 34% of the voters did not cast a vote in the EU 2014 elections. In the 2012 national elections 20% of the voters abstained. The average educational level (0.56), the average level of political knowledge (0.79), and news exposure (0.48) of the abstainers in the 2014 EU election are low as compared to 2014 EU voters. Their dissatisfaction with government policy (-0.25) is surpassed only by voters for the leftist SP and the rightist PVV.

³ A multilevel logistic regression analyses on “stacked” data with combinations of parties and respondents as the units of analysis is to be preferred over a multinomial regression analysis on “wide” data with respondents as the units of analysis. The independent news variables about the emphasis that a party puts on an issue should predict only the dichotomous choice for that party, and should not be allowed to exert all types of side-effects on the decision to make a choice between other parties. This is guaranteed with a multilevel logistic regression analysis, and not with a multinomial regression analysis.

Table 1. Means of dependent variable and independent variables for abstainers and voters for each party average exposure to political issues of voters in the EU 2014 elections for each party based on their media use.

	Voter characteristics						Exposure of voters for party to issue associations of party				
	party choice EU 2014	party choice 2012	education	knowledge	gvmt satisfaction [-1..+1]	news exposure [0..1]	left-right	cultural	EU	euro crisis	Ukraine crisis
Total	100%	100%	0.56	0.79	-0.25	0.60	-	-	-	-	-
abstention	34%	20%	0.48	0.68	-0.33	0.48	-	-	-	-	-
turnout, party voted for:											
SP (Socialists)	9%	14%	0.50	0.82	-0.64	0.65	20	20	16	7	9
GroenLinks (Ecologists)	5%	3%	0.76	0.88	-0.26	0.67	17	17	15	7	8
PvdA (Social-Democrats)	8%	11%	0.63	0.92	0.06	0.79	43	40	31	13	20
ChristenUnie (Christian)	3%	3%	0.59	0.82	-0.09	0.52	19	17	14	6	9
D66 (cultural liberal)	10%	6%	0.66	0.84	-0.01	0.66	26	25	21	8	12
CDA (Christian)	10%	7%	0.58	0.87	-0.15	0.67	28	27	23	9	12
VVD (socio-ec. right)	7%	15%	0.71	0.89	0.28	0.69	40	41	34	14	22
PVV (cultural right)	8%	6%	0.48	0.77	-0.56	0.64	24	37	27	10	15

The parties are roughly ordered from left (SP) to right (PVV). Habitual turnout as measured by the percentage of a party's 2014 EU voters who voted for the same party at the EU elections of 2009 is lowest for the parties at the extremes, thus for the SP and PVV. Education, knowledge, government satisfaction and news exposure are also relatively low for voters of the SP and PVV. Education is highest for GroenLinks (0.76), but voters for the PvdA exhibit on average the highest news exposure (0.79) and the highest political knowledge (0.92).

The final five columns in Table 1 show average exposure to political issues of voters in the EU 2014 elections for each party based on their media use. They are *not* based on all voters. Table 1 shows, for example, that PVV voters, given their media use, could have encountered on average 37 news items in which the PVV played the drum of cultural issues—e.g. the Islam—from December 1st 2013 until the elections on May 22nd 2014. A comparison per row shows that the PVV addressed the cultural dimension more often than any other issue according to the media that were consumed by PVV voters. A comparison per column shows that the government coalition parties PvdA and VVD addressed the cultural dimension even more often according to the media that were followed by PvdA-voters, respectively VVD-voters. The left-wing PvdA focuses slightly more on the left-right dimension than on the cultural dimension (43 vs 40) whereas the reverse holds for the VVD (40 vs 41). The government parties take the lead also in addressing EU issues. Table 1 shows that the media that were used by voters of the opposition parties SP, GroenLinks, and ChristenUnie do not pay a lot of atten-

tion to the new euro crisis or the Ukraine.

4.2. Assessing the Effect of EU Related News Controlled for Other Factors

Table 2 shows logistic regression coefficients that represent the effects of news about the issue positions of parties on the vote for a party. Model 1 is the empty model that is included to enable a comparison of goodness-of-fit measures AIC and DIC. Model 2 includes only voter and party characteristics (hypothesis 3). Model 3 includes also the effects of the emphasis of parties on the left-right dimension and the cultural dimension according to the media (hypothesis 2) and the effects of a party's emphasis on the euro crisis and the Ukraine according to the media (hypothesis 1).

The decreasing AIC and DIC scores show that model 3 fits the data better than model 2, which in turn fits the data better than model 1. This implies that news about party positions on the EU partially explain EP vote choice, also when controlling for news about party positions on the left-right dimension and the cultural dimension, and for structural characteristics of voters and parties.

4.2.1. Controls for Structural Determinants of the Vote in Second-Order Elections

The direction of the significant regression coefficients in both model 2 and model 3 in Table 2 confirm expectations that voters consider national political cleavages when voting in second-order elections. The decision to

Table 2. Multilevel logistic regression to trace the influence of news on a party's issue profile on the vote.

	1: empty model			2: with party × voter			3: with party profile in media used by voter		
	B	SE	sig	B	SE	sig	B	SE	sig
intercept	-2.522	0.040	***	-4.461	0.246	***	-4.662	0.257	***
controls									
education				0.735	0.183	***	0.741	0.185	***
political knowledge				0.711	0.259	**	0.608	0.270	*
vote choice as 2 nd order elections									
H3a national party choice 2012				2.399	0.107	***	2.413	0.107	***
H3b issue agreement				1.783	0.124	***	1.774	0.124	***
H3c incumbent coalition party				-0.444	0.125	***	-0.278	0.196	
H3d satisfaction government policy				0.437	0.100	***	0.450	0.101	***
H3e incumbent × satisfaction				0.680	0.111	***	0.719	0.113	***
issue profile party in media used by the voter									
H1a EU							0.041	0.053	
H1b financial crisis / euro crisis							-0.279	0.070	***
H1c Ukraine							-0.164	0.042	***
H2a left vs right dimension							0.052	0.019	**
H2b cultural dimension							0.094	0.029	**
random part, variance									
across respondents (n=1160)	0.000			0.000			0.000		
goodness of fit									
AIC	4917.9			3276.4			3250.0		
DIC	4913.9			3258.4			3222.0		

Note: n = 8 parties x 1160 respondents; *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, *p< 0.05, .p< 0.1 two-sided.

vote for a specific party is influenced strongly by habitual voting (Franklin & Hobolt, 2011), as measured by whether one voted already for the same party in the 2012 national elections (H3a). Voting by heart on the basis of agreement on political issues with the party to be voted for matters strongly in second-order elections (H3b). Voters who are disappointed with their previous party will not vote for an arbitrary other party but for a party with which they agree on political issues (Dassonneville & Dejaeghere, 2014; Kleinnijenhuis & Fan, 1999; Van der Meer et al., 2015). Satisfaction with government policy reveals the straightforward interaction effect that especially parties that take part in the coalition part will be rewarded in case of satisfaction and punished in case of dissatisfaction, in line with the literature on retrospective voting (Johnston & Pattie, 2001; Van der Brug, Van der Eijk, & Franklin, 2007) (H3c, H3d and H3e). The controls for levels of education and knowledge show that these important predictors of turnout in second-order elections (Lefevere & Van Aelst, 2014) increase the likelihood to vote for each of the parties.

4.2.2. Effects of Political News

Model 3 shows that news matters along with these structural determinants of party choice in second-order elections. The significant logistic regression coefficients show that reports in the media used by voter about party positioning on the left-right dimension (H2a) and on the cultural dimension (H2b) increase the likelihood to vote for these parties. The most likely underlying mechanism is that voters will reward parties who succeed in getting media coverage for their owned issues, which are usually either left or right (Budge & Farlie, 1983), or either Green, Alternative and Libertarian or Traditional, Authoritarian and Nationalist (Hooghe et al., 2002).

Because national parties are not portrayed as powerful players in EU news, we expected a negative effect on the vote of the news about parties addressing the EU, the euro crisis, or the Ukraine conflict. No effect shows up for addressing the EU (H1a). Negative *boomerang effects* show up for addressing the euro crisis (H1b) and the Ukraine conflict (H1c), as is indicated by the significantly negative logistic regression coefficients. Thus, hypothesis H1 is confirmed, and the puzzle why parties did not mobilize their voters on the new EU issues in spite of an explosion of EU news is solved. In the news effects model 3 the direct negative effect of incumbency on the vote in second-order elections (H3c) becomes insignificant, which suggests that the negative effect of incumbency on the vote is mediated by involvement of the governing parties in news about EU related issues, which makes them unpopular.

We now turn to the random part to assess the variance of regression coefficients. The variation in the random intercept across respondents is remarkably small. We tested also a model with random intercepts

across parties and a random slope model with party-specific habitual voting, which showed the same positive and negative signs for the regression coefficients.⁴

4.2.3. Conditional Effect of News about a Party's Stance on the Ukraine

Multilevel logistic regression estimates often give a poor impression of the marginal effects of separate variables in the model, even when different explanatory variables have the value range as in Table 2. To illustrate effect size, Figure 2 presents a linear plot of the effect of a party's emphasis on the Ukraine on the probability to vote for that party. The X-axis shows the association between a party and the Ukraine in the news followed by voters of that party, while the Y-axis shows the logarithmic transformation of the probability to vote for that party, with all other variables set to their means. The distribution of news about the profiles of parties is shown on the x-axis by means of small, more or less densely plotted, vertical bars.

Even when controlled for other variables the probability to vote for a party decreases from 20% for a theoretical party that did not address the Ukraine at all, down to far less than 1% for a theoretical party that addresses the Ukraine at every occasion.

For a further interpretation of Figure 2 it is worthwhile to consider the average emphasis of individual parties according to the news media that were followed by their voters on the x-axis, as presented in the last column in Table 1. Given *average* values on other variables, VVD voters would have been assigned a probability of roughly 1% only to vote for the governing VVD given the high amount of Ukraine related EU news (n=22 news items on average) about the VVD. The likelihood to vote for the Christian-Democrats (CDA), the Socialist Party (SP) or GroenLinks would amount to almost 5%, since these opposition parties were more able to avoid the Ukraine (n=8, 9 news items, respectively). All in all Figure 2 shows that the negative effect of party-related news on the Ukraine on the EU vote is quite substantial.

⁴ A model with random intercepts per party hardly converges, but shows the same direction of regression coefficients as in model 3 from Table 2, but with insignificant coefficients for news effects and incumbency effects. The reason for the latter is that incumbency and party emphasis on issues can be predicted almost perfectly from party names. A random slope model with random slopes for habitual voting per party is theoretically more interesting and less multicollinear from an empirical point of view. This gives a model with an improved goodness of fit (DIC=3151) as compared to model 3 (DIC=3222). Habitual voting shows to be particularly strong for the parties of the Christian party family, CDA and CU/SGP, which is in line with what most political observers believe. In this model the negative effects of addressing the Euro crisis or the Ukraine conflict remain significant, in addition to a marginal significant effect for emphasizing the cultural dimension.

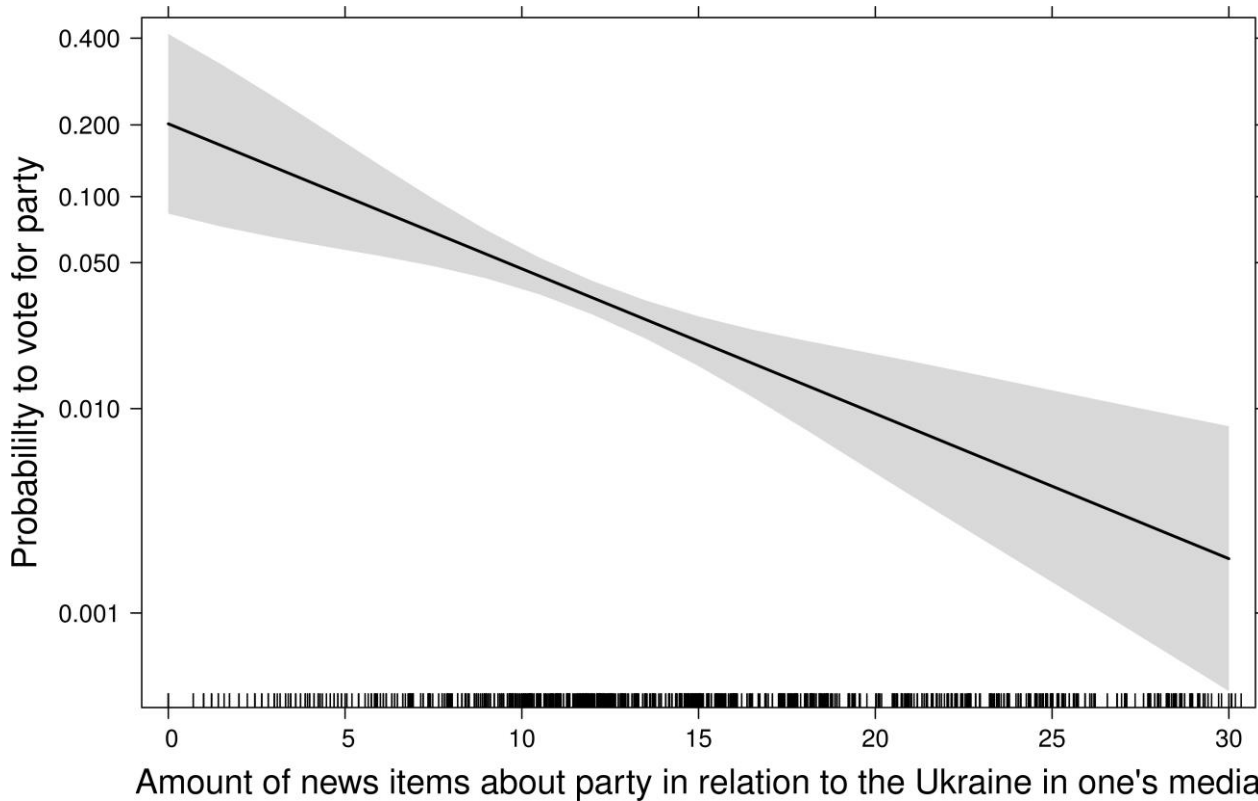


Figure 2. Effect of number of news items about a party and the Ukraine in one’s media on the probability to vote for party (logarithmic scale). Note: The effects are conditional on mean values for the remaining independent variables and for the random intercept in the multilevel regression model of Table 2. The grey area denotes the 95% confidence interval.

5. Discussion

One can wonder why the explosion of EU related news on the euro crisis and the Ukraine conflict before the 2014 EU elections hardly resulted in a higher enthusiasm for the EU positions of political parties, as shown by the very low increase of turnout (cf. Figure 1). The puzzle why this did not occur in 2014 can be solved by looking at the micro-level effects of media coverage on the individual vote.

The current study confirms that issue voting in a European context matters (e.g. Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Van de Wardt et al., 2014). The study shows news effects, in line with the literature on effects of the visibility and the tone of EU related news (e.g. Azrout et al., 2012; Van Spanje & De Vreese, 2014). The unique contribution of this study is to provide empirical evidence that amplification of parties’ issue positions on EU related issues in the news media actually *diminished* electoral support. The emphasis of parties on the euro crisis and the Ukraine did not motivate voters but scared them off, when controlled for structural characteristics of voters and parties, and for addressing the traditional left-right dimension and the cultural dimension. The result that a party’s emphasis on the left-right dimension and the cultural dimension in the media motivates voters to vote for that party is in line with

survey research that established the importance of the left-right dimension in EU elections (Hobolt & Spoon, 2012). The result that the EU’s relation with Ukraine and the euro crisis can’t be addressed by parties in the news media without losing voters is in line with survey research which showed that the EU is a wedge issue in multiparty systems (Van de Wardt et al., 2014).

A limitation of this study that we focused on issue news and on retrospective voting based on satisfaction with government policy, but not on news about support and criticism, and cooperation and conflict, or about success and failures, losses and benefits, and the horse race, which also exerts effects on the vote (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2007; Schuck et al., 2016; Van Spanje & De Vreese, 2014).

Political parties were not portrayed in the media as relevant players in the Euro crisis and the Ukraine conflict: the ‘vertical’ dimension of Europeanization was weak. This points in the direction of a vicious circle between a low visibility of national parties in EU related news and electoral losses for parties who relatively strongly emphasize EU related issues, most often incumbent government parties. Months of prolonged news about path breaking party stances on EU related issues, such as the 2015 EU immigrant crisis, can possibly offer an escape from such a downward cycle, and create the momentum to break the vicious circle.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Dr. Jan Kleinnijenhuis

Jan Kleinnijenhuis (PhD Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 1990) is professor of Communication Science at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. His research addresses the nature of political and economic news, news selection and agenda building, news effects, and methods for automated and semi-automated content analysis. Why don't politicians state something else, and why do media audiences not believe something else?



Dr. Wouter van Atteveldt

Wouter van Atteveldt (PhD Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2008) is assistant professor at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and specialized in text analysis methods. He has developed the Amsterdam Content Analysis Toolkit (AmCAT) and (co-)developed a number of R packages and given numerous (R) workshops on text analysis. His current methodological interests include grammatical analysis, topic models, sentiment analysis and network methods, and substantively he is interested in long-term changes in journalistic norms.

Article

Looking for the European Voter: Split-Ticket Voting in the Belgian Regional and European Elections of 2009 and 2014

Camille Kelbel¹, Virginie Van Ingelgom^{2,*} and Soetkin Verhaegen³

¹CEVIPOL, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1050 Bruxelles, Belgium; E-Mail: camille.kelbel@ulb.ac.be

²F.R.S.–FNRS, ISPOLE, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1348 Louvain-La-Neuve, Belgium;
E-Mail: virginie.vaningelgom@uclouvain.be

³Centrum voor Politicologie, KU Leuven, 3000 Leuven, Belgium; E-Mail: soetkin.verhaegen@soc.kuleuven.be

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

While European elections are often seen as remote from EU issues, considerations specifically linked to the EU came to the forefront in the wake of the 2014 European elections: the economic and financial crisis, the new process of designation of the European Commission President, and the alleged increase of Eurosceptic votes. This increased salience of political debates about the EU asks for a reconsideration of the ‘second-order nature’ of European elections. In this context, as in 2009, the Belgian electorate voted for the regional and European levels on the very same day. Belgian voters were thus offered the opportunity to split their ticket between both levels. This allows comparing the occurrence and determinants of these ‘immediate switching’ behaviours in 2014 with those of the presumably less politicized EP elections in 2009. We do that by employing the 2009 and 2014 PartiRep Election Study data. On the one hand, the article shows that split-ticket voting cannot be explained by economic voting, European identity, and attitudes towards integration in 2014. On the other hand, the unique configuration of the Belgian elections enables us to observe that the introduction of Spitzenkandidaten did enhance split-ticket voting for voters who could directly vote for this candidate (in Flanders), while this did not increase split-ticket voting among voters who could only indirectly support the candidate (in Wallonia).

Keywords

economic voting; European elections; politicization; split-ticket voting

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1. Introduction

In multi-level political systems, voters are offered the opportunity to cast votes for several elections. These different contests are, however, not independent from each other. Sub-national and supra-national elections in Western European countries are bound to be tainted by national level considerations both in political campaigns and their electoral outcomes. If sub-national and supra-national elections have been introduced in

an attempt to provide more legitimacy to these tiers of government, such legitimacy claims rest on the unproven assumption that voters vote according to level-specific motives. In the case of the European Union (EU), scholars have often shown that elections for the European Parliament (EP) are simply not about Europe (Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Føllesdal & Hix, 2006). Due to low levels of politicization of European integration, EU issue voting is often considered, at best, a ‘sleeping giant’ (Van der Eijk & Franklin, 2004; de Vries, 2007). At

the same time, however, the integration process has resulted in a shift of a broad range of competences to the supra-national level. Few political domains are not affected by EU-level decision-making: Europe is nearly everywhere. This article aims to increase insights into the ways in which voters deal with this apparent paradox. What are EP elections about according to citizens? Are they about Europe at all? And if so, what specific EU issues are at stake?

In Belgium, electoral results of the 2014 EP elections clearly differed from those of the 2009 elections (see Table 1). Differences in party choices, however, do not tell us how and why these elections were different from previous contests. To answer these questions, we should shed light on vote motives.

Table 1. Results of the 2009 and 2014 EP Elections by region (%). Source: verkiezingen2014.be

	2009	2014	Difference
Flanders			
CD&V	23.54	20.14	-3.40
Groen	7.84	10.57	+2.73
N-VA	9.71	26.91	+17.20
Open VLD	20.02	19.92	-0.10
PvdA+	1.01	2.42	+1.41
sp.a	13.60	13.24	-0.36
Vlaams Belang	15.82	6.80	-9.02
Wallonia			
cdH	13.42	11.65	-1.77
Ecolo	22.00	10.90	-11.1
FDF	/	2.27	+2.27
MR	24.78	27.44	+2.66
PP	/	6.64	+6.64
PS	30.50	29.66	-0.84
PTB-GO	1.19	5.68	+4.49

Note: Percentages of vote share within each region are presented.

Given the simultaneity of the two types of elections, both in 2009 and in 2014, this article studies split-ticket voting between European and regional elections. Split-ticket voting refers to voting for different parties for different offices which are being decided upon in a single election day. In 2014, the highest aggregate level effects of split-ticket voting between regional and EP elections were observed for the Open VLD (which scored 5.7 per cent higher in European elections), the N-VA (which scored 5.0 per cent lower in EP elections), the cdH (with a 3.5 per cent difference), and Ecolo (+2.3 per cent in EP elections). To understand the rationale of split-ticket voting, however, it is necessary to further explore its determinants at the individual-level.

In this study, we use the Belgian case to examine motives of differentiated vote choices between European and other (here: regional) elections. As in most of the EU (and especially Eurozone) member states, the economic and financial crisis was high on the political

agenda in Belgium. Besides that, the Belgian case also provides a unique opportunity to test whether the introduction of Spitzenkandidaten had an effect on voting behaviours. Since the Dutch and French language communities in Belgium have separate party systems (Brack & Pilet, 2010), and as a Spitzenkandidat was only running as a MEP candidate in the Dutch language community, we can test the effect of this new mechanism introduced in the 2014 EP elections in two different situations. Citizens of the Dutch language community could directly vote for this candidate; citizens of the French language community could only indirectly support this candidate. This peculiar situation is undoubtedly the main added value of the Belgian case to our attempt to explore new possible reasons for split-ticket voting in EP elections. It enables us to test to what extent the newly introduced electoral connection between EP elections and the designation of the President of the European Commission—often seen as the ultimate attempt to introduce a ‘quasi-parliamentary system’ (Hobolt, 2014, p. 1532)—has gained any consideration among those it was directed at: the European citizens.

Thus, this article contributes to the debate of the (alleged) growing politicization of EU integration (de Wilde, 2011). It argues that because of the increased salience of European issues prior to the 2014 elections (the economic and financial crisis, the introduction of Spitzenkandidaten and more generally the alleged ongoing politicization of EU integration), voters are expected to have based their EP vote more often on European-specific motives rather than on considerations related to national or regional politics. Voting for a different party in EP elections than in other contests should increasingly be the result of EU-specific vote motives. Accordingly, this article tests whether reasons for split-ticket voting in 2014 differed from reasons for split-ticket voting in 2009.

2. Split-Ticket Voting: Theory and Hypotheses

2.1. Explaining Split-Ticket Voting

Split-ticket voting has originally been examined in the American two-party system, where several ‘classical’ explanations for ballot-splitting have been put forth. Differentiated vote choices in concurrent elections can first and foremost be linked to the general trend toward candidate-centred politics. On the one hand, split-ticket voting has been seen as the result of specific trends of the party system such as declining party loyalty, the weakening of party apparatuses, media-centred campaigns, or the surge in incumbents’ advantage (Wattenberg, 1991). On the other hand, funding, visibility, or the quality of a candidate (and notably his/her political experience—Jacobson, 1990) can result in voting for a particular candidate, even though

this candidate is part of a different party than the one usually supported by a given voter (Beck, Baum, Clausen, & Smith, 1992; Burden & Helmke, 2009; Burden & Kimball, 1998; Roscoe, 2003). Hence, both features of the system and of particular candidates can lead to ‘candidate effects’ resulting in split-ticket voting. Another set of explanations more simply suggests that voters look for different things in different elections (Jacobson, 1990), thus expressing arena-specific votes. Party preferences would differ in the two arenas precisely because something else is at stake in the two different elections. An additional account of voters’ choices is offered by the policy-balancing model (Alesina & Rosenthal, 1995; Fiorina, 1992), whereby voters situated ‘in between’ two parties may choose to alternate their choices in order to maximize their policy preferences overall.

Ever since the first direct elections of the EP in 1979, major differences in voting behaviour between European and other—above all, national—elections have been pinpointed. They have almost invariably been analysed through the prism of the ‘second-order’ model (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Although the model originally did not directly focus on split-ticket voting, it did put forth explanations related to divergent electoral outcomes in different electoral contests: European elections are marked by higher abstention levels, and better electoral results of small and opposition parties—as opposed to large and governmental ones. Why do voters vote differently in European elections? Voters are deemed to consider European elections as less important than first-order, national elections and are expected to use these supra-national elections to express opinions about national-level issues (Reif, 1984, 1985; Schmitt, 2005). It is assumed that domestic issues dominate European ones when it comes down to vote choices for European elections (Reif, 1984, 1985). This recognised absence of genuine European elections is one of the crucial elements of the endemic ‘EU democratic deficit’: “European Parliament elections are [not] really ‘European’ elections: they are not about the personalities and parties at the European level or the direction of the EU policy agenda” (Føllesdal & Hix, 2006, pp. 535-536). Developments of the model have tried to understand how national issues are mobilised in EP votes and result in differentiated votes. They have highlighted specific voting behaviours such as ‘sanctioning the government’ (Hix & Marsh, 2007), or ‘sincere voting’ as opposed to the ‘useful’ votes expressed in national elections (Marsh & Mikhaylov, 2010).

The second-order model thus accounts for different electoral outcomes in different electoral contests, through national vote motives. At the same time, the literature has increasingly come to acknowledge that European elections are to some extent about Europe (de Vries & Tillman, 2011; Mattila, 2003; Schuck, Xezonakis, Elenbaas, Banducci, & de Vreese, 2011), and

much more so than they previously were (Hobolt, Spoon, & Tilley, 2009). This apparent paradox can be solved by reconsidering the main assumption of the ‘second-order’ model, which states that domestic issues dominate, but do not necessarily monopolise the European electoral arena. Hence, the question becomes: how different vote motives pertaining to different levels are articulated in explaining votes in European elections, compared to other (first-order) elections.

The Belgian case offers an opportunity to reconsider this model in instances of simultaneous elections. Based on the above presented literature on split-ticket voting and on the ‘second-order’ model, we assume that voters who vote differently in two (or more) concomitant contests use a specific reasoning when casting a vote for the ‘less important’ contest (here: European elections). We can thus put forth explanations of why certain voters choose to vote differently in EP elections than in more ‘first-order’ elections: national elections, which remain the main reference point, but also regional elections. Furthermore, a number of structural and contextual characteristics of the Belgian political system challenge some of the core features of the ‘second-order’ model, which makes the country a good case for studying whether the changed context in which the EP elections took place in 2009 and 2014 affected split-ticket voting.

First, regarding the structural characteristics of the system, while lower participation levels in European elections is one of the three main pillars on which the model is based, compulsory voting in Belgium annihilate most interpretations regarding participation. Second, in multipolar systems like Belgium, a number of medium size parties enter electoral competition, blurring the differentiation between small and large organisations, which constitute the first reference of the model in terms of vote transfers. Third, as a ‘consociation’ that consists of governments at various policy-levels, many parties usually take part in government at one level or the other. As a consequence, there is often no clear ‘alternation’ in power and the distinction between governmental and non-governmental parties is curtailed. Accordingly, voting behaviours which rest on the assumption that voters have clear pictures of who governs and who is likely to govern—such as ‘sanctioning the government’ or ‘tactical voting’—are less likely to occur. A final structural characteristic of the Belgian case is that, as a federal state, the importance of the different regions brings into question the originally admitted dichotomous distinction between national first-order elections and a second-order category encompassing all other contests. In fact, the degree of importance that voters attach to regional elections has been shown to vary with the distribution of competences between the central state and the regions (Chhibber & Kollman, 2004). The more competences attributed to the regions, the more likely it is that re-

gional elections will escape the logics of second-orderness (Jeffery & Hough, 2009). In federal or quasi-federal states, where regions exert a real legislative power, voters tend to give more consideration to their regional elections. These contests should be considered on a continuum as less of second-order or even more of 'first-order' nature (Cutler, 2008; Jeffery & Hough, 2009; Van der Eijk, Franklin, & Marsh, 1996). Belgium is precisely a highly decentralized federal state in which the regions (and communities) have been attributed extensive competences¹. Its regional elections can hence be reasonably assumed to escape the 'second-order' ranking and the choice of voters is likely to be largely influenced by factors specific to regional politics. As such, regional considerations should be brought in as part of the (first-order) explanation of ticket-splitting.

Secondly, and turning to contextual features, the initial model has often carefully ignored instances of simultaneous elections, although later research has re-incorporated them (Heath, McLean, Taylor, & Curtice, 1999; Van Aelst & Lefevere, 2012). Electoral cycles, however, are part and parcel of the model. The sanctioning effect is expected to be stronger when European elections act as 'intermediary elections' (Parodi, 1983) or as 'mid-terms' (as in the 'punishment and protest' explanation of Hix & Marsh, 2007). By contrast, sanctioning behaviour is expected to be weaker when EP elections are held closer to first-order ones—either directly after or just before—suggesting that there would be less vote-switching or even bonuses for governing parties in such instances (Reif, 1985). In this regard, Belgian voters have been confronted with an extreme case of such closeness in both 2009 and 2014.

In sum, with its consociational, federal and multi-party system, and taking into account the concomitance of elections, Belgium is clearly a 'least likely case' of voting behaviours in European elections dictated by the logics of the 'second-order' model. These characteristics theoretically limit the sanctioning effect to a large extent, leaving space for other—issue driven—vote motives. In the Belgian case it is more likely that a split vote is based on EU-specific considerations rather than on national considerations. If voters would take first-order preferences into account, they are expected to vote for the same party in both elections.

This article questions to what extent European elections are still of 'second-order' by examining whether split-ticket voting can be at least partly and increasingly linked to EU-specific motives. Hobolt et al. (2009)

¹ The Sixth State Reform has most recently (2011–2013) proceeded with a considerable transfer of competences and has given broad fiscal autonomy to the regions, largely resulting in moving the centre of gravity of public policies from the Federal Government to the federated entities (Sautois & Uyttendaele, 2013).

showed that voters might base their votes on both European and domestic issues. Hence, both vote motives are not mutually exclusive. In 2009, Van Aelst and Lefevere (2012) studied why people voted differently in the 2009 regional and European elections in Belgium. They showed that at least a part of the electorate was driven by Euro-specific motivations. Our study contributes to this debate by introducing a comparison between 2009 and 2014, hence allowing for a first appreciation of a possible evolution. Such evolution is expected for two main reasons: EU matters are increasingly salient, and attitudes regarding (especially against) current developments of the EU have gained considerable attention. We expect that:

H1: Motives of split-ticket voting are likely to differ between 2009 and 2014. In 2014, split-ticket motives were more likely to entail EU-specific considerations.

2.2. Looking for EU-Specific Motives

This article studies why voters split their ticket, examining the extent to which EU-specific motives can be part of the explanation of such behaviour in the context of what are usually considered as 'second-order' elections. This second section first puts forth EU arena-specific considerations before turning to candidate effects explanations. As such, we offer a continuation, a test, and an addition to previous studies on voting behaviour in EP elections. Far from dismissing the 'second-order' model, we reassess it in light of a 'least likely case'. By reviewing EU-specific motives, this article tackles the question whether the increased salience of European issues prior to the 2014 elections due to the economic and financial crisis, the introduction of Spitzenkandidaten, and thus the alleged ongoing politicization of EU integration influenced motives for split-ticket voting in EP elections. In these posited more politicized EP elections, voters are expected to have based their vote more often on European-specific motives than on considerations related to national or regional politics.

2.2.1. Reincorporating Arena-Specific Considerations

EU-specific considerations can drive split-ticket voting. Carruba and Timpone, for instance, suggested that 'Europe matters' in the sense that voters actively express different preferences at the EU level and at the national level (Carruba & Timpone, 2005, p. 279). They showed that voting for a green party at the European level could not be reduced to a vote for a small party or against the government (as argued in the 'second-order' elections theory). In the same vein, Hong recently demonstrated that European considerations matter in vote switching towards niche parties for European elections (Hong, 2015). 'Europe' would thus have become a

subject-matter of its own, politicized and important enough to constitute a factor of voters' decisions in elections (de Vries & Tillman, 2011; de Vries, van der Brug, van Egmond, & van der Eijk, 2011; Hobolt & Wittrock, 2011). In other words, Europe as an issue may constitute one motivational basis for choosing a particular party. Reasonably, if European issues had played a role in voters' decision, they would primarily have been expressed at that level, likely resulting in split-ticket voting.

One factor possibly leading to an EU-specific vote in EP elections (and to one that differs from one's vote in other elections) is the strength of an individual's European identity. The importance attributed to a specific ballot can be linked to perceptions of the institution, and specifically to how voters perceive the institution as legitimately representing them (Rohrschneider & Loveless, 2011). As citizens with a stronger European identity feel part of the community that is (aimed to be) represented by the EP, those citizens with a stronger European identity are expected to attach more importance to EP elections (Verhaegen, 2015). As a result, voters with a stronger European identity are expected to more often specifically think about their policy preferences for the EU community they are part of when casting their vote in EP elections.

Another EU-related reason to vote differently in EP elections than in other elections are attitudes about EU integration. A considerable amount of recent studies suggests that EU attitudes increasingly affect party choice in EP elections (de Vries, 2007, 2009, 2010; de Vries et al., 2011; Evans, 1998, 2002; Hobolt et al., 2009). Eurosceptic votes linked to worries about the effects of EU policy and dissatisfaction with mainstream politics lie at the heart of Eurosceptic parties' success (Treib, 2014). In a context characterized by greater politicization, it is more likely that attitudes towards the EU influence electoral decisions. This process whereby the EU has become an issue in itself is referred to as 'EU issue voting' by de Vries (2007). Hence, it seems logical to assume that split-ticket voters may be turning to other parties in EP elections out of a positive or negative general attitude towards the EU². As such, ticket-splitting could be attributed to various attitudes of the electorate towards different contests that are held simultaneously, but can also be attributed to different motives much in line with the arena-specific vote motives argument (Jacobson, 1990).

² Note that the literature has underlined the need to consider citizens who are neither Europhile nor Eurosceptic as well (de Vries, 2013; Duchesne, Frazer, Haegel, & Van Ingelgom, 2013; Rose & Borz, 2015; Stoeckel, 2013; Van Ingelgom, 2012, 2014). Citizens that are indifferent and/or ambivalent towards European integration could be expected either to be more volatile and split their ticket or not to participate (the latter not really applying in Belgium due to compulsory voting). However, we lack indicators, as questions measuring indifference and ambivalence were not included in the surveys.

Besides these diffused factors of identity and attitudes about EU integration, policy-issues may also lead to an EU-specific vote. By 2014, some policy areas such as the economic and monetary union, security, migration, or the environment gained unprecedented salience. Kriesi and Grande (2015) showed that events such as the Greek crisis and bailout, the Irish bailout, and the fiscal compact translated into an increased salience of the EU in media coverage and in the public debate. Hobolt and Tilley (2014) also established that this increased salience of the Euro crisis translated into an increased awareness among citizens about the Euro crisis. Citizens even tended to perceive the EU as responsible for the economic situation in their country, rather than seeing this as a responsibility of the national government. To this regard, a particularly prolific theory, economic voting³, is precisely concerned with the impact of economic perceptions or situations on the probability of voting for incumbents or for any other party (Duch & Stevenson, 2006). The economic voting phenomenon has often been studied through the vote function (Kramer, 1971; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000), which refers to the evolution of the vote for incumbents or for other parties, and entails both economic and political variables as explanations of vote choices (Nannestad & Paldam, 1994). Applying economic voting to European elections entails that voters who associate economic matters with the EU are expected to vote for European elections based on economic considerations since they perceive the EU-level as particularly relevant on these matters. This may lead to voting for a different party in EP elections, than in national or regional elections, as the consideration for the economy is in this case made specifically about the EU-level.

Overall, we argue that especially for the 2014 EP elections, a number of EU arena-specific considerations are potential explanations of split-ticket voting. Thus, motives related to the EU or European politics are expected to increase the likelihood of voting differently in regional and EP elections in Belgium (Van Aelst & Lefevere, 2012, p. 6). More precisely, we expect that:

H2a: Voters with a stronger European identity are more likely to split their ticket, especially in 2014.

H2b: Voters with more positive attitudes about EU integration are more likely to split their ticket, especially in 2014.

H2c: Voters who grant more importance to the economy are more likely to split their ticket, especially in 2014.

³ For literature reviews of economic voting theory see, among others: Lewis-Beck (1990), Norpoth, Lewis-Beck, & Lafay (1991), Dorussen & Taylor (2001).

We will further explain and explore these relationships in the third part of the article.

2.2.2. Candidate Effects

A number of authors have argued that limited levels of candidate voting in EP elections contribute to the absence of genuinely ‘European’ elections (Føllesdal & Hix, 2006). In 2014, however, the first application of a provision enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon has brought expectations of change in this regard. As of 2014, the elections of the EP should be taken into account by the European Council in the designation of the President of the European Commission (art.17 TEU). The interpretation put forth by the European Parliament is that the President of the Commission is to come from the party group that received the largest vote share in the European elections, urging political parties at European level (the so-called ‘Europarties’) to designate their ‘lead candidate’⁴. The Europarties and the Parliament advertised that a vote for a particular party in the EP elections implies a vote for the ‘lead candidate’, or ‘Spitzenkandidat’, of the corresponding Europarty. Hobolt (2014) observed that the awareness about this electoral connection between a vote for the EP and the selection of a new President of the European Commission differed between member states where voters could directly vote for such a candidate (i.e. where a ‘lead candidate’ of a given Europarty was also a candidate to the EP for a national party), and member states where only the mechanism of indirect support for a candidate was possible.

In Belgium, although Guy Verhofstadt was known as former Prime Minister in 2009, we can assume that his visibility—at least partly attributable to his role as group President of the ALDE—in the past EP legislature (2009–2014) has established him as a major European figure. Switching to Verhofstadt would hence be in line with the ‘candidate-effect’ identified by the split-ticket voting literature. Although we cannot clearly establish whether voting for him is based on clear ‘European motives’ or tainted with considerations about the role of Belgium in Europe if Verhofstadt would become the President of the Commission (which would amount to a kind of strategic voting), both possibilities are linked to European considerations. In the Dutch-speaking community in Belgium, the candidate of the ALDE party for the Commission Presidency was on the Open VLD list. Thus, Verhofstadt’s candidacy for President of the Commission is expected to have a (candidacy) effect on split-ticket voting. Following the literature on candidacy effects, it can be expected that Verhofstadt’s candidacy encouraged part of the Flemish voters to vote for

⁴ European Parliament, Resolution of 22 November 2012 on the elections to the European Parliament in 2014 (2012/2829(RSP)).

Open VLD and specifically to vote for Verhofstadt in EP elections, even if they voted for a different party in regional elections. In the French language community, voters who want to support Verhofstadt’s candidacy for President of the Commission can be expected to vote for MR as this indirectly supports the candidacy of Verhofstadt (MR is also part of the ALDE Europarty). According to this reasoning, voters who turned to Open VLD or MR in the 2014 EP elections were more likely to do so for EU-specific motives, and more precisely for a specific ‘European’ candidate. Because of this, we expect that:

H3a: Voting for Open VLD or MR in EP elections more often led to a split-ticket vote.

H3b: Voting for Verhofstadt in EP elections more often led to a split-ticket vote among voters of the Dutch language community.

3. Data and Methods

The data of the PartiRep Elections Study 2009 and 2014⁵ are used in this article as they allow for comparing explanations for split-ticket voting between the two most recent EP elections. In these studies, a geographically stratified random sample of eligible voters in Flanders and Wallonia was drawn from the national registry. The 2009 study was carried out in three waves, two before and one after the elections of June 7th, 2009. The 2014 study was carried out in two waves, one before and one after the elections of May 25th, 2014. Different respondents participated in the 2009 and the 2014 study. While a short panel study was carried out in both election years, it has to be noted that we do not use panel data from 2009 to 2014. In the first wave of each study, respondents were interviewed face-to-face about their personal background, opinions, interests, political activities, and voting behaviour. In the other survey waves, the respondents were interviewed by phone about the votes they casted, their vote motives, and the election campaign. In 2009, the first interview was completed by 2,331 respondents (1,204 Flemish and 1,127 Walloon), 1,845 respondents completed the survey in the second wave, and 1,698 respondents also completed the third survey. In 2014, the interview was completed by 2,019 re-

⁵ We use the PartiRep Election Study 2009 and 2014. PartiRep is a network and a research project focusing on changing patterns of participation and representation in modern democracies. PartiRep is formally an Interuniversity Attraction Pole (IAP) funded by the Belgian Science Policy (Belspo). It involves the universities of Antwerp (Universiteit Antwerpen), Brussels (Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Université libre de Bruxelles), Leiden (Universiteit Leiden), Leuven (KU Leuven), Louvain-La-Neuve (Université Catholique de Louvain), and Mannheim (Universität Mannheim).

spondents (1,008 Flemish and 1,011 Walloon), which accounts for an acceptable response rate of 45 per cent. In the second wave, 1,470 respondents completed the survey. To account for the disproportionate non-response rate according to age, gender, and education level, weights are used throughout the analyses. Indicators for the concepts of interest in this research (European vote motives, economic vote motives, and information on voting for a Spitzenkandidat) are included in the data.

In both studies, respondents were asked which topic they find most important to take into account when deciding upon their vote. In the 2009 study, 'the financial crisis' was in the list of options. In 2014, 'economics' was included as an option. These questions are used as measures for economic motives for split-ticket voting. As measures for European vote motives, attitudes about EU integration, and European identity are included. Attitudes about EU integration are measured on a scale from 0 to 10 whereby '0' means respondents think that European integration already went too far, '5' that it is fine as it is, and '10' that they would like the EU to further integrate. European identity is measured by asking respondents to which geographic or cultural community they feel they belong to in the first place and in the second place. A dummy variable is constructed with the respondents who opted for Europe in the first place or in the second place receive code '1', and respondents that did not choose Europe receive code '0'⁶. Voters with a stronger European identity are expected to attach more importance to EP elections (Bruter, 2008; Ehin, 2008; Verhaegen, 2015). As a result, they are expected to invest more consideration in their vote for the EP, which is more likely to result in a split-ticket vote based on EU vote motives. On the contrary, voters with a strong regional identity might focus on regional elections and just follow the same line in EP elections, which they perceive as less important in comparison to voters with a strong European identity. Also, regional identity is included as a dummy variable (using the same survey questions about feeling of belonging to particular geographic and cultural communities) to set the effect of European identity against the potential effect of regional identity. The hypothesized effect of the introduction of Spitzenkandidaten requires an extra test of the effect of voting for a specific candidate. To examine the effect on split-ticket voting of the fact that former Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt was running as Spitzenkandidat for the ALDE, we tested whether respondents who voted for a liberal party (Open VLD among Flemish respondents and MR among Walloon

respondents) were more likely to have also split their ticket. Also, in 2014 we assessed whether the candidate effect (if any) in Flanders can be explained by specifically voting for Verhofstadt.

We also introduced other variables in order to check for alternative explanations of split-ticket voting. A first alternative explanation is uncertainty of party preference or of allegiance. It is expected that when voters like multiple parties or are not strongly attached to just one party, they might vote for different parties in different elections (here: regional and European) in order to express their support for different parties. This is also seen as 'balancing' between different preferences and positions (Giebler & Wagner, 2015). On the one hand, this can be measured by vote switching between the election that took place during the study, and the most recent previous election. On the other hand, an indicator is included that displays whether the vote intention of the respondent in the first wave of the study matches the vote in the election. A comparison is made with the actual vote in the regional election of 2009 and 2014 respectively because the questions about the vote choice in the most recent previous election, and about vote intention, were measured for regional and federal elections only, which are theoretically of or closer to first-order classification. This information is not available for voting in EP elections. A second alternative explanation for split-ticket voting is voting for a specific candidate, rather than for a party. The specific characteristics of a candidate might attract support of a voter, quasi-independently from which party the candidate is attached. This might lead to split-ticket voting as the party of the candidate is seen as of little importance. In the 2009 study, respondents were asked about their vote motives for EP elections in an open question. We use the coding of Van Aelst and Lefevere (2012) who attributed the code '1' to respondents who referred to a specific candidate in their vote motive. Respondents who did not mention a candidate or candidates received the code '0'. In the 2014 study, respondents were directly asked whether they voted for the party in general, or for a specific candidate (or multiple candidates). A dummy variable is constructed where voting for a candidate received '1'.

Finally, control variables are included in the analyses. Education level is included as individual resources, such as education level, influences political sophistication. Similarly, political interest and political knowledge are related to political sophistication. More sophisticated reasoning that combines different vote motives and strategies may drive split-ticket voting. Also, citizens with a higher educational level, who know more about politics and who are more interested in politics, are more likely to be in favour of EU integration and have a stronger European identity (Fligstein, 2008; Verhaegen & Hooghe, 2015). Political sophistication could thus potentially moderate the relationship between attitudes

⁶ As a robustness test, we replicated the analysis of the 2014 data with a more elaborate measure of European identity. This analysis led to the same result as when using the binary variable: European identity is not significantly related to split-ticket voting.

about and identifications with the EU and split-ticket voting. Furthermore, controls are included for age, gender, and political trust. Political trust in national institutions might increase or decrease the odds of ticket-splitting as we have seen that EP vote can be used to support or sanction the (parties in) government. Citizens employ proxies rooted in attitudes towards domestic politics in their attitudes towards European integration (Anderson, 1998; Duchesne et al., 2013). Moreover, citizens who have more trust in political institutions tend to identify more strongly as European (Verhaegen & Hooghe, 2015). Trust in political institutions could thus moderate as well the relationship between EU-specific vote motives and split-ticket voting.

4. Analyses

Table 2 presents the proportion of the respondents in the PartiRep Election Studies of 2009 and 2014 that split their ticket between regional and EP elections. In both election years, a large majority of citizens voted for the same party in regional and in EP elections.

Even though 18.59 to 28.99 per cent of the respondents split their ticket, it is more likely that one voted for the same party in both elections. It can also be observed that in both election years, Flemish voters were more likely to split their ticket than Walloon voters. Finally, we see that both in Flanders and in Wallonia more respondents split their ticket in 2014 than in 2009. Different vote motives might have inspired voters in 2014 and in 2009. This is in line with our first hypothesis.

In order to test whether split-ticket voting could be explained by different factors in 2014 than in 2009, multivariate logistic regressions will be carried out for both elections, including the same explanatory and control variables. The significance of the explanatory variables will be compared between both models. The analyses are carried out for Wallonia and Flanders separately as each region has a separate party system.

Table 2. Regional-European split-ticket voting in 2009 and 2014 in Flanders and Wallonia. Source: PartiRep Election Study 2009, 2014.

	2009		2014	
	%	N	%	N
Flanders	22.76%	201/883	28.99%	225/776
Wallonia	18.59%	134/721	26.94%	167/620

Note: Percentages of split-ticket voting are presented. This is the proportion of respondents that voted for a different party in the EP elections than in the regional elections.

4.1. Explaining Split-Ticket Voting between Regional and European Levels: Comparing 2009 and 2014 Ballots

The multivariate logistic analyses that include all explanatory and control variables are presented in Table 3.

Similar (coded 0) or dissimilar (coded 1) party choices in regional and European elections as reported by the respondents are used as the dependent variable. These analyses show that not all bivariate relationships are robust when including control variables and alternative explanations. In the 2009 study in the Flemish sample, European identity and attitudes about EU integration show significant coefficients. In 2014, however, there is no significant relationship between European identity or support for EU integration and split-ticket voting in Flanders. Rather, uncertainty (i.e. changing party preference between the 2014 regional elections and the previous elections, and changing party preference between the 2014 regional elections and the first 2014 survey wave) and voting for a specific candidate in EP elections show to be consistent explanations for split-ticket voting in both 2009 and 2014 in Flanders. In the Walloon sample, part of the variation in split-ticket voting in 2009 can be explained by uncertainty of party preference exemplified by intra-campaign vote switching (between the first and the last survey wave of the 2009 Study). Also, respondents who voted for a specific candidate in the 2009 EP elections were more likely to split their ticket. In 2014, the variance in split-ticket voting among Walloon respondents can be explained by both inter-campaign vote switching (between the 2007 and 2009 elections), and by intra-campaign vote switching. Voting for a specific candidate is not significantly related to split-ticket voting in Wallonia in 2014. Finally, voters who considered the economy as the most important issue when voting are not more likely to have split their ticket. All in all, our second set of hypotheses is largely invalidated.

4.2. A Verhofstadt Effect in 2014?

Five major Europarties designated candidates for the European Commission Presidency ahead of the European elections. One of them—the candidate of the ALDE—was the former Belgian Prime Minister, Guy Verhofstadt. A direct effect of his candidacy could be expected in Flanders where voters could directly vote for him, and an indirect effect in Wallonia where only the mechanism of indirect support could be at play through a vote for the MR (Mouvement Réformateur) party. Indeed, in Flanders, many respondents of our pool voted for Open VLD for the European elections even when they voted for a different party in the 2014 regional elections, thereby increasing the declared vote for this party by 5.4 per cent between regional and European elections. Thus, 16 per cent of the N-VA electorate, 11.6 per cent of CD&V voters, 9.8 per cent of Sp.a voters, 12 per cent of the Groen electorate and 13.8 per cent of Vlaams Belang voters at regional elections split their vote, throwing their support at Open VLD at the European level. In Wallonia, the MR records similar results for both elections, respectively 26.7 per cent and

Table 3. Explaining split-ticket voting between Regional and EP Elections in Flanders and Wallonia in 2009 and 2014. Source: PartiRep Election Study 2009 and PartiRep Election Study 2014.

	Model I Flanders 2009	Model II Flanders 2014	Model III Wallonia 2009	Model IV Wallonia 2014
	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Economic vote motive				
Economy/financial crisis most important issue to decide vote	0.030 (0.242)	0.344 (0.256)	0.094 (0.278)	0.748 (0.383)
EU-specific vote motives				
European identity	0.743 (0.274)**	0.309 (0.310)	0.494 (0.329)	0.596 (0.472)
Regional identity	0.360 (0.255)	0.154 (0.284)	0.393 (0.318)	0.204 (0.426)
Attitude about EU integration (higher score is more positive towards further integration)	-0.117 (0.049)*	0.026 (0.050)	0.048 (0.056)	0.010 (0.066)
Alternative explanations				
Change vote between elections	0.898 (0.242)***	0.869 (0.268)**	0.528 (0.282)	1.129 (0.462) *
Change party preference between survey waves ⁺	1.733 (0.246)***	1.362 (0.281)***	1.824 (0.297)***	1.575 (0.432)***
Vote for candidate (vote for list is ref.)	1.429 (0.229)***	0.751 (0.245)**	1.006 (0.346)**	-0.059 (0.340)
Political trust (national institutions)	-0.062 (0.078)	0.019 (0.085)	0.018 (0.095)	0.049 (0.109)
Control variables				
Age	0.002 (0.008)	-0.015 (0.007)*	-0.001 (0.009)	-0.001 (0.011)
Female	-0.245 (0.233)	-0.519 (0.275)	-0.321 (0.279)	0.091 (0.343)
Education (low is ref.)				
Middle	0.372 (0.318)	0.470 (0.325)	0.403 (0.377)	-0.600 (0.485)
High	1.020 (0.341)**	0.418 (0.333)	0.460 (0.379)	0.254 (0.439)
Political interest	0.021 (0.053)	-0.056 (0.059)	-0.024 (0.068)	-0.059 (0.063)
Political knowledge	0.202 (0.085)*	-0.080 (0.441)	-0.053 (0.098)	0.065 (0.607)
Intercept	-3.410 (0.662)***	-1.945 (0.726)	-3.389 (0.713)***	-2.855 (0.908)**
N	661	439	487	326
Pseudo-R ²	23.47%	17.38%	19.32%	19.84%

Note: Logistic regression with split-ticket voting as dependent variable. The results are weighted for age, gender and education level. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. ⁺ In 2009, respondents' vote in the regional elections is compared to their preference for the regional elections in the first wave; in 2014 party preference is not asked for the regional elections in wave 1, so the actual vote in the 2014 regional elections is compared to respondents' preference for the federal elections in wave 1.

27.4 per cent in regional and European ballots. In this last section, we test if the running of former Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt as Spitzenkandidat had an effect on split-ticket voting toward a candidate in 2014.

First, we observe no substantial difference when comparing percentages of respondents who declare to have voted for a specific candidate between Flanders (43.5 per cent) and Wallonia (43.8 per cent). Yet, voters mentioning voting for a specific candidate in EP elections (that is, casting one or multiple preference vote(s) rather than a vote for the entire list) were more likely to split their ticket in Flanders (34.3 per cent) than in Wallonia (24.3 per cent). Taking a closer look at who were the specific candidates the respondents casted their vote for, we observe that in Flanders, Guy Verhofstadt comes first with 32.5 per cent. In Wallonia, Louis Michel gathers 20.3 per cent. The descriptive results for the top three of specific candidates in Flanders and in Wallonia are presented in Table 4.

More importantly, in Flanders, the respondents who declare to have voted for the former Prime Minis-

ter were more inclined to split their ticket between regional and European elections, as 55.8 per cent of those who gave their vote to Verhofstadt in the EP elections did not vote for Open VLD in regional elections. The fact that other popular politicians, such as Louis Michel (MR), Marianne Thyssen (CD&V) or Marie Arena (PS), were less able to attract split-ticket voters is already an indication of what could be called a 'Verhofstadt effect' thus confirming hypotheses 3a and 3b. In sum, it seems that voting in for Verhofstadt EP elections helps to explain split-ticket voting. In the next section we test whether this relationship is robust when including control variables and alternatives explanations.

In order to scrutinize the direct impact of the presence of a 'Spitzenkandidat' on the European list in Flanders, and to test for an indirect effect in Wallonia, we use a multivariate analysis again that combines the economic voting motives, the EU-specific vote motives, and alternative classical explanations. We also add indicators capturing a 'Spitzenkandidat' effect. Again, we use binary regression models to predict split-ticket voting (1) or straight-ticket voting (0). In a first step, we estimate two

Table 4. Top three of specific candidates mentioned by the respondents in Flanders and Wallonia in EP Elections (first mentioned, N=551). Source: PartiRep Election Study 2014.

	Electoral results in 2014		PartiRep 2014 Survey	
	Preference votes ⁺	Percentage of voters	Split-ticket voters (per cent)	N
Flanders				
VERHOFSTADT Guy (Open VLD)	531,030	32.5	55.8	104
THYSSEN Marianne (CD&V)	340,026	15.0	27.1	48
VAN OVERTVELDT Johan (N-VA)	274,444	11.6	5.4	37
Respondents declaring voting for a specific candidate			34.3	320
Wallonia				
MICHEL Louis (MR)	264,550	20.3	25.5	47
ARENA Marie (PS)	186,103	13.9	6.3	32
ROLIN Claude (CDH)	75,521	10.0	21.7	23
Respondents declaring voting for a specific candidate			24.3	231

Note: Percentages of respondents mentioning specific candidates for those who declared a vote for a candidate and percentages of those mentioned one of the top three most-mentioned candidates that are split-ticket voters. ⁺ These data were computed by J. Dodeigne (Dodeigne, 2015).

models, one for each region, which includes a dummy variable voting for Open VLD in EP elections or voting for MR in EP elections. This variable accounts for the fact that a ‘Spitzenkandidat’ effect could have played a role in leading more voters to turn to Open VLD and to its French-speaking counterpart, in order to support the candidacy of Guy Verhofstadt in the race for the Commission Presidency. Indeed, the Belgian electorate was at least—partly—aware of his candidacy to the Presidency of the Commission. In the survey commissioned by the Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists, 71 percent declared to be aware of the candidacy of Guy Verhofstadt when aided to answer the question (Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists, 2014). Voters aware of his candidacy and willing to support it should have logically privileged the national parties that stand for the ALDE—in Flanders, Open VLD and in Wallonia, indirectly through the MR.

Models V and VI (see Table 5) confirm earlier presented results when introducing voting for Open VLD/MR in the models. In 2014, in both regions, neither economic vote motive nor EU-specific vote motives do significantly affect the odds of casting a split-ticket vote between regional and European ballots. The variances in split-ticket voting among respondents are related to both inter-elections vote switching and intra-campaign vote switching. More importantly, in Flanders, once we introduce voting for Open VLD, voting for a specific candidate rather than for a list does not significantly explain the probability of ticket-splitting any more. In other words, split-ticket voting can be significantly explained by voting for Open VLD at the European level. Respondents who voted for Open VLD in EP elections often voted for a different party in Regional elections. In Wallonia, we do not find any trace of an indirect mechanism of support for the candidacy of Guy Verhofstadt as a Spitzenkandidat through a vote for the MR.

In Model VII, we add a dummy variable to account for the declared vote for Guy Verhofstadt (1) or for (an)other candidate(s) (0) in Flanders. This last model hence verifies whether there was a ‘Verhofstadt effect’ on split-ticket voting in Flanders, even when controlling for the other identified motives of split-ticket voting. Declaring to have voted for Guy Verhofstadt is found to be a crucial explanation for split-ticket voting in Flanders in 2014. Also in this case, the effect of voting for a specific candidate in EP elections disappears at the expense of a strong and highly significant effect of voting for Verhofstadt. This result suggests that Flemish citizens who split their ticket did so in part because they specifically wanted to vote for Verhofstadt and possibly support his candidacy as Spitzenkandidat. This supports hypotheses 3a and 3b.

5. Discussion

Due to the differences between the context in which the 2014 and the 2009 EP elections took place, vote motives pertaining to both elections were expected to differ. More precisely, this article argued that European considerations should have mattered more in vote choices in 2014 and that this should be visible through increased levels of split-ticket voting. In the Belgian case, voters casted their vote for regional and EP elections on the same day. Hence, voters generally had the same attitudes and perceptions about the political and social situation when casting their different votes. We therefore tried to explain why voters did vote for a different party in the two ballots under scrutiny: the regional and the European ones. The results of our analyses show that the strength of respondents’ European identity, and their support for EU integration, significantly explain split-ticket voting in the Flemish sample in 2009, but not in the 2014 or in the Walloon samples.

Table 5. ‘Spitzenkandidat Effect’ on Split-Ticket Voting between Regional and EP Elections in Flanders and Wallonia in 2014. Source: PartiRep Election Study 2009 and PartiRep Election Study 2014.

	Model V Flanders 2014	Model VI Wallonia 2014	Model VII Flanders 2014
	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Economic vote motive			
Economy/financial crisis most important issue to decide vote	0.185 (0.261)	0.719 (0.392)	0.196 (0.264)
EU-specific vote motives			
European identity	0.447 (0.314)	0.588 (0.473)	0.367 (0.312)
Regional identity	0.302 (0.297)	0.209 (0.425)	0.393 (0.318)
Attitude about EU integration (higher score is more positive towards further integration)	0.021 (0.052)	0.010 (0.066)	0.035 (0.052)
‘Spitzenkandidat’ effect			
Vote for candidate	0.462 (0.263)	-0.069 (0.341)	0.224 (0.286)
Vote for Open-VLD/MR	1.128 (0.292)***	0.179 (0.371)	
Vote for Verhofstadt			1.306 (0.337)***
Alternative explanations			
Change vote between elections	0.829 (0.274)**	1.118 (0.463)*	0.843 (0.275)**
Change party preference between survey waves ⁺	1.315 (0.289)***	1.594 (0.438)***	1.344 (0.288)***
Political trust (national institutions)	0.039 (0.090)	0.054 (0.110)	0.014 (0.090)
Control variables			
Age	-0.011 (0.008)	-0.001 (0.011)	-0.111 (0.008)
Female	-0.534 (0.285)	0.102 (0.347)	-0.443 (0.282)
Education (low is ref.)			
Middle	0.599 (0.343)	-0.642 (0.493)	0.564 (0.333)
High	0.461 (0.344)	0.224 (0.449)	0.492 (0.340)
Political interest	-0.045 (0.060)	-0.057 (0.062)	-0.048 (0.060)
Political knowledge	-0.101 (0.441)	0.053 (0.609)	-0.013 (0.439)
Intercept	-2.457 (0.772)***	-2.926 (0.930)**	-2.224 (0.762)**
N	439	326	439
Pseudo-R ²	20.50%	19.91%	20.17%

Note: Logistic regression with split-ticket voting as dependent variable. The results are weighted for age, gender and education level. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. ⁺ As in 2014 party preference was not asked for the regional elections in wave 1, the actual vote in the 2014 regional elections is compared to respondents’ preference for the federal elections in wave 1.

Rather, uncertainty about the most favoured party (which is often the result of holding multiple party preferences or of having a weaker party identification) and voting for a specific candidate in EP elections proved to be the most robust explanation for split-ticket voting in both regions of Belgium and in both elections accounted for in this study. Uncertainty appears in line with classical de-alignment-based explanations of ticket-splitting, rather than as a change because of the specific context in which the 2014 EP elections took place. Voting for a specific candidate, also largely corroborates classical explanations of ticket-splitting, especially when considering the increasingly candidate-centred nature of the political system. Also, one could add that the structure of the ballot in Belgium (semi-opened lists), whereby the head of the list is often meant to ‘pull the list’. As a result, to a large extent, logics pertaining to the national political context and party system have prevailed. Yet, emitting a preference vote for one (or several) candidate(s) can be driven by characteristics of the candidate(s) that remain linked to national-level considerations (e.g. when a candidate has had an important role at the na-

tional or sub-national level before), or may be driven by European-level considerations (e.g. in cases when the candidate has a pronounced and visible opinion about EU policies and/or integration). While such differentiation remains difficult to interpret in 2009, the analyses demonstrated that in 2014 a candidate effect could be attributed to the specific presence on the lists of Guy Verhofstadt.

Our data provides mixed evidence for the claim that the 2014 EP elections were more dominated by European vote motives than previous EP elections. Both the financial crisis and the politicization of the EU have seemingly had a very limited effect on vote choices. The introduction of Spitzenkandidaten is, however, a notable exception and does seem to have had a direct effect. When Flemish voters switched to the liberal party for European elections, they were likely to tick the name of Verhofstadt. When voters could only indirectly support Verhofstadt’s candidacy (as in Wallonia), no effect was found. This appears in line with the findings of Hobolt (2014) who observed that in member states which are the home country of one or more of the Spitzenkandidaten, more citizens were aware of

the link between their vote and the selection of a new President of the European Commission. Our research adds to these observations that such a 'Spitzenkandidat effect' has an impact on voting. Moreover, the presence of a direct effect, while an indirect effect seems to be absent, pleads in favour of the idea of direct elections for the President of the European Commission as one reaction to weak interest in EP elections among lay citizens. Furthermore, our research shows how the differentiation between national and European vote motives is increasingly difficult to make. European elections in Flanders have at least to some extent been about a national personality as denounced by the 'democratic deficit' literature (Føllesdal & Hix, 2006), while being at the same time about a major European figure. Critics of the second-order model have maybe been too quick in dismissing its central postulate. In the end, the issue is not so much about whether European vote motives matter in European elections but also about how they may combine with national ones.

The specificities of the Belgian case have hence largely allowed us to reconsider and further test the second-order model in the case of simultaneous elections. According to the Belgian Constitution following the Sixth State Reform, the federal elections should always be organised the same day as the European elections. Since their introduction, the regional elections have also been traditionally organised concomitantly with the European ballot. Although the regions do possess some leeway in adjusting the length of their legislatures and the date of elections, the Belgian case is likely to increasingly provide a prolific field of research for split-ticket voting in the future.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Camille Kelbel

Camille Kelbel is a PhD candidate at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, taking part in the 'PartiRep' Interuniversity Attraction Pole. Prior to joining the ULB, Camille Kelbel was an academic assistant at the College of Europe, Bruges. Her PhD project focuses on candidate selection for European elections. More generally, her research interests lie in EU politics, political parties and elections.



Prof. Dr. Virginie Van Ingelgom

Virginie Van Ingelgom is a Research Associate Professor F.R.S.—FNRS at the Institut de Sciences Politiques Louvain-Europe, Université Catholique de Louvain and an associate research fellow of the Centre for European Studies, Sciences Po Paris. Her research focuses on citizens' reactions and attitudes towards European integration and on EU legitimacy and its politicisation.



Dr. Soetkin Verhaegen

Soetkin Verhaegen is a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Political Science at KU Leuven. Her research focuses on the relationship between European identity and political and social attitudes and behaviour.

Article

Voting at National versus European Elections: An Individual Level Test of the Second Order Paradigm for the 2014 European Parliament Elections

Hajo G. Boomgaarden, David Johann and Sylvia Kritzinger *

Department of Methods in the Social Sciences, University of Vienna, 1010 Vienna, Austria; E-Mails: Hajo.Boomgaarden@univie.ac.at (H.G.B.), david.johann@univie.ac.at (D.J.), sylvia.kritzinger@univie.ac.at (S.K.)

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

The second-order paradigm is the dominant framework for research on electoral behavior in European Parliament (EP) elections. In this study, we assess to what degree voting patterns in the 2014 EP election were characterized by second-orderness. While most studies of second-order voting behavior rely on macro-level accounts or suffer from potentially conflated vote measures, this study relies on panel data from the 2013 national and the 2014 EP election in Austria. We study change patterns in electoral behavior and, more importantly, assess the motives behind differences in vote choices between first- and second-order elections. Overall, the findings point towards a persisting relevance of the second-order framework for explaining voting in the 2014 EP election.

Keywords

EU attitudes; EP election; panel study; second-order election

Issue

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1. Introduction

European Parliament (EP) elections have generally been described as second-order elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980, 1997). Compared to first-order elections - usually national (parliamentary) elections - less is at stake in second-order elections as the composition of the national government is not being determined. Compared to first-order elections, second-order elections are characterized by (e.g., Reif & Schmitt, 1980): (1) lower turnout, (2) higher success rates for fringe and new parties, (3) electoral losses for government parties, (4) a higher percentage of invalid ballots, (5) issues and actors dominating the electoral campaign that are not at stake and do not stand for election, and (6) lower media attention. Classifying EP elections as second-order has prompted extensive academic attention, confirming by and large the assumptions of the

second-order paradigm, ranging from a focus on party campaigns and campaign strategies (e.g., de Vreese, 2009), the coverage of mass media (e.g., Wilke & Reinemann, 2007) to—most importantly—the behavior of voters (e.g., Hobolt, Spoon, & Tilley, 2009; Hix & Marsh, 2007, 2011).

There are good reasons, however, to speculate that the 2014 EP election was different from previous EP elections and therefore does not adhere anymore, or at least to a lesser degree, to the characteristics of a second-order election. First, the election took place during a deep crisis of European integration. As a consequence of the economic and financial crisis starting in 2008, the EU underwent what some called a “Euro crisis” with Greece at its center. Such a crisis of one of the most visible successes of European integration, the common currency, was likely to place the 2014 EP election high on the political and public agenda. Further-

more, for the first time ever, most EP party groups campaigned with a EU wide candidate for the presidency of the Commission, with the race culminating between Junker (Christian Democrats) and Schulz (Social Democrats). These leading candidates had the objective to run a rather European focused campaign and to frequently discuss European issues (e.g., Piedrafita & Renman, 2014).¹ Therefore, it is important to re-evaluate the assumptions generated by the second-order literature for the case of the 2014 EP election (see Schmitt, 2005, p. 669).

This study examines whether voter behavior in the 2014 EP election is in line with assumptions surrounding second-order elections and seeks to answer the question if the 2014 election can (still) be described as a second-order election, despite a very different context to previous EP elections. First, we examine citizens' turnout and voting patterns between first-order national and second-order EP elections. Second, we analyze the motivations for changes in citizens' electoral behavior between national and EP elections, focusing in particular on the less-is-at-stake argument and on varying political involvement among the electorate. Only by uncovering the motivations behind voting patterns can we evaluate to what extent the second-order election paradigm is (still) valid. Unlike previous studies, we draw on a unique online panel survey database of Austrian voters surveyed during both national and EP election periods. This allows us to assess whether citizens indeed behave differently in first- versus second-order elections. By doing so, not only do we obtain a better insight into the behavior of individuals at different types of elections, we are also able to extend the literature on second-order elections.

2. EP Elections as Second-Order

All elections are equal, but some elections are more equal than others, so it appears. When comparing elections at different levels, the yardstick is most commonly the national election, labeled first-order election. Other elections at the local, regional or supranational level are juxtaposed against this yardstick, and referred to as second-order elections (Reif, 1984). The differences between these and first-order elections are said to be wide-ranging: they manifest themselves in the party campaigns, the mass media coverage of and the voters' engagement with the campaigns, as well as in the polling booths. While previous research has dealt with the second-order phenomenon in regard to local or regional elections (e.g., McAllister, 2004; Freire, 2004; Schakel & Jeffery, 2013) in this study the focus is on European elections and campaigns.

In their seminal contribution, Reif and Schmitt

(1980) provide the basic framework for the second-order paradigm of EP elections. Based on the contention that the most important political decisions are made in the national political systems, it is argued that EP elections have to be viewed as second-order to national elections. Reif and Schmitt outline five dimensions that characterize second-order elections, of which the first, the 'less at stake dimension' (p. 9) has received most attention and has provided the central assumptions most often used when studying second-order voting behavior (e.g., Reif, 1984; Schmitt, 2005).² In short, these assumptions refer to patterns in turnout and voting behavior that should be characteristic of EP elections, provided they are real second-order elections. First, because there is less at stake in EP elections and due to a less politicized campaign, it is predicted that turnout will be lower in EP elections compared to the national level. Second, since government parties are in a position in which they may disappoint voters to a greater extent than opposition parties, it is likely that such dissatisfied voters will use the EP election as an easy opportunity to punish government parties. This translates into a higher likelihood of lower support for government parties in EP elections than in the previous national election. Third, it is argued that voters might cast more sincere ballots in elections in which less is at stake, since incentives to vote strategically are lower. Strategically it often makes more sense to vote for a big party since these have a higher likelihood of actually influencing political decisions. This 'voting with the heart' rather than 'voting with the head' phenomenon (Schmitt, 2005, p. 652; van der Eijk, Franklin, & Marsh, 1996) would also translate into big parties losing support in EP elections compared to national elections. A supplementary assumption that follows from this is that new and more extreme parties in particular would do comparatively well at EP elections (Reif, 1984; van der Eijk et al., 1996).³

The three central assumptions have been repeatedly tested and largely confirmed over the past three decades, in particular concerning turnout patterns (e.g. Curtice, 1989; Niedermayer, 1990; Reif, 1984).⁴ In a

² The other dimensions are 'specific arena', 'institutional-procedural', 'campaign' and 'main-arena political change' (Reif & Schmitt, 1980, pp. 10-15). Some of these provide additional impetus to the basic postulates of the 'less at stake' dimension.

³ Another important contention in the literature is that the electoral cycle matters and patterns differ between countries depending on when in the national electoral cycle the EP elections are held. Since this study looks at voting in a single country only, we do not further discuss this issue here.

⁴ A further contention of the second-order paradigm stretches to the wider campaign context. Allegedly, EP elections are characterized by little attention from the mass media and less active party campaigns. Furthermore, EP election campaigns are said to be dominated by national, not European perspec-

¹ See also van der Brug, Gattermann and de Vreese (2016) for the uniqueness of the 2014 EP election.

comprehensive contribution after the first four EP elections, Marsh (1998) finds substantial support for expected vote choice patterns: government parties as well as bigger parties had been losing out in EP elections. Looking at the 2004 EP elections, Schmitt (2005) still finds strong signs for second-order voting throughout Western European countries, less so in the then new member states of Central and Eastern Europe. By and large, and in particular in Western countries, turnout was lower, government parties were losing and small parties were winning in EP elections. In a similar vein, Koepke and Ringe (2006) conclude that the applicability of the second-order framework to the Central and Eastern European countries would be at least questionable. Träger (2015), however, finds that the EP election of 2014 was again characterized by strong indications of second-orderness, with low participation rates, strong 'anti-government swings' and more support for small and new parties across Europe.

Such largely aggregate-level perspectives allow for speculation about individual differences, while empirically testing the possible motivations at the individual-level and gaining insight in differences in voters' behavior at first- and second-order elections is not possible (Schmitt, 2005, is an exception here). Individual-level data are needed to further test the theoretical backgrounds behind the second-order framework (e.g., van Aelst & Lefevere, 2012; see also Giebler & Wagner, 2015, for a more elaborate argumentation).

Only few studies explicitly consider *motivations for turnout differences* between national and EP elections at the individual level. While a vast range of literature deals with explanations of turnout in general terms (see Blais, 2006), a considerable number has specifically focused on turnout at EP elections. As with the general literature, a distinction is made between macro-level systemic factors (such as compulsory voting, weekend voting etc.; see Mattila, 2003) and micro-level motivations. As our analysis is confined to a single country context, macro-level factors are not further discussed here,⁵ except for the second-order framework influencing micro-level motivations. Research on possible individual-level predictors of turning out in EP elections has provided mixed results. It is assumed that citizens' perceptions of the EU polity (for instance trust in the EP or the EU in general) function as explanatory

tives, thus show strong domestication in terms of issues and actors (e.g., Brunsbach, John, & Werner, 2012; Cushion & Thomas, 2015; de Vreese, 2003, 2009; Tenschler & Maier, 2009; Wilke & Reinemann, 2007). Regarding media campaign coverage, it needs to be noted, however, that there are strong cross-national and cross-media differences and that some have identified a steady increase in the visibility of EP elections (e.g., Boomgaarden & de Vreese, 2016). We do not further discuss these issues here.

⁵ See Hobolt et al. (2009) and Söderlund et al. (2011) for studies integrating context and individual factors.

factors for voter turnout. Schmitt and Mannheimer (1991) however only find small effects of EU factors, while Blondel, Sinnott and Svensson (1997) come to the opposite conclusion (see also Flickinger & Studlar, 2007, for macro-level support).

While EU attitudes are one plausible motivation for turnout at EP elections, it has been argued that involvement and information play an important role as well (de Vreese & Tobiasen, 2007; Mattila, 2003). Political interest, for instance, has been shown to consistently affect turnout in general (e.g., Denny & Doyle, 2008) and also in EP elections (van der Eijk & Openhuis, 1990). Söderlund, Wass and Blais (2011) explicitly address the role of political interest in a second-order framework. They argue and demonstrate that, as EP elections are of low salience, political interest plays an even greater role for turnout in EP than in national elections. Our analysis continues along those lines by additionally focusing on attention to the campaign. Even if of low salience generally, individuals' attentiveness to the EP campaign may increase their propensity to cast a vote, simply because they are more aware of what is going on in the campaign. This may in particular be true for the 2014 campaign in which the apparent horse race between the two main candidates may have motivated people to vote.

In this study we address three *motivations for changing voting behavior* between national and EP elections. Two of these are in line with the second-order framework, while the third deviates from this framework. First, as mentioned above, voters may use the EP elections to display their true preferences. Since there is something at stake in national elections, voters are more inclined to vote strategically, that is for bigger parties that are more likely to enter government and influence policy. Voters in these elections thus depart from their preferences and cast a vote for a party that would otherwise not be their first choice. In EP elections, by contrast, as less is at stake, voters are more likely to display their true preference when casting a vote. Vote choice is more expressive; voters tend to 'vote with their hearts' (e.g., Carrubba & Timpone, 2005; Franklin & Wlezien, 1997; Marsh, 1998; Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Prior studies have found some empirical evidence for this assumption on the individual level, while at the same time it also appears that sincere, expressive voting is not the only mechanism at play (Carrubba & Timpone, 2005).

A second motivation (that would lead to a similar outcome as the sincere voting assumption discussed above) is that voters use the EP election to demonstrate discontent with national politics, in particular the national government (Franklin, van der Eijk, & Marsh, 1995; van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996). Since there is apparently little at stake in EP elections, voters may use these elections as a kind of referendum to send signals of dissatisfaction to the national government.

Voters may ‘vote with their boots’ and punish the incumbents without this punishment having much consequence for the composition of the national government, thus being a safe opportunity to send signals. Again, there is limited support for this assumption at the individual-level (e.g., Carrubba & Timpono, 2005).

The third motivation under study here departs from the second-order framework in that it puts voters’ actual perceptions of EU politics and policies center stage. This ‘EU matters’ motivation assumes that voters have knowledge of what is happening at the EU-level and take into account which of the parties would best represent their perceptions of EU politics when casting a vote in EP elections. In this framework we should see that vote change should be a function of voters’ perceptions of and attitudes towards EU politics. Studies of voting behavior at EP elections have shown that, at least under certain circumstances, the EU does indeed matter for voting decisions (Carrubba & Timpono, 2005; Heath, McLean, Taylor, & Curtice, 1999; Hobolt et al. 2009; van Aelst & Lefevere, 2012; Clark & Rohrschneider, 2009; for conflicting evidence see Giebler & Wagner, 2015). As such, EP elections cannot only be considered as second-order elections any longer. While our study does not address the differential strengths of EU attitudes as motivation for voting behavior at different elections, we specifically look at EU attitudes being a motivation to change one’s vote from national to EP elections. We draw on the three assumptions discussed here when formulating our hypotheses.

A major shortcoming of prior studies that focus on electoral behavior at national *and* EP elections is that their results are based first and foremost on potentially incorrect recall questions.⁶ When survey respondents are asked about their electoral behavior for different elections in the same survey, it is highly likely that their responses are biased because respondents tend to harmonize their responses. Our study is different in that it employs panel data in which the same individuals were probed about their electoral behavior right after the respective election took place.

3. Hypotheses

To test whether the individual vote choice at the 2014 EP election differed from the voting behavior of the same individuals at the previous national election in ways that are in line with presumptions from the second order literature, we formulate the following hypotheses. These are drawn from the host of literature reviewed above regarding the patterns of second-order as opposed to first-order election behavior. Since we can only speculate so far about possible changes brought about by the 2014 context, we adhere to for-

mulating assumptions similar to many prior studies, based on observations during past EP elections (e.g., Koepke & Ringe, 2006; Marsh, 1998; Schmitt, 2005). These will form the basis for the subsequent hypotheses regarding individual motivations for the differences in voting behavior. With regard to turnout we expect:

H1: Voters are more likely to abstain at European elections compared to national elections.

Concerning patterns of vote choice we follow prior studies in differentiating between votes for government parties and for bigger parties generally, vis-à-vis votes for opposition parties and for smaller parties. Since the political configuration in Austria in 2014 makes it impossible to distinguish between government and big, or opposition and small parties respectively, we refrain from formulating two different hypotheses here. The two major parties were in a grand coalition, and the smaller parties formed the opposition (as has mostly been the case in post-war Austria).

H2a: Voters are more likely to switch vote from a (large) government party in the national election to a (small) opposition party in the EP election than vice versa.

While the ‘voting with the heart’ thesis would predict vote switching from government to opposition parties, the ‘voting with the boot’ or protest vote thesis would allow for two different patterns which are subject of the following hypothesis. To protest against the government, government supporters at the national election could just simply stay home during the EP election. Therefore we expect:

H2b: Voters of (large) government parties at national elections are more likely to abstain at the European election than voters of (small) opposition parties.

Beyond these comparative aggregate-level hypotheses we consider possible motivations of individual voters that would explain the differences in electoral behavior. Most of the extant individual-level literature on second-order voting focuses on actual vote choice, while we take both, *motivations* for turnout and *motivations* for vote swings into account. Starting with the former we have identified two main factors that may explain turnout differences between national and EP elections. First, EU attitudes are supposed to matter. In line with prior research (Blondel et al., 1997; de Vreese & Tobiasen, 2007; Flickinger & Studlar, 2007) we expect that positive attitudes towards European integration are positively related to turnout at the EP elections.

⁶ However, for an exception see van Aelst and Lefevere (2012).

H3: Positive attitudes towards European integration are positively related to turnout at the EP election.

Also in line with prior research (de Vreese & Tobiasen, 2007; Sönderlund et al., 2011) we expect that involvement matters for turnout at EP elections.

H4: Interest and involvement in politics are positively related to turnout at the EP election.

Our hypotheses of individual level *motivations to change vote choice* relate to the second-order framework in that they address the notions of ‘voting with the heart’ versus ‘voting with the boot’ and furthermore consider whether the ‘EU matters’ for vote switching. First, we assume that dissatisfaction with politics at the level of the nation state would lead voters to switch from voting for the big, governing parties to voting for a smaller, opposition party—they ‘vote with their boots’ by largely drawing on national political considerations.

H5: Dissatisfaction with national politics motivates those who voted for a (large) government party in the national election to vote for a (small) opposition party in the EP election.

An alternative perspective would be that vote switching between national and EP elections is actually an expression of voters’ true preferences. Here we should see that voters’ switching behavior can be explained by their political predispositions—they tend to vote with their heart.

H6: Vote switching between the national and the EP election is motivated by voters’ political predispositions.

Finally, we depart from the second-order framework and examine—in line with earlier studies (Carrubba & Timpone, 2005; van Aelst & Lefevere, 2012)—whether vote switching between national and EP elections can be explained by EU policy perceptions and preferences. Since we study this motive in the context of second-order elections, we primarily focus on EU policy preferences as a motive to switch vote from a bigger government party to a smaller opposition party. We should see dissatisfaction with politics on a European level as a motivator for voters to switch from the government to opposition parties in general terms. The opposition, in particular in the Austrian case of a center grand coalition, is diverse. In this case it is more likely that voters would not vote for any opposition party, but specifically for those opposition parties that take a clear anti-European position—thus we should see those dissatisfied with EU politics to cast a clear ‘EU matters’ vote.

H7a: Dissatisfaction with European politics motivates those who voted for a (large) government party in the national election to vote for a (small) opposition party in the EP election.

H7b: Dissatisfaction with European politics motivates those who voted for a pro-European party in the national election to vote for an anti-European party in the EP election.

4. Data and Method

We test our expectations within Austria, which joined the EU in 1995. While Austrian voters were supportive of joining the EU in a referendum in 1994 (66.6 per cent voted in favor of joining the EU), their overall support of the European integration process dropped substantially soon thereafter. Eurobarometer data reveal that Austrian citizens were and still are hardly convinced to have benefited from EU membership, and support for EU-membership was and still is only slightly higher than in the UK. Unsurprisingly, Austria has always had a number of rather Eurosceptic parties running in EP-elections, some of them being very successful over the course of the years (e.g. List Hans-Peter Martin and FPÖ (Freedom Party), together gained 30.4 per cent of the vote share in the 2009 EP election). Meanwhile, like in most European countries, the mainstream parties can overall be characterized as being pro-European. The two mainstream parties in Austria, the Social Democrats (SPÖ) and the Christian Democratic “Austrian People’s Party” (ÖVP), are also government parties, as they have been in a grand coalition (again) since 2006.

For our analyses, we rely on a unique online panel study within the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES) which collected data before and after the 2013 Austrian national election, as well as after the 2014 EP elections in Austria (Kritzinger et al., 2016). In particular, we use wave 4 of the panel study fielded immediately after the Austrian national election that took place in September 2013, and wave 5 collected in the aftermath of the EP elections in May 2014. 2.456 respondents took part in fourth wave of the online panel in 2013, of which 1.222 could be re-interviewed after the EP elections in 2014. Hence, the *same* respondents were interviewed after two different elections and this avoids the problem of having to rely on recall questions about past turnout behavior and vote choice which have been shown to be plagued by considerable errors (van der Eijk & Niemöller, 2008; Waldahl & Aardal, 2000; Weir, 1975): most importantly, it appears likely that responses with regard to two different elections taken in the same survey influence each other. In other words, responses about electoral behavior at t-1 that are provided at t (where t could be either the national, first-order or the second-order EP

election and t-1 the respective opposite) might be faulty because respondents incorrectly remember their voting behavior or because they reflect current preferences at t. Individual differences identified on the basis of such data may therefore be rather hypothetical and hardly reflective of differences in real preferences at the two time points (Marsh & Mikhaylov, 2008; van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996).

We used respondents' electoral behaviors in 2013 and 2014 to construct our various dependent variables on which the outlined individual motivations on changes in electoral behavior between first- and second-order elections were then tested. Concerning to turnout we came up with four categories of voters, two of them indicating change: (1) respondents who abstained from both elections; (2) respondents who participated only in the national election; (3) respondents that turned out only in EP elections; and (4) those respondents that participated both in the national and the EP elections.

With regard to vote choice, we also constructed several categories. First, we examined which party the respondent voted for in the national election and then created several outcome variables for 2014. Voters that took part in the EP elections could switch from (1) government parties in national elections to opposition parties in EP elections or from (2) opposition parties to government parties. The last two categories we coded were (3) respondents switching from pro-EU parties in national elections to Eurosceptic parties in EP elections and (4) respondents switching from Anti-EU parties in national elections to Pro-EU parties in EP elections. It should be noted that these categories are not exclusive, in that for instance a pro-EU party could also be a government party (see the notes below Table 2 for the concrete coding of the various parties).

Turning to the main independent variables, we examine four types of factors: satisfaction with national politics, satisfaction with European politics, political involvement and general political predispositions. First, to evaluate citizens' levels of satisfaction with the national political system in general and politics in particular we use three variables. The first one captures respondents' levels of satisfaction with democracy in Austria, the second citizens' satisfaction with the current Austrian government, and for the third, we use respondents' perception of the economic development in Austria over the last 12 months. Satisfaction with European politics is reflected in four items in total. Parallel to the national level, respondents reported their satisfaction with EU democracy, and additionally, we include respondents' satisfaction with political decisions at the EU level. We furthermore probed a general assessment of EU integration commonly used in EU public opinion studies (European integration should go further or has already gone too far) and, given the crisis of European integration in 2014, we also used a

question on EU solidarity ("In times of crisis Austria should financially support EU member states that suffer from economic and financial distress").

For the turnout model, we captured political involvement using questions regarding respondents' attentiveness towards both the national and the EP election campaign. Furthermore, for all our models we rely on a traditional measure of political interest as an indicator for involvement. Finally, our measure of political predisposition is limited to ideological self-placement on a left-right scale and to the squared term of this measure to consider differential behavior of the ideological extremes. Eventually, we included a set of control variables, such as education, age and gender. While for our turnout hypotheses we run a multinomial logit model (in line with current standards we report marginal effects, computed according to the "observed-value-approach", Hanmer & Kalkan, 2013), for the vote choice models we run several binary logit models.

5. Results

Addressing our first set of hypotheses, we first provide some descriptive results on turnout and voting behavior differences at the aggregate-level between the national and the EP election. Specifically, we examine whether and to what extent individuals are more likely to turn out at national elections and are more prone to vote for small and opposition parties in EP elections. These results confirm our expectations based on the second-order framework to some degree (see Figure 1). Concerning turnout, we find that 24 per cent of the respondents voted in the national but not the EP election, while only less than two per cent did the reverse (differences significant at $p < .001$). We thus find clear indications of second-orderness of EP elections when it comes to turnout, supporting H1. When considering vote switching from government to opposition parties and vice versa, the picture is also quite clear, but somewhat less pronounced. Of those who voted for a government party at the national election, some 18 per cent switched to voting for an opposition party in the EP election, while less than ten per cent of those who cast a national election vote for an opposition party switched to a government party (difference significant at $p < .001$). This provides support for the second-order framework as expected in H2a.

The expectation, however, that those who voted for a government party at the national election were more likely to abstain in the EP election (H2b) was not confirmed. Taking as a baseline all those who cast a vote in the national election, only some ten per cent of the initial government voters, but 18 per cent of the opposition voters did not turn out at the EP election (difference significant at $p < .001$). Voters did not punish government parties more than opposition parties by

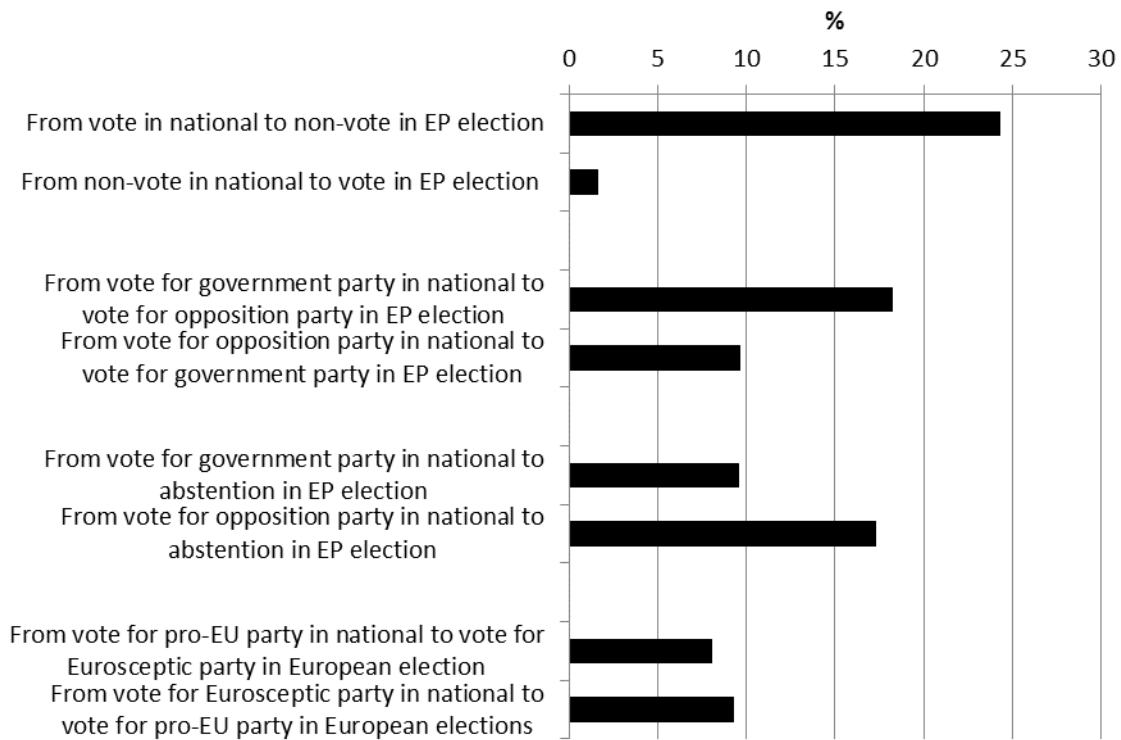


Figure 1. Aggregate patterns of changes in voting behavior.

not turning out, but rather the reverse. Finally, while not specifically hypothesized, we find no aggregate-level evidence of an anti-EU party swing at the European election. Of all respondents who cast vote in both elections, only some eight per cent switched from a pro-EU party vote in the national election to a Eurosceptic party vote in the EP election, and another nine percent did the reverse (difference non-significant).

In a second step, we test the motives for different behaviors. The first set of analyses relates to turnout patterns between first- and second-order elections. In these explanatory models of turnout, we consider factors relating to involvement in politics and EU attitudes. We present the average marginal effects of these factors based on our MNL model in Table 1.⁷ Starting with EU attitudes, the results show that retrospective satisfaction with EU decisions is positively related to turnout in both national *and* EP elections. Those few who only turned out at EP elections did not do so in relation to their EU attitudes. With regard to the political involvement variables, political interest is not related to turnout, and it is only negatively related to no turnout in both elections. Meanwhile, attention to the EP campaign is positively related to voting in both the national and the EP election and negatively to turnout in the general election only. While not explicitly hypothesized, we also find that it is in particular citizens placing themselves in the middle of the left-right

scale that were more likely to turn out only in the general election, while citizens placing themselves at the edges of the left-right scale are more likely to turn out in both elections.⁸

Overall, we find some support for the assumption that EU attitudes are a motivation for turning out at EP elections (H3). Although considering the number of EU attitude variables employed in our model, it is striking to see that only very few of those factors actually matter. Nonetheless, it is comforting to see that none of our EU attitude variables are related to turnout at national elections only. Turnout cannot be explained by political interest. However, EP campaign attention is a strong positive predictor of turnout. We obtain rather mixed results for H4.

The second set of explanatory models considers changes in vote choice between the national and the EP election for different types of parties (Table 2). In line with the second-order framework, we focus on political predispositions, national protest motives, and, additionally, on EU attitudes. The first model, explaining vote switching from a (large) government party in the national to a (small) opposition party in the EP election, is in line with our expectation formulated in H5. Those who are discontent with the national government are more likely to switch from a government vote in the national to an opposition vote in the EP election. This we

⁷ See Table A3 in the Appendix for logit coefficients.

⁸ This interpretation is based on illustrations that are available on request.

Table 1. Average marginal effects.

	Turnout in No Election	Turnout Only in General Election	Turnout Only in EP Election	Turnout in Both Elections
Age 16 to 29	0.03 (0.03)	0.08# (0.05)	0.04 (0.03)	-0.15** (0.06)
Age 30 to 44	0.02 (0.03)	0.07 (0.04)	0.04# (0.02)	-0.13** (0.04)
Age 45 to 59	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.08# (0.04)
Men	0.01 (0.02)	-0.06* (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.06* (0.03)
Education (Matura)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.06# (0.03)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.10** (0.03)
Interest in politics	-0.04* (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.03 (0.04)
Satisfaction with democracy AT	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.01)	0.03 (0.03)
Satisfaction with democracy EU	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)	0.01 (0.01)	0.08# (0.04)
Satisfaction with government AT	0.01 (0.03)	0.06 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.05 (0.05)
Satisfaction with decisions of EU (past 12 month)	-0.08# (0.04)	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.13* (0.05)
Assessment of European integration	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)
AT should support other EU members	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Changes in Economic Situation AT (past 12 month)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.02* (0.01)	-0.00 (0.02)
Attentiveness to general election campaign	-0.03# (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.04)
Attentiveness to EP election campaign	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.18*** (0.03)	0.01 (0.01)	0.20*** (0.03)

Note: Delta-method standard errors in parentheses; # $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; See Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix for the variable coding; See Table A3 in the Appendix for logit coefficients.

take as an indication for a ‘vote with the boot’ in EP elections, much in line with the second-order framework. Neither ideological self-placement (predisposition), nor EU attitudes explain switching behavior. Although further specifications of vote switching shown in model three do provide a somewhat different picture. Changing votes from a pro-EU party in the national election to a Eurosceptic party is clearly influenced by EU attitudes. Dissatisfaction with EU decisions and negative assessments of EU integration explain this kind of switching behavior. Ideological predispositions and protest motives do not play a role here, giving a clear indication of an ‘EU matters’ framework (H7b). In sum, we identify protest motives as drivers of the typically postulated anti-government swing in EP elections. It is, however, important to specify vote switching behavior between certain types of parties in order to get at EU driven motives for differences in vote choice. It appears relevant to further specify the kind of party voters turn to when turning their back on the party they voted for in the national election.

Concerning vote switching, political predispositions and EU attitudes act as opposing drivers of the second-

order framework (second and fourth model). Those at the ideological center with rather positive EU attitudes are more likely to switch from voting for an opposition or Eurosceptic party in the national, to a government party or a pro-EU party in the EP elections. With regard to H6, we find that political predispositions do not influence vote switches as predicted by the second-order framework, but rather in the opposite direction. Of the control variables, only one consistent finding is noteworthy. It is in particularly the young that tend to switch votes to (smaller) Eurosceptic opposition parties. Overall the models perform quite well, with R-Square values between .23 and .56.

In sum, we find only partial evidence for our hypotheses in the data. Table 3 summarizes the findings presented above. As shown, slightly more than half our expectations, which were formulated in line with the second-order literature, found support, while we find only weak evidence in support of, or had to reject the other hypotheses. This suggests that the second-order phenomenon might at least not apply similarly in all cases, and that individual-level data are useful to specify and thoroughly investigate general assumptions.

Table 2. Binary logit models explaining patterns in vote choice.

	Gov. to Opp.	Opp. to Gov.¹	Pro-EU to Anti-EU²	Anti-EU to Pro-EU
Age 16 to 29	1.62** (0.60)	-0.58 (0.63)	1.35* (0.57)	1.62 (0.99)
Age 30 to 44	0.84 (0.54)	0.10 (0.50)	1.14* (0.50)	0.38 (0.64)
Age 45 to 59	0.50 (0.43)	0.26 (0.47)	0.41 (0.45)	0.12 (0.59)
Men	-0.49 (0.36)	-0.58# (0.35)	0.26 (0.35)	0.12 (0.48)
Education (Matura)	-0.24 (0.38)	0.51 (0.39)	-0.73* (0.36)	1.33** (0.47)
Interest in politics	-0.29 (0.40)	0.45 (0.43)	0.09 (0.41)	-0.70 (0.52)
Left-right	2.37 (2.92)	8.67* (3.69)	-0.68 (2.74)	11.05* (4.57)
Left-right ²	-2.91 (3.32)	-6.99# (3.70)	0.41 (3.20)	-14.06** (4.84)
Satisfaction with democracy AT	0.59 (0.46)	0.53 (0.38)	-0.05 (0.38)	-0.38 (0.52)
Satisfaction with democracy EU	-0.16 (0.43)	1.37** (0.42)	-0.43 (0.40)	1.02 (0.65)
Satisfaction with government AT	-1.45** (0.51)	0.38 (0.48)	-1.05 (0.65)	-1.66# (0.92)
Satisfaction with decisions of EU (past 12 month)	-0.40 (0.45)	0.30 (0.40)	-0.85# (0.45)	1.93* (0.85)
Assessment of European integration	-0.05 (0.08)	0.04 (0.07)	-0.17* (0.07)	0.39*** (0.09)
AT should support other EU members	-0.13 (0.21)	0.22 (0.20)	-0.09 (0.19)	-0.03 (0.26)
Changes in Economic Situation AT (past 12 month)	-0.24 (0.22)	-0.06 (0.21)	-0.30 (0.21)	0.12 (0.35)
Constant	-1.23 (0.92)	-5.93*** (1.18)	-0.84 (0.85)	-4.44** (1.56)
<i>N</i>	223	407	394	231
Cragg-Uhler R ²	0.23	0.26	0.24	0.56

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; # $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; ¹ *Government parties* = SPÖ, ÖVP; *Opposition parties* = FPÖ, Greens, NEOS; ² *Pro-EU parties* = SPÖ, ÖVP, Greens, NEOS, Piraten; *Anti-EU parties* = FPÖ, BZÖ, Europa Anders, REKOS, EUStop; See Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix for the variable coding.

Table 3. Electoral behavior at EP election compared to national election: Hypotheses.

Turnout	Abstention more likely in EP elections	H1	✓
	...EU support increases turnout at EP elections	H3	✓
	...interest and involvement increases turnout at EP elections	H4	≈
	Abstention more likely amongst voters of (large) government parties	H2b	×
Vote Change	Vote switch from (large) government party to (small) opposition party	H2a	✓
	...increases with dissatisfaction with national politics	H5	✓
	...increases with dissatisfaction with European politics	H7a	×
	...is based on ideological predispositions	H6	×
	Vote switch from pro-European party to Eurosceptic party increases with dissatisfaction with European politics	H7b	✓

6. Discussion

This study set out to test the second order elections framework (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) in the context of the most recent 2014 EP election in Austria. The different

context of this election gave rise to speculations to what degree the second-order framework would still apply. Notably, and in addition to considering whether voting patterns would be in line with the second-order framework, our study addresses the motivation for an

individual's differential voting behavior at national versus EP elections. By and large, we still find indications of the second-order framework regarding the 2014 EP elections. On the aggregate-level, we indeed see that citizens were less inclined to turn out at the EP election than at the national election, and that there is a tendency towards an anti-government swing (Marsh, 1998). Thus, our findings confirm the basic assumptions of the second-order framework, namely that people defect and that they rather vote for (smaller) opposition parties than for the (bigger) government parties. These aggregate-level findings are in line with Träger (2015) who provides evidence across EU member states that points into a similar direction for the 2014 election (see also Freire & Pereira, 2015, for the Portuguese case).

In a second step, we consider whether individuals' motivations for second-order voting are also in line with the assumptions from the general framework. We find that to be the case in particular for vote switching from government to opposition parties, which appears to be strongly driven by discontent with the national government. It is therefore not the case that voters refrain from strategic votes for big parties and rather 'go with their hearts' along their political predispositions, but rather that small opposition parties win, because people 'vote with their boots', as they want to punish the incumbent (e.g. van der Eijk et al., 1996). Only further specifications of the vote switch between the national and EP election give some indication for an 'EU matters' framework on the one hand, and for a 'voting with the heart' on the other. When considering vote switches from rather pro-EU or government parties in national elections to anti-EU or populist parties in the EP elections, we see a clear influence of EU attitudes as a motivation. Furthermore, and rather to our surprise, political predispositions in the form of ideology mattered only for vote switches that were in contrast to what the second-order framework would postulate. In sum, when considering the general assumptions of the second-order framework, we only find the motive of protest to stand out for vote switching.

Concerning turnout patterns, we see a role of both, political involvement and EU attitudes, with those paying attention to politics and those with positive EU attitudes being more likely to turn out at EP elections, or less likely to abstain after having voted in national elections. Involvement seems to play a considerable role as well. This is somewhat in line with Söderlund et al. (2011) who suggest a strong role for political involvement in explaining second-order election turnout. Concerning both turnout and vote choice patterns, we see that further specifying the basic postulates of the second-order framework to certain parties was important for finding at least some support for an 'EU matters' framework. In sum, we find indications of second-order voting and these are driven by political involvement

regarding turnout, and by protest regarding vote switches. Our results give little reason to doubt that the second-order framework persisted to be applicable to the 2014 EP election, at least in Austria.

A real asset of our study is the database it draws upon. Using survey responses from a panel in which the same individuals were probed directly following the national and the EP election is a clear improvement compared to the designs of many prior studies that relied on either macro-level analysis or hypothetical survey questions regarding vote choice in a far-away election. While Austria is a good case to study the second-order framework, being a rather typical European multiparty system, one problem remains. Austria was ruled by a grand coalition comprised of the country's two major parties in 2014 when the EP election was held. Therefore, our study of the second-order framework was not able to distinguish between government *and* large parties on the one hand, and opposition *and* small parties on the other. Our analysis of vote choice is a combination of both, and we are thus not able to see whether large vs. small party voting would be motivated by something else than protest.

Furthermore, Marsh (1998) has shown that second-order voting patterns were more pronounced in countries in which government alternation was the norm, rather than the exception. Austria, however, is characterized by strong stability in terms of government. This may be an explanation why the patterns we identified were present, but not dramatic. One can speculate that the findings would be more pronounced in other countries where governments are more likely to change from one national election to the next. Another point worthy of stressing here is that our study explicitly aimed at studying patterns of *changes* in voting behavior between national and EP elections and the motivations for such changes. Therefore, we do not attempt to answer the question whether EU attitudes were more important as a predictor of vote choice for certain parties at EP elections compared to national elections, but merely whether they mattered for changing the vote. Extensions of our study to other times and contexts should make sure that identical vote choice models can be built to address this question.

A final limitation relates to the fact that we could not empirically address the question whether the 2014 EP election was *more or less* second-order compared to previous elections. Overall, the findings are in line with expectations derived from the framework, and therefore we conclude that the Austrian EP election 2014 still had clear signs of second-orderness despite an economic crisis at center stage and a strongly personalized campaign.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Dr. Hajo Boomgaarden

Hajo Boomgaarden is Professor of Methods in the Social Sciences with a focus on Text Analysis at the University of Vienna He held positions as Assistant and Associate Professor for Political Communication at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research and the Department of Communication at the University of Amsterdam. His research focuses broadly on political communication, with an emphasis on media and European integration, media and populist, extreme right parties, election campaigns and advancements of computerized methods of text analysis with multimedia analysis.



Dr. David Johann

David Johann is Senior Research Associate in the Department of Methods in the Social Sciences at the University of Vienna and a core team member of the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES). In addition, he is Post-Doctoral Research Associate at the German Centre for Research on Higher Education and Science Studies (DZHW). David Johann completed his PhD in Political Science at the University of Vienna.



Dr. Sylvia Kritzinger

Sylvia Kritzinger is Professor and Head of the Department of Methods in the Social Sciences at the University of Vienna. She obtained her PhD in Political Science at the University of Vienna and then held post-doc and visiting positions at Trinity College Dublin, Institute for Advanced Studies and Vienna University. Her research focuses on political behavior and electoral research, democratic representation and political participation, and quantitative methods in the social sciences. She is one of the principal investigators of the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES) being responsible for the Demand Side.

Appendix
Table A1. Dependent variables descriptives.

Dependent Variables	n	Scale	%
Turnout ¹	1218	1	7.64
		2	24.30
		3	1.64
		4	66.42
Vote Choice: ² Opposition to Government	479	0	86.43
		1	13.57
Vote Choice: Government to Opposition	272	0	74.26
		1	25.74
Vote Choice: Pro-EU to Anti-EU	475	0	87.37
		1	12.63
Vote Choice: Anti-EU to Pro-EU	269	0	74.35
		1	25.65

Note: ¹Turnout: 1=abstaining from both elections (n=93); 2=participating only in the national election (n=296); 3=participating only in EP elections (n=20); 4=participating both in the national and the EP elections (n=809); ²For all vote choice variables: 0=staying with the same party as in the national election; 1=switching to a different party.

Table A2. Independent variables descriptives.

Independent variables	n	mean	SD	min	max
Age 16 to 29	1222	0.16	0.37	0	1
Age 30 to 44	1222	0.29	0.45	0	1
Age 45 to 59	1222	0.34	0.47	0	1
Men	1222	0.49	0.50	0	1
Education (Matura)	1214	0.50	0.50	0	1
Interest in politics	1216	0.64	0.48	0	1
Left-right	1075	0.48	0.21	0	1
Left-right ²	1075	0.27	0.21	0	1
Satisfaction with democracy AT	1187	0.56	0.50	0	1
Satisfaction with democracy EU	1155	0.38	0.49	0	1
Satisfaction with government AT	1181	0.14	0.35	0	1
Satisfaction with decisions of EU (past 12 month)	1123	0.25	0.43	0	1
Assessment of European integration	1141	4.15	3.01	0	10
AT should support other EU members	1189	-0.42	1.12	-2	2
Changes in Economic Situation AT (past 12 month)	1197	-0.59	0.92	-2	2
Attentiveness to general election campaign	1018	0.59	0.49	0	1
Attentiveness to EP election campaign	1220	0.50	0.50	0	1

Note: The exact question wording for all variables can be found in the AUTNES codebook on www.autnes.at

Table A3. Multinomial logit model explaining turnout (Baseline category: Turnout in No Election).

	Turnout Only in General Election	Turnout Only in EP Election	Turnout in Both Elections
Age 16 to 29	-0.15 (0.73)	1.19 (1.45)	-0.97 (0.70)
Age 30 to 44	-0.06 (0.58)	1.51 (1.23)	-0.71 (0.54)
Age 45 to 59	-0.40 (0.55)	0.50 (1.21)	-0.75 (0.51)
Men	-0.46 (0.36)	-0.47 (0.65)	0.01 (0.34)
Education (Matura)	0.43 (0.40)	0.63 (0.68)	0.98** (0.38)
Interest in politics	0.89* (0.44)	0.34 (0.78)	0.84* (0.41)
Left-right	1.29 (3.41)	-1.62 (5.43)	-3.66 (3.11)
Left-right ²	-0.83 (3.03)	-0.60 (5.65)	3.48 (2.77)
Satisfaction with democracy AT	0.29 (0.40)	0.54 (0.74)	0.42 (0.38)
Satisfaction with democracy EU	0.42 (0.56)	1.10 (0.86)	0.86 (0.53)
Satisfaction with government AT	0.20 (0.65)	-0.82 (1.26)	-0.24 (0.63)
Satisfaction with decisions of EU (past 12 month)	1.17 (0.84)	0.66 (1.18)	1.68* (0.81)
Assessment of European integration	0.00 (0.08)	0.10 (0.13)	0.03 (0.08)
AT should support other EU members	-0.05 (0.21)	0.06 (0.35)	0.04 (0.19)
Changes in Economic Situation AT (past 12 month)	-0.14 (0.23)	-1.11* (0.46)	-0.22 (0.21)
Attentiveness to general election campaign	0.78# (0.44)	0.23 (0.77)	0.65 (0.41)
Attentiveness to EP election campaign	-0.60 (0.43)	0.78 (0.72)	0.86* (0.39)
Constant	-0.09 (1.16)	-3.53# (1.98)	1.39 (1.07)
<i>N</i>	763		
Cragg-Uhler R ²	0.28		

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; # $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Article

Context Matters: Economic Voting in the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament Elections

Martin Okolikj^{1,*} and Stephen Quinlan²

¹School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin, Dublin 4, Ireland;
E-Mail: martin.okolikj@ucdconnect.ie

²GESIS Leibniz Institute, 68159 Mannheim, Germany; E-Mail: stephen.quinlan@gesis.org

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

Using the 2009 and 2014 European Election Studies (EES), we explore the effect of the economy on the vote in the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections. The paper demonstrates that the economy did influence voters in both contests. However, its impact was heterogeneous across the two elections and between countries. While assessments of the economy directly motivated voters in 2009 by 2014 economic appraisals were conditioned by how much responsibility voters felt the national government had for the state of the economy, implying a shift in calculus between the two elections. The analysis suggests that voters in 2009 were simply reacting to the economic tsunami that was the Global Financial Crisis, with motivations primarily driven by the unfavourable economic conditions countries faced. But in 2014, evaluations were conditioned by judgments about responsibility for the economy, suggesting a more conscious holding to account of the government. Our paper also reveals cross-country differences in the influence of the economy on vote. Attribution of responsibility and economic evaluations had a more potent impact on support for the government in bailout countries compared to non-bailout countries in 2014. Our findings demonstrate the importance of economy on vote in EP elections but also highlight how its impact on vote can vary based on context.

Keywords

bailout; economic voting; European elections; global financial crisis; perceptions of economic responsibility

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1. Introduction

Between 2008 and 2014 the advanced industrial world faced its greatest economic challenge since the Great Depression of the late 1920s. The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) saw unemployment across the European Union (EU) rise to unprecedented levels, prolonged periods of negative economic growth, a series of banks come close to collapse forcing national and EU institutions to step in and preserve them, national deficits spiral, and the true indebtedness of many EU member states become evident. Such were the scale of eco-

nomie problems that serious questions were raised regarding the ability of the Euro currency to survive (e.g. Eichengreen, 2013; Hotten, 2011). Eight member states (Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, Romania and Spain) were forced to seek so-called ‘bailouts’ between 2008 and 2013, where the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the EU provided finances to these countries to enable them to keep their ships of state afloat. Support came with the proviso that these countries would implement a series of austere economic measures, including salary cuts and reduced public services. Austerity became the economic

orthodoxy of most member states with the GFC also having a number of political repercussions including the ejection from office of many governments in power at the time the GFC hit (LeDuc & Pammett, 2013), the development of new anti-establishment political movements across Europe, and a dampening of enthusiasm towards the EU (Treib, 2014). Taken together, all of this ensured the economy has been the dominant preoccupation of both citizens and governments alike over the past eight years and in this context, it is reasonable to assume economics has been a key issue, if not the key issue, on voters' minds as they went to the ballot box during this period.

Previous studies have shown the potency of the economy on the vote (e.g. Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2014; Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck & Paldam, 2000; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2013). During economic crises, the economy becomes even more salient (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2014; Singer, 2011), as the media gives greater coverage to the issue (Soroka, 2006). This is evidenced by the fact economics were front and centre in the recent national elections of countries adversely affected by the GFC (e.g. Costa-Lobo, 2013; Fraile & Lewis-Beck, 2013; Marsh & Mikhailov, 2014; Nezi, 2012; Nezi & Katsanidou, 2014).

Economics have also been shown to shape attitudes towards European integration (e.g. Gabel, 1998; Tucker, Pacek, & Berinsky, 2002) and preferences in EU referendums (e.g. Doyle & Fidrmuc, 2006; Elkind, Quinlan, & Sinnott, 2015). However, its influence on vote choice in European Parliament elections has been explored much less. Traditionally, EP elections have been considered 'second-order', with voter behaviour conditioned by attitudes to the incumbent government (e.g. Hix & Marsh, 2011; Marsh, 1998; Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015). More recently, there has been an appreciation that other reasons also influence voters in EP contests (e.g. de Vries, van der Brug, van Egmond, & van der Eijk, 2011; Hobolt & Spoon, 2012). Our claim is that economics are another crucial component, especially in light of the Global Financial Crisis. Therefore, our paper focuses on how the economy motivated vote choice in the 2009 and 2014 European elections.

There has never been a more apt time to explore the motivations underlying citizen behaviour in EP elections given the increasing powers of the European Parliament (Hix, 2013; Hobolt, 2014). EP elections are among the few means citizens have to pass judgment on the EU and thus, exploring what motivates voters in these contests is valuable. Studying behaviour in European elections is all the more interesting considering the 2014 elections marked an attempt by the EU to make European elections "different" from previous EP contests by introducing *spitzenkandidaten*, where parties at the European level proposed rival candidates for the Presidency of the European Commission. It was hoped by offering voters the opportunity of voting for

an executive office and providing a link between voter preferences and selection of the Commission might create more interest in the elections and add a greater 'European' dimension to contests that have been classically characterised as 'second-order' (Hobolt, 2014). However, if vote choice is motivated by attitudes to the national economy as we suspect, this would undermine the idea that European elections were anything but elections where voters were motivated by domestic matters. Accordingly, assessing the influence of the national economy on vote is relevant. Additionally, few studies of EP elections have focused on the link between economics and vote (for an exception see Tilley, Garry, & Bold, 2008) and those that have done have done so through the prism of the 'second-order' model and in periods of general economic calm. But the 2009 and 2014 contests were held in the midst and aftermath of the Crisis. Couple this with the prominent role European institutions have played in shaping member states responses to the GFC, there is merit in re-assessing its impact in these circumstances.

We develop a set of expectations about how the economy influenced vote choice in the 2009 and 2014 EP elections. In line with previous scholarship which has highlighted the importance of context (e.g. Anderson, 2000; Powell Jnr. & Whitten, 1993; Whitten & Palmer, 1999), we argue the impact of economy on vote is heterogeneous across both elections and countries. We expect that in 2009 economic perceptions directly influenced vote as the poll took place as the GFC was taking root and the effects were only becoming obvious. It also offered the first opportunity for most European citizens to have their say at the ballot box in a national contest, and thus a direct link is anticipated. By 2014, we expect the economy still influences vote but voter calculus might have shifted. We suggest voters' economic assessments will be conditioned by how much responsibility for economic performance they attribute to the national government. Building on a large literature that shows voter ascriptions of responsibility matter (e.g. de Vries, Edwards, & Tilman, 2011; Hellwig & Coffey, 2011; Marsh & Tilley, 2009; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011), we expect this change of calculus to be driven by a mixture of factors including that governments in power at the time of the GFC hit had been dismissed in many countries (LeDuc & Pammett, 2013), the initial shock of the GFC had dissipated with voters now well accustomed to the economic realities post-crisis, and voters by this point were now adjudicating on their government's response to the economic crisis, as much as responding to the economic context themselves. Thus, we expect the more a government is perceived to be responsible for economic performance, the stronger economic voting will be.

Our third expectation relates exclusively to the 2014 elections. We posit the impact of the economy on the vote might vary between countries based on whether a state received external financial aid or not in

the preceding six years. The reasoning is simple—bailout and non-bailout countries had different economic experiences with the crisis more pronounced in the former compared with the latter, with ‘bailout states’ having been more constrained as they were subject to scrutiny from external institutions. Consequently, we suggest the impact of economics on vote in 2014 will be more potent in countries that received a bailout.

Using a series of multivariate models based on data from the 2009 and 2014 European Election Study (EES), our expectations are largely borne out. Our analysis advances our understanding of economic voting and European elections in numerous ways. First, we demonstrate that during the economic crisis and its aftermath, economic perceptions played an important role in determining vote in the European Elections, challenging previous research suggesting economic voting in EP contests were minimal (Tilley et al., 2008). Second, we show economic perceptions influence on vote in EP elections are conditional on context, with perceptions being a direct motivator of vote choice in 2009 but economic assessments impact on vote conditioned by ascriptions of responsibility in 2014. This highlights the extent to which economic voting, while robust and clearly evident, is conditioned by context. Third, the idea that the 2014 EP elections were any different from past European elections is severely undermined. Clearly, EP elections retain a distinct and strong national flavour.

We structure our article as follows: we begin by reviewing the economic voting literature, defining our conception of economic voting, and then developing three hypotheses to test its impact on vote in the 2009 and 2014 EP elections. In section 3, we describe our research strategy and data. Section 4 details our empirical results while section 5 provides a summary of our results and their implications.

2. Theory

2.1. *Defining the Mechanisms of Economic Voting in EP Elections*

“It’s the economy, stupid!”—the phrase coined by Bill Clinton’s campaign team during his run for the American Presidency in 1992 stresses the importance political campaigns credit to the economy’s impact on voters. And they do not appear to be wrong for the economy has been shown to influence vote time and again cross-nationally (e.g. Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2013; Lewis-Beck & Paldam, 2000; Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, & Elias, 2008; Singer, 2011). Economic voting comes in three forms: valence, positional, and patrimonial (Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, & Foucault, 2013). Traditionally, the valence model has gained most attention and is based on the premise that when voters consider the economy to be doing well, they are more likely to vote for the government, and conversely, when it is

perceived to be underperforming, they are more likely to vote against them. This reward-punishment axiom has led Anderson (2007, p. 277) to note that “given citizens limited willingness and capacity to process complex information about politics, rewards and punishment should most easily be detectable with regard to the performance of the economy—after all, the economy is perhaps the most perennially talked-about issue”. The economy is especially likely to be salient during an economic crisis (Dassonneville & Lewis-Beck, 2014; Singer, 2011). If we couple this with the fact that ideologically motivated voting has been declining, fewer citizens now have a predisposition to vote for a particular party (e.g. Dalton, 2006), and valence issues are more prominent than ever (e.g. Clarke, Sanders, Stewart, & Whiteley, 2009), we expect the economy will impact vote.

While an abundance of literature suggests a strong link between economy and vote, critics argue partisan bias heavily distorts voters’ economic perceptions. In the words of Bartels (2002, p.138) “partisan loyalties have pervasive effects on perceptions of the political world”. Thus, some scholars (e.g. Evans & Anderson, 2006; Wlezien, Franklin, & Twiggs, 1997) have contended political predispositions contaminate attitudes towards the economy and that economic assessments have no independent effect of their own. Assertions of endogeneity have been met with vigorous counter-claims that even when it can be fully teased out (for example using panel data and an instrumental variable approach), there is persuasive evidence to showing economics have a direct effect on vote, and if anything, cross-sectional analysis may suppress the true impact of economic voting (e.g. Fraile & Lewis-Beck, 2014; Lewis-Beck, Nadeau, & Elias, 2008). Our room for manoeuvre in this analysis is limited as we only have access to cross-sectional data. However, we are buoyed by scholarship that shows even when endogeneity concerns can be conclusively addressed, the strong impact of economy on vote persists. As means of allaying concerns to the extent we can, we do control for partisanship in our models and do draw inferences across two cross-sectional samples rather than one. While not circumventing the endogeneity issue completely, this does allow us to have greater confidence in our conclusions than we otherwise might.

Much debate also rages about the mechanisms underlying economic voting. Existing research recognizes two different facets. First is whether voters are motivated by sociotropic or egocentric rationales, and second whether voters base their opinions on retrospective or prospective judgments. We deal with each in turn below.

Sociotropic motivations assume voters act according to their perception of the overall macroeconomic situation in their country while egocentric motivations are predicated on ‘personal’ utility with voters deciding on the basis of their personal economic gain or loss

(Nannestad & Paldam, 1994). While we do not discount the possibility some voters in EP elections might be ego-centric, we suspect most are motivated by sociotropic utility. We come to this view not only because most research suggests sociotropic considerations drive economic voting more (e.g. Anderson, 2000; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2013), but also because of the nature of EP contests. As elections are taking place simultaneously across the EU, we suspect benchmarking (Kayser & Perses, 2012) is more likely to take hold, where citizens compare the economic performance of their countries to others, and in doing so, are more likely to be making sociotropic rather than pocketbook comparisons. In any event, our measure of economic performance only allows us to explore sociotropic motivations.

Another area of debate is whether voters base their judgments on retrospective or prospective evaluations. Retrospective assessments assume voters' decisions are based on the past performance of the government and follow the premise that politicians are held accountable for their actions (Woon, 2012). On the other hand, such an assumption is incompatible with the idea that voters are forward-looking (e.g. Ashworth & Bueno de Mesquita, 2008; Gordon & Huber, 2007). Consequently, many argue that when casting a vote, the electorate are thinking about how politicians will handle the economy in the future (Woon, 2012). Besides the stronger evidence of retrospective voting (e.g. Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2013), we assume that the characteristics of EP elections, particularly those of 2009 and 2014, makes retrospective voting much more likely. Voters in EP elections are not voting for a government and consequently are unlikely to judge the prospect of future economic dividends accruing from the election of individuals to the European Parliament, especially as the EU's economic power is distributed across a range of institutions from the Commission to the European Central Bank.¹ In sum, we expect economic voting in EP elections to be sociotropic and retrospective.

2.2. *Economic Voting in the European Parliament Elections of 2009 and 2014*

Our interest lies in deciphering the impact of the economy on vote in the 2009 and 2014 European elections. Traditionally European elections have been studied from the 'second-order' perspective with vote choice considered to be primarily influenced by attitudes to the incumbent government (e.g. Hix & Marsh, 2011;

¹ While the 2014 EP elections were predicated on the idea of citizens being able to vote for an executive office, we maintain this was not equivalent to voting for a government because while the EP election results are taken into account in the selection of the Commission President, selection of Commissioners remains the purview of national governments.

Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt, 2005). In recent years, other reasons beyond 'second-order' stimuli such as attitudes towards integration and citizens level of sophistication have been shown to influence voters as well (e.g. de Vries, van der Brug, van Egmond, & van der Eijk, 2011; Hobolt & Spoon, 2012). Nonetheless, EP elections continue to have a 'second-order' dimension, with elections campaigns dominated by domestic issues, low voter turnout, and established parties and incumbent governments losing votes (e.g. Cordero & Montero, 2015; Quinlan & Okolikj, 2016; Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015). Accordingly, we would expect to find support for valence economic voting in EP elections with voters judging government performance on a domestic issue (the national economy).

Yet few studies have explored economic voting in EP elections. A notable exception is Tilley et al.'s (2008) analysis of economic voting in the 2004 contest. They concluded economic voting was limited and only observable among sophisticated voters and in countries that had single party governments in power. A more comprehensive assessment of economic voting using European election data comes from van der Brug, van der Eijk, and Franklin (2007). Using data from the European Election Studies between 1989 and 1999, they found that while the economy matters it is just one factor among many that influences vote. Further, its impact depends on its saliency as an issue, leading them to conclude that while the economy matters, its impact is not quite as important as we might have assumed. However, a re-assessment of the economy's impact on vote in EP elections is in order considering the GFC, which has put the economy front and centre of political debate since 2008 and seen EU institutions take a prominent role in dealing with the fallout from the Crisis. Given these circumstances, it can be expected the economy might have influenced vote choice to a greater extent in 2009 and 2014.

But how might the economy have shaped vote in 2009 and 2014? An abundance of research has previously demonstrated that context conditions economic voting (e.g. Anderson, 2000; Powell Jr. & Whitten, 1993). We suppose context will also mediate the impact of economy in EP elections too and that its influence will vary across both elections and countries. Let us first take the differences between 2009 and 2014 polls. We suspect economic perceptions will have directly influenced vote in 2009 considering that the Crisis was still evolving, with the ramifications of the GFC only becoming gradually clear. The fallout consumed voters as unemployment rose, GDP declined, member states debt levels increased, and significant majorities of citizens across the Union judged their national economic circumstances as poor (see Figure 1). The 2009 EP elections also represented the first opportunity for most voters to pass judgment on the Crisis in nationwide elections. Of the twenty-seven member states,

only in Lithuania had voters been to the polls since the GFC's critical tipping point of September 2008.² Given these circumstances, we expect economic perceptions directly influenced vote in 2009.

We infer that the economy still matters in 2014 but as the contextual circumstances were different at this point, we posit voter calculus will have shifted. By this stage, six years had elapsed since the GFC took hold and while many countries were still dealing with the fallout from it, the global economy had stabilized to an extent. In many member states, the economic outlook was looking better both at a macro level and in terms of citizen perceptions (for e.g. see Figure 2). Furthermore, many governments in power when the Crisis took hold had been dismissed. Thus, while we still expect economic perceptions to matter, we expect voters will take a wider view and incorporate how responsible they felt the government to be for the economic circumstances in 2014. A large literature has highlighted that ascriptions of responsibility matter (e.g. de Vries, Edwards, & Tilman, 2011; Hellwig & Coffey, 2011; Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Marsh & Tilley, 2009; Powell Jnr. & Whitten, 1993). We contend responsibility attribution matters in 2014 because voters will have had time to absorb the shock of the GFC, and having already dismissed many governments in power at the time of the GFC, evaluations of new governments' handling of the

economy should become more prominent. Hence, we expect perceptions of economic responsibility (PER) will matter in 2014, and that they will condition economic voting. The more responsibility voters credit to the government for the economy, the more likely they are to vote for/against them, depending on whether they assess the economy to be performing good or bad.

Two critiques might be levelled at our suppositions. The first relates to the methodological issue of restricted variance regarding individual economic perceptions. Given the devastating effects of the GFC, there is an expectation that as everybody thought the economy was performing badly, at least in 2009, there might be little variation to explore (for more see Fraile & Lewis-Beck, 2014). However, inspection of citizens' views about economic performance at the time shows a more nuanced picture. Figures 1 and 2 detail the distribution of economic perceptions by country. In 2009 (Figure 1) sufficient numbers of citizens in most member states had an alternative view to the conventional wisdom that the economy was performing poorly, although in some countries this represented a small proportion of the electorate. Our cross-national strategy aids us here as with evaluations varying between countries, there is sufficient variance overall to explore economic perceptions legitimately. Thus, we do not believe the restricted variance problem is something that plagues our analysis to a sufficient extent. Additionally, these distributions support our idea that as voter perceptions of the economy have changed between 2009 and 2014 (which inspection of Figures 1 and 2 by country illustrate they clearly have), this might play into economic voting being different between the two elections and between countries.

² While the active phase of the GFC can be dated to early 2007, September 2008 remains an important crunch point in its evolution with the collapse of Lehman Brothers Bank in the United States and inter-bank lending seizing up, triggering a global economic shock which resulted in a number of European banks failing, stock indexes plummeting, and governments being forced to intervene in the economy in unprecedented ways.

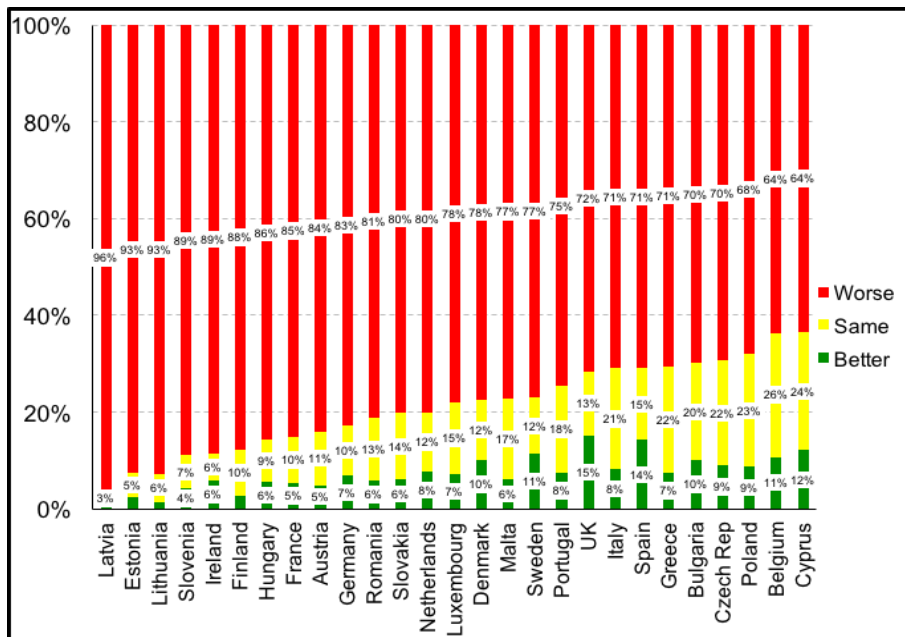


Figure 1. Perceptions of the economy by country in 2009 (%). Source: van Egmond, van der Brug, Hobolt, Franklin, & Sapir, 2013. Note: Data ordered by proportion of respondents saying “worse”.

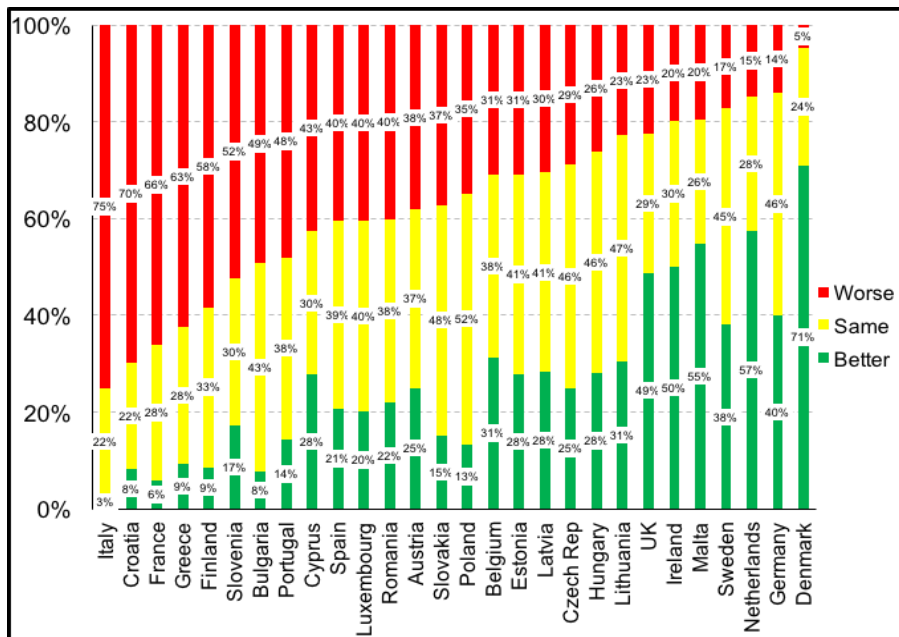


Figure 2. Perceptions of the economy by country in 2014 (%). Source: Schmitt, Popa, & Devinger, 2015. Note: Data ordered by proportion of respondents saying “worse”.

The second critique is our focus on attributions of responsibility by voters. Critics suggest they might be contaminated by pre-existing political views (e.g. Bisgaard, 2015; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). An alternative strategy might have been to look at responsibility delineation from an aggregate perspective using an index based on institutional criteria including a country’s electoral and party system, majority status of government, and opposition influence, as previous work has done (e.g. Anderson, 2000; Powell Jr. & Whitten, 1993). However, this assumption requires us to believe voters have detailed information as to how the political system operates and where the responsibility for power really lies, which is debatable. In any event and in the vein of many other studies (e.g.: Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Marsh & Tilley, 2009; Sanders, 2000), we believe subjective perceptions are key. Controlling for the respondent’s ideological distance from the ideological position of the party of the incumbent head of government on the left-right scale circumvents this problem to an extent. Further, we are buoyed by Lavine, Johnston and Steenbergen’s (2012) work showing ambivalent partisans—voters who can suspend their partiality, do exist, and that these voters judge based on evidence. We also know suspension of partisanship is all the more likely to occur when there is sizeable consensus on an issue, such as a severe economic crisis (Parker-Stephen, 2013; Stanig, 2013) or when economic conditions are improving. Thus, while we accept that our measure is not ideal and thus a caveat to our conclusions, we are confident the issue is not as problematic as might first appear.

In sum, our expectations can be summarized as follows:

H1: Economic assessments will directly influence vote choice in the 2009 EP elections.

H2: Voter attributions of responsibility to the national government for economic performance will condition the impact of economic assessments on vote choice in the 2014 EP elections.

We also expect the impact of the economy on vote choice in 2014 to vary by country. Specifically, we assume economic voting might differ between bailout and non-bailout countries. We classify ‘bailout’ countries as EU member states that received external financial assistance to avert sovereign defaults between 2008 and 2012. Eight states fall into this category: Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Portugal, Romania and Spain.³ Our supposition is the economic crises in bailout countries have been markedly worse compared to non-bailout countries and the consequences felt much more profoundly, especially as bailout countries were subject to much more stringent austerity measures, with their government’s economic decisions were under external scrutiny from institutions like the EU and the IMF.

Table 1 contrasts the positions of the two sets of countries on four prominent indicators of economic

³ Our choice is based on those countries that received any EU/IMF financial assistance. Italy, although often considered as party of this group, was not officially in receipt of a formal bailout. An advantage of our classification is that we incorporate all member states adjudged to be in such financial peril that they needed external financial assistance, and not concentrated solely on the states of Southern Europe, which have received most scholarly attention to date (e.g. Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2012; Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015).

performance for the year 2014. As we can see, the eight countries who received external financial assistance performed significantly worse on average on three indicators: unemployment, youth unemployment, and government debt as a percentage of GDP. Only for economic growth are the bailout and non-bailout countries similar in performance. But if we remove the extreme outlier among the bailout countries for 2014, namely Ireland which recorded economic growth of 5.2% in 2014, the difference is much greater (1.34% growth for bailout countries versus 1.93% for non-bailout countries). In sum, there is clear evidence to suggest sizeable differences in economic performance between the two sets of countries and this might play into how economics influenced vote in the 2014 EP elections. Thus we suggest that:

H3: Economic assessments and voter attributions of responsibility for economic performance will have a greater impact on vote choice in the 2014 EP elections in countries that have received bailouts from external bodies compared to those who have not.

Table 1. Selected economic conditions in bailout versus non-bailout countries in 2014.

	Bailout	Non-Bailout
Unemployment	15.43%	8.55%
Youth unemployment	33.41%	19.39%
Economic growth	1.83%	1.93%
General Government Gross debt as a percentage of GDP	97.58%	62.96%

Note: Authors' calculations based on classification of bailout versus non-bailout countries on data gathered from Eurostat and World Bank.

3. Research Strategy

3.1. Data and Primary Variable Classifications

Our data comes from the 2009 (van Egmond, van der Brug, Hobolt, Franklin, & Sapir, 2013) and 2014 (Schmitt, Popa, & Devinger, 2015) European Electoral Studies (EES), two cross-sectional comparative post-election surveys administered in all EU member states. The data includes identical questions posed to respondents that tap voters' assessments of the economy, who they perceive to be responsible for it, as well as other relevant political and demographic variables.

Our dependent variable is binary and captures whether a respondent voted for the national governing party/coalition (coded 1) or another party/coalition (coded 0) on the basis of the question: "Which party did you give your vote to in these recent European Parliament elections?" Respondents who reported ab-

staining were excluded from the analysis.⁴

We have two primary independent variables. The first is perceptions of economic performance. Our measure is sociotropic and retrospective and is based on the question: "Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation in [our country] is..." In common with previous studies of economic voting, we recoded this measure into a binary variable, with a 1 capturing those who rated the economy as "Is a lot better" and "Is a little better" and 0 representing respondents who said "Is a little worse" and "Is a lot worse".⁵ Our second independent variable of interest is responsibility attribution for the national economy. We capture this with responses to the question: "thinking about the economy, how responsible is [incumbent] government for economic conditions in [our country]". We refer to this as perceptions of economic responsibility (PER), which is scaled from 0 to 10, with a score of 0 indicating a voter does not hold the government responsible for the economy and a score of 10 representing voters who deemed the government fully responsible.

Our total N at the micro level across the two election cycles is 26,728 observations: 19,878 for the 2009 elections and 6,850 for the 2014 EP elections, with all country samples across both waves having a minimum of 1,000 initial observations and being representative of the national population. The difference in number of observation between 2009 and 2014 sample is a result of fewer observations available in 2014 and due to our classifications.⁶ Our macro observations are 27 for both elections.⁷

⁴ For robustness, we re-classified our dependent variable to include the party of the incumbent Head of Government. We identified no substantive deviations, with the alternative models in line with our theoretical expectations. The alternative specifications are detailed in Table A7 in Appendix.

⁵ Respondents who answered "stayed the same" and "don't know" were excluded from the analysis. For robustness, we re-classified this variable by including those who responded "stayed the same" in both the "worse" and the "better" categories and re-estimating our models on this basis (see Tables A5 and A6 in Appendix). Regarding the inclusion of "stayed the same" in the "worse" category, which we argue is the most appropriate specification given the economic crisis, we identified no substantive deviations, with the alternative models in line with our theoretical expectations. When the "stayed the same" is included among the "better" category, we do see that the coefficient for the interaction term in 2014 is statistically significant only at $p < 0.1$. While a slight deviation on our reported analysis, it does not go against our theoretical expectations.

⁶ This is a result of the many respondents who answered that economy "stayed the same" in 2014. Also, a larger number of respondents refused to answer for which party they gave their vote in 2014 EP election.

⁷ Croatia is excluded from the analysis to maintain comparability at the macro level as the country only became a member of the EU in 2013 and thus only participated in the 2014 elections.

3.2. Modelling Strategy and Covariate Selection

The hierarchical nature of the EES data calls for a multi-level strategy. When observations within a sample are clustered, the data violates the assumption of independence of observations. Failure to take account of this could result in the incorrect estimation of standard errors, which can increase the probability of Type-I errors (Gelman & Hill, 2007). Multilevel modeling allows us to estimate separate variance components for both the micro and macro levels. For this study, we define two levels of analysis: citizens (micro-level) that are nested in countries (macro-level).⁸ We estimate multi-level models with random effects for country and economy, as we expect the impact of economy will vary between countries.

We face difficulties in taking a multilevel approach in testing H3: the difference between bailout and non-bailout countries in terms of economy's impact on vote in the 2014 elections. With bailout countries only accounting for eight observations, a multilevel approach is infeasible because multilevel models with an inadequate number of macro observations have been noted for producing biased estimates (e.g. Maas & Hox, 2004; Stegmueller, 2013). One might assume we would circumvent this by estimating a multilevel (or indeed simple logit) model by just including a three-way interaction in our model. However, given the noted difficulties in interpreting interactions in logit models (Brambor, Roberts Clarke, & Golder, 2006), we suggest a three-way interaction is too convoluted and a more comprehensive interpretation is achieved from this strategy. Accordingly, Models V and VI in Table 3 are based on regular logit models with robust standard errors.

The remainder of our model is based on the well-established specification for testing economic effects in a comparative analysis (e.g. Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck & Nadeau, 2012). Therefore, we control for religious service attendance as a proxy of cleavage and ideology. Our ideological measure captures the ideological distance of the respondent from the ideological position of the party of the incumbent head of government on the left-right scale.⁹ To this, we add the in-

For robustness, each model was re-estimated omitting each individual country to establish if a specific country was driving our results. We identified no substantive deviations, with the alternative models in line with our theoretical expectations.

⁸ We also estimated our models in the classic pooled analysis fashion and we identified no substantive deviations from our theoretical expectations.

⁹ We calculated ideology-distance variable as follows: we took the mean of respondents' placements of the head of government party on a left-right scale for each country and each election. Then we subtracted this mean from the individual respondent's self-placement on the left-right scale and took the absolute value of the results, which created the ideological distance variable.

teraction term¹⁰ between economic evaluations and perceptions of government responsibility in line with our theoretical expectations, to arrive at the following model:

$$\text{Vote} = f(\text{Cleavage, ideological distance, economy} * \text{perceptions of government responsibility})$$

Summary statistics for each variable are included in the appendix (see Tables A2–A4).

4. Empirical Analysis

Our empirical analysis consists of three parts. First we are interested in establishing the direct effect of evaluations of the economy on vote choice. Models I (2009) and II (2014) of Table 2 test this. Second we add an interaction component to the basic model to test our second hypothesis—our expectation being the impact of the economy on vote might be mediated by how much responsibility is attributed to the national government for economic performance. We expect to observe heterogeneity between the elections—i.e. perceptions of economic responsibility will mediate the impact of economy on vote in 2014 but not in 2009. Models III (2009) and IV (2014) of Table 2 investigate this. Third, we explore whether the impact of economy and responsibility attribution is the same in 2014 between countries. We assume different effects will take hold in bailout compared to non-bailout states, with economy and the interaction between economy and responsibility attribution having a stronger impact in bailout states. We test this in Models V (bailout) and VI (non bailout) of Table 3.

In models I and II of Table 2, we see the economy variable is positive and statically significant in both models ($p < 0.01$). This suggests that for respondents who judge the economy has improved in their country in the preceding twelve months before the election, the likelihood of voting for the government increased substantially. Such an effect is hardly surprising and confirms the potency of economics in shaping vote, even in a second-order election like the EP elections.

¹⁰ It should be noted that the magnitude and statistical significance of interaction effects in models with binary dependent variables can vary by observation (Ai & Norton, 2003). As a robustness check, we estimated the interaction effects following Norton, Wang and Ai (2004) and observed no significant deviations from our reported analysis.

Table 2: Multilevel logit models examining the impact of economic voting in 27 democracies. Source: van Egmond, van der Brug, Hobolt, Franklin, & Sapir, 2013; Schmitt, Popa, & Devinger, 2015.

Dependent variable: Vote for the Incumbent Party or Coalition	(I) 2009	(II) 2014	(III) 2009	(IV) 2014
FIXED EFFECTS				
Economy	0.712** (0.113)	1.191** (0.209)	0.796** (0.18)	0.688* (0.268)
PER	-	-	-0.036** (0.007)	-0.039** (0.015)
Ideology–distance	-0.271** (0.01)	-0.055** (0.014)	-0.273** (0.011)	-0.057** (0.014)
Religion	-0.114** (0.012)	-0.05* (0.021)	-0.118** (0.013)	-0.048* (0.021)
Economy x PER	-	-	-0.014 (0.021)	0.066** (0.022)
Constant	-0.08 (0.129)	-0.424* (0.181)	0.202 (0.139)	-0.131 (0.213)
RANDOM EFFECTS				
(Intercept) Country	0.233 (0.483)	0.051 (0.225)	0.234 (0.484)	0.056 (0.237)
(Intercept) Economy by Country	0.119 (0.345)	0.521 (0.722)	0.115 (0.339)	0.511 (0.715)
N (Micro/Macro)	19878/27	6850/27	19498/27	6790/27
Log Likelihood	-10254.8	-4229.7	-10025	-4185.8
AIC	20521.7	8471.3	20066	8387.6
BIC	20569.1	8512.3	20129	8442.2

Note: Standard error in parenthesis; *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

Table 3 Logit models examining the impact of economic voting in 27 democracies in the 2014 European Parliament elections. Source: Schmitt, Popa, & Devinger, 2015.

Dependent variable: Vote for the Incumbent Party or Coalition	(V) 2014 (Bailout)	(VI) 2014 (Non bailout)
Economy	0.402 (0.344)	-0.062 (0.19)
PER	-0.132** (0.029)	-0.02 (0.015)
Ideology–distance	0.001 (0.028)	-0.093** (0.014)
Religion	-0.138** (0.038)	-0.028 (0.02)
Economy x PER	0.137** (0.041)	0.078** (0.023)
Constant	0.545 (0.3)	0.118 (0.154)
N	1712	5078
Log Likelihood	-1.024	-3.437.6
AIC	2.060	6.887.2

Note: Robust standard error in parenthesis; *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

However, our supposition is the ‘true impact’ of economy only reveals itself when perceptions of responsibility for economic performance (PER) are accounted for. Therefore, we add an interaction term to our models. We detail the results in models III and IV of Table 2. It is evident that the inclusion of responsibility attribution and the interaction with economic assessments results in some important changes. First, PER on its own

has an influence in both elections. In both 2009 and 2014, the more citizens thought the economy was the responsibility of the government, the more likely they were to vote against the government, hardly surprising given the economic circumstances in many states. Second, the strong direct effect of economic perceptions on vote persists: the more voters thought the economy was performing well (incidentally few did), the more likely

they were to vote for the incumbent administration, and this effect remains independent of responsibility attribution. However, the interaction term in 2009 does not reach statistical significance.¹¹ This is in line with our expectations—economic perceptions were the primary driver of economic voting in the 2009 poll.

We see a different pattern for 2014 (Model IV). Here, the addition of attributions of responsibility results in the direct impact of the economy reaching statistical significance at $p < 0.05$ level and still having a positive impact. However, the interaction term is positive and significant implying the impact of the economy is conditioned by voter perceptions of responsibility attribution. When the economy was considered to be doing well and the government were perceived to be re-

sponsible for it, voters were more likely to have supported the incumbent administration. To gain an idea of the magnitude of this effect, Figure 3 (for the 2009 EP election) and Figure 4 (for the 2014 EP election) plots the interaction effect between economy and perception of economic responsibility. Looking at Figure 4, the upper right plot indicates that when perception of economic responsibility is at the highest level, the probability to vote for incumbent government is around 60 percent for respondents who thought that the economy has improved in the last 12 months prior to the election. Yet, for those respondents who were more sceptical about the economy, the probability to vote for the governing party or coalition drops to around 30 percent. However, this difference is not so evident when the perception of economic responsibility is at its lowest (bottom left plot Figure 4). Here the probability to vote for the incumbent party between those respondents who answered that economy was better was approximately 50 percent compared to those who believed that the economy was worse in the past 12 months (approximately 40%).

¹¹ We were conscious that the magnitude and statistical significance of interaction effects in models with binary dependent variables can vary by observation. For robustness, we re-estimated the interaction using Ai and Norton's (2003) approach and found that the significance levels and sign of the coefficients to be in same direction as those detailed in our analysis.

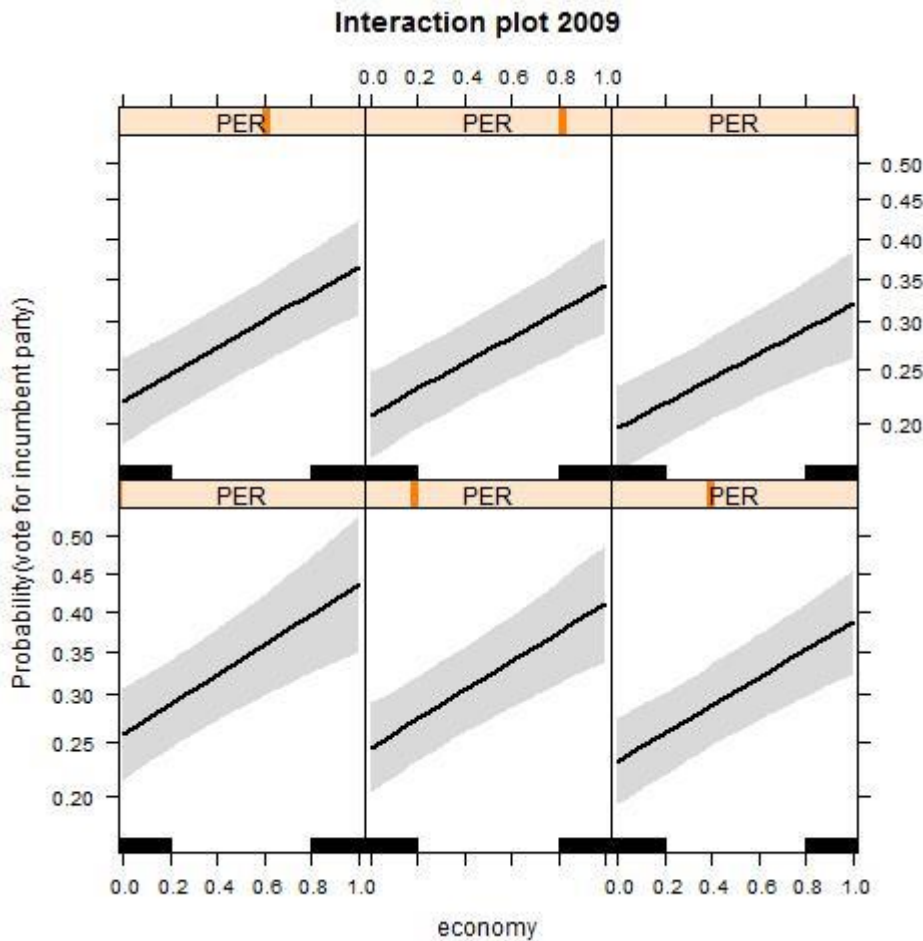


Figure 3. Interaction effect plots between economy and PER for 2009 EP election. Note: The upper right plot indicates that PER is at the highest level. The lower left plot indicates that PER is at the lowest level.

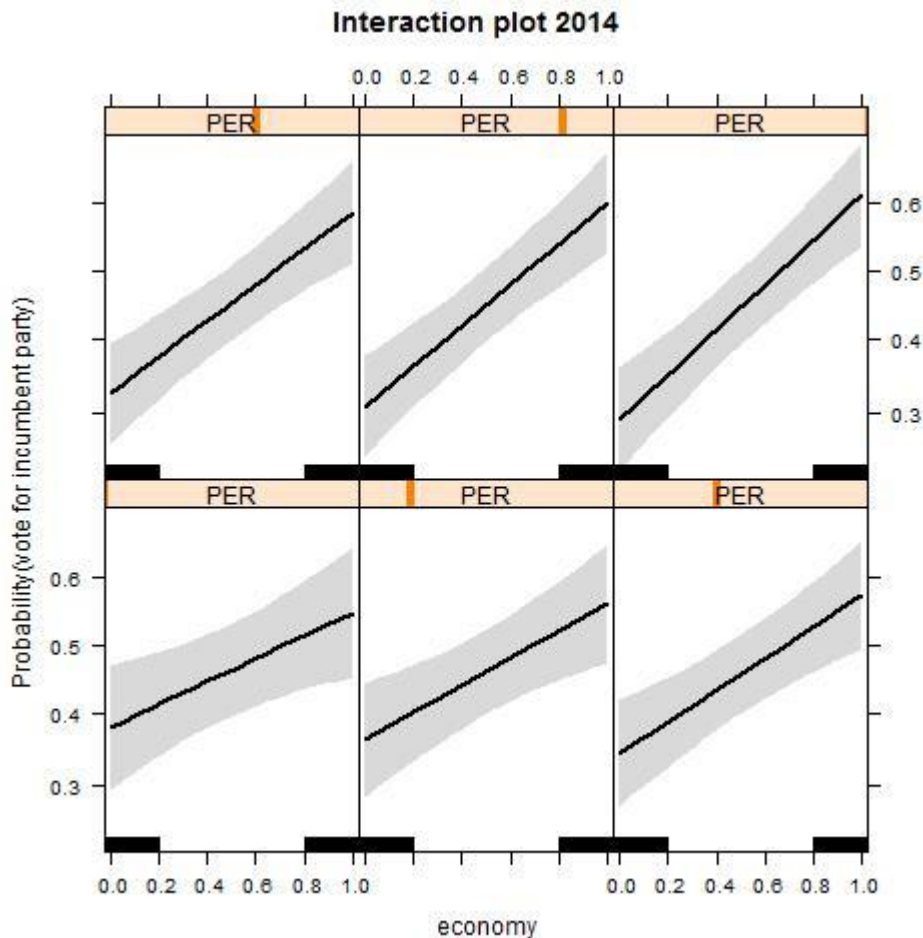


Figure 4. Interaction effect plots between economy and PER for 2014 EP election. Note: The upper right plot indicates that PER is highest. The lower left plot indicates that PER is at the lowest level.

In sum, we deduce the following from our analysis. There is support for H1—the economy had a direct impact on vote choice in 2009. Voter assessments of the economy were enough to influence vote choice with those perceiving the economic situation to be good voting for the incumbent administration and those classifying it as worse voting against it. While economics also mattered in 2014, its impact on vote was conditioned by how much responsibility voters credited to the government for economic performance, with the more responsibility assigned to the government and the better the economic circumstances, the more likely voters were to vote for the government. The key point though is the direct effect of economy in 2014 was partially channelled through responsibility ascriptions, providing support for H2.

Regarding the impact of the economy and responsibility attribution on vote in 2014, we anticipated this effect may not be universal across the EU bloc but that it might have differed across countries dependent on whether a state had received a bailout or not. To test this, we divided our sample into ‘bailout’ and ‘non-bailout’ countries and devised two separate logit models to explore the differences between the two sets of

nations. We expect in countries that have received a financial support from the EU/IMF, we will observe a greater level of economic responsibility: the perceptions of responsibility will have a stronger and negative effect on vote compared to non-bailout countries. This is because the economic situation in bailout countries was much worse compared to the non-bailout countries. Therefore, we would expect that the attribution of responsibility for the economic circumstances would have larger negative effect on the incumbent government among bailout countries.

Our results are detailed in Models V and VI of Table 3. Perceptions of the state of the economy do not have a significant effect on the vote in either set of countries, which fits with our overall theoretical argument that economic voting in 2014 was channelled through perceptions of responsibility. Instead, the differences between the two sets of countries are seen with respect to the impact of perceptions of responsibility and perceptions of responsibility when interacted with economic assessments. First, attribution of responsibility on its own had a significant effect in bailout countries—when governments were held responsible for the performance of the national economy, voters were

more likely to vote against it. However, we do not have evidence of the same effect taking hold in non-bailout countries. We suggest this significant difference reflects the poorer state of bailout countries' economies.

The interaction effect in both models is positive and significant which is line with our expectations—the better the economy is and the more governments are considered to be responsible, the greater the likelihood of voting for the incumbent government. We conclude there is support for H3: voters in bailout countries approached the 2014 elections differently to the non-bailout. First and foremost, attribution of responsibility on its own mattered in these countries, while it did not in non-bailout states. Further, the impact of the economy was conditioned on this basis but also was shown to be stronger in bailout countries than non-bailout countries. Our overall results show that economic voting is present in both the 2009 and 2014 EP elections. However, this does mask clear differences as to how economic voting shaped vote choice between the two elections and cross-nationally.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

While much ink has been spilt exploring the influence of economy on the vote in national elections and referendums, and on attitudes towards European integration, few studies have analysed the effect of economic perceptions on vote in European Parliament elections. Yet the onset of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), its domination of the political agenda over the past seven years, and the fact its marked effects are still very much felt, calls for a re-assessment. Our contribution explores the economy's impact in the 2009 and 2014 contests respectively.

Our study shows that like other elections, citizens' views about the economy do influence their vote in European elections. This is somewhat contrary to the conclusions of Tilley et al. (2008), who found minimal evidence for economic voting, and argued that existing political preferences contaminate economic perceptions. In a cross-sectional sample, endogeneity is difficult to rule out but we are confident that convincing evidence has been presented which shows that even when endogenous concerns can be conclusively addressed, economic voting exists. Accordingly, we suggest the differences in our findings compared to theirs are best explained by the different contexts. The Global Financial Crisis and its profound implications on citizens have ensured economics has been front and centre of the political agenda for the past seven years. As such, it became the central preoccupation of citizens and this translated into it becoming more important in shaping vote choice at the European level.

However, in line with previous scholarship which has found economic voting depends on context (e.g. Anderson 2000; Powell Jnr. & Whitten 1993), we found

economics shaped vote in different ways across the two elections. In 2009, with the GFC in its infancy, and its consequences becoming gradually apparent, voters, many of whom were getting their first opportunity to go to the ballot box since the eruption of the crisis, were directly motivated by their perceptions of how the economy was performing. In 2014, economic perceptions still mattered. However, voter calculus shifted and the potency of economic voting depended on how much responsibility voters assigned to the national government for economic performance. The more responsibility they felt the government had, the more likely economic voting was to take hold. These assessments were seen to be stronger in countries that had received external financial assistance in the preceding six years, hardly surprising considering the GFCs impact on these states was more manifest than others. This underlines that economic voting, while prevalent in the European context, is conditional both on time and space. It also suggests that voters' response to economic crisis evolves, with economic perceptions initially enough to shape vote choice, but as time goes on, economic voting becomes motivated by other considerations including who is deemed to be responsible for the circumstances.

Our study also cast doubt on the idea that the 2014 European elections were much different compared to EP elections of the past, in spite of the characterisation of 'This time it's different' (see Hobolt, 2014). For one thing, economics mattered in both elections, albeit differently. But more fundamentally, voters in both remained strongly motivated by national considerations with domestic issues such as national economic perceptions playing a key role. Therefore, we can deduce the EP elections remain classic 'second-order' contests (for similar conclusions see Quinlan & Okolijk, 2016; Schmitt & Teperoglou, 2015).

Interesting avenues of research remain. While our study has focused on voters' ascriptions of economic responsibility to national governments, the attributions voters ascribe to the European Union remains underdeveloped (an exception is Costa-Lobo & Lewis-Beck, 2012). Additionally, economic voting is multidimensional. Here we have concentrated on the conventional valence reward-punishment model but other dimensions merit exploration. Gaining traction is the idea that there is a patrimonial aspect to economic voting with citizens' wealth has been found to shape voter preferences in Denmark, France, and Portugal (e.g. Costa-Lobo, 2013; Stubager, Lewis-Beck, & Nadeau, 2013). Given its existence at the national level, it might be that patrimony also influences voters in European contests and future studies should explore this.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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About the Authors

Martin Okolikj

Martin Okolikj is a PhD Candidate in Political Science at the University College Dublin, School of Politics and International Relations (SPIRe) and a PhD Researcher at the UCD Geary Institute for Public Policy, Ireland. His research interest is in the fields of Political Methodology and Comparative Politics with focus on Elections, Voting Behaviour and Quality of Government.

Dr. Stephen Quinlan

Stephen Quinlan is Senior Researcher and Project Manager of the Comparative Studies of Electoral Systems (CSES) project at the GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences in Mannheim, Germany. His research focuses on electoral behaviour and public opinion including voter turnout, elections, referendums, and examining the impact of social media on politics.

Appendix
Table A1. Logistic regression results. Source of data: (van Egmond, van der Brug, Hobolt, Franklin, & Sapir, 2013; Schmitt, Popa, & Devinger, 2015)

Governing Party or Coalition	(1) 2009	(2) 2014	(3) 2009	(4) 2014
Economy	0.67** (0.054)	0.797** (0.05)	0.677** (0.142)	0.031 (0.165)
PER	-	-	-0.052** (0.007)	-0.06** (0.013)
Ideology distance	-0.253** (0.009)	-0.069** (0.013)	-0.256** (0.01)	-0.071** (0.013)
Religion	-0.084** (0.011)	-0.054** (0.017)	-0.086** (0.011)	-0.055** (0.017)
Economy x PER	-	-	-0.004 (0.02)	0.099** (0.02)
Constant	-0.146** (0.053)	-0.164 (0.088)	0.243** (0.072)	0.303* (0.138)
N	19878	6850	19498	6790
Log Likelihood	-10788	-4571.8	-10540.2	-4516.1
AIC	21584	9151.6	21092	9044.2

Note: Standard error in parenthesis; *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

Table A2. Summary statistics.

2009	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Gov. Party	27.069	0.249	0.432	0	1
Economy	23.088	0.085	0.278	0	1
PER	26.264	7.188	2.717	0	10
Ideology distance	23.647	2.738	2.128	0.022	8.959
Religion	26.549	4.181	1.572	1	6
2014	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Gov. Party	13.701	0.454	0.498	0	1
Economy	17.828	0.436	0.496	0	1
PER	28.324	7.668	2.630	0	10
Ideology distance	22.699	2.82	2.017	0.013	9.02
Religion	28.475	4.383	1.445	1	6
Bailout/Non-Bailout	28.986	0.28/0.72	0.449	0	1

Table A3. Summary statistics of economy variable by country 2009.

Country	N	Mean	Sd	Median	Min	Max
Austria	875	0.05	0.23	0	0	1
Belgium	732	0.14	0.35	0	0	1
Bulgaria	768	0.12	0.33	0	0	1
Cyprus	747	0.16	0.37	0	0	1
Czech Republic	785	0.11	0.32	0	0	1
Denmark	868	0.11	0.32	0	0	1
Estonia	954	0.03	0.16	0	0	1
Finland	902	0.03	0.17	0	0	1
France	900	0.06	0.24	0	0	1
Germany	898	0.08	0.26	0	0	1
Greece	775	0.1	0.29	0	0	1
Hungary	909	0.06	0.24	0	0	1
Ireland	942	0.06	0.24	0	0	1
Italy	782	0.1	0.3	0	0	1
Latvia	966	0.01	0.08	0	0	1
Lithuania	937	0.01	0.12	0	0	1
Luxembourg	849	0.08	0.28	0	0	1
Malta	808	0.07	0.26	0	0	1
Poland	758	0.11	0.32	0	0	1
Portugal	816	0.09	0.29	0	0	1
Romania	860	0.07	0.25	0	0	1
Slovakia	870	0.07	0.25	0	0	1
Slovenia	923	0.05	0.21	0	0	1
Spain	850	0.17	0.37	0	0	1
Sweden	876	0.13	0.33	0	0	1
The Netherlands	873	0.09	0.28	0	0	1
United Kingdom	865	0.18	0.38	0	0	1

Table A4. Summary statistics of economy variable by country 2014.

Country	N	Mean	Sd	Median	Min	Max
Austria	693	0.4	0.49	0	0	1
Belgium	670	0.5	0.5	1	0	1
Bulgaria	620	0.14	0.34	0	0	1
Cyprus	366	0.39	0.49	0	0	1
Czech Republic	620	0.46	0.5	0	0	1
Denmark	805	0.94	0.24	1	0	1
Estonia	616	0.47	0.5	0	0	1
Finland	727	0.13	0.33	0	0	1
France	760	0.08	0.27	0	0	1
Germany	868	0.74	0.44	1	0	1
Greece	775	0.13	0.34	0	0	1
Hungary	593	0.52	0.5	1	0	1
Ireland	751	0.72	0.45	1	0	1
Italy	833	0.04	0.19	0	0	1
Latvia	607	0.48	0.5	0	0	1
Lithuania	572	0.57	0.5	1	0	1
Luxembourg	316	0.33	0.47	0	0	1
Malta	382	0.74	0.44	1	0	1
Poland	568	0.28	0.45	0	0	1
Portugal	636	0.23	0.42	0	0	1
Romania	674	0.35	0.48	0	0	1
Slovakia	562	0.29	0.45	0	0	1
Slovenia	772	0.25	0.43	0	0	1
Spain	669	0.34	0.47	0	0	1
Sweden	607	0.69	0.46	1	0	1
The Netherlands	784	0.8	0.4	1	0	1
United Kingdom	982	0.68	0.47	1	0	1

Table A5. Multilevel logit models examining the impact of economic voting in 27 democracies “about the same” is negative in the economy variable. Source: van Egmond, van der Brug, Hobolt, Franklin, & Sapir, 2013; Schmitt, Popa, & Devinger, 2015.

Dependent variable: Vote for incumbent govt.	(I) 2009	(II) 2014	(III) 2009	(IV) 2014
FIXED EFFECTS				
Economy	0.633*** (0.098)	0.833*** (0.165)	0.7*** (0.169)	0.373* (0.222)
PER	-	-	-0.039*** (0.006)	-0.033*** (0.01)
Ideology distance	-0.277*** (0.009)	-0.067*** (0.011)	-0.278*** (0.01)	-0.067*** (0.011)
Religion	-0.116*** (0.011)	-0.062*** (0.016)	-0.119*** (0.011)	-0.063*** (0.016)
Economy x PER	-	-	-0.011 (0.021)	0.06*** (0.019)
Constant	0.017 (0.123)	0.013 (0.151)	0.313** (0.131)	0.271 (0.17)
RANDOM EFFECTS				
Intercept Country by Economy	0.079 (0.28)	0.323 (0.568)	0.075 (0.274)	0.315 (0.562)
Intercept Country	0.255 (0.505)	0.116 (0.34)	0.255 (0.505)	0.121 (0.348)
N (Micro/Macro)	23076/27	10702/27	22607/27	10603
Log Likelihood	-12188.2	-6796.3	-11897.8	-6720.7
AIC	24388.3	13604.6	23811.6	13457.4
BIC	24436.6	13648.3	23875.8	13515.5

Note: Standard error in parenthesis; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Table A6. Multilevel logit models examining the impact of economic voting in 27 democracies “about the same” is positive in the economy variable. Source: van Egmond, van der Brug, Hobolt, Franklin, & Sapir, 2013; Schmitt, Popa, & Devinger, 2015.

Dependent variable: Vote for incumbent govt.	(I) 2009	(II) 2014	(III) 2009	(IV) 2014
FIXED EFFECTS				
Economy	0.487*** (0.09)	0.861*** (0.139)	0.539*** (0.131)	0.62** (0.197)
PER	-	-	-0.036*** (0.007)	-0.04** (0.015)
Ideology distance	-0.27*** (0.009)	-0.069*** (0.011)	-0.272*** (0.01)	-0.07*** (0.011)
Religion	-0.116*** (0.011)	-0.066*** (0.016)	-0.119*** (0.011)	-0.067*** (0.016)
Economy x PER	-	-	-0.009 (0.014)	0.032* (0.018)
Constant	-0.072 (0.124)	-0.305* (0.161)	0.204 (0.134)	0.004 (0.197)
RANDOM EFFECTS				
Intercept Country by Economy	0.086 (0.293)	0.216 (0.465)	0.085 (0.292)	0.213 (0.462)
Intercept Country	0.25 (0.5)	0.272 (0.522)	0.248 (0.498)	0.275 (0.524)
N (Micro/Macro)	23076/27	10702	22607	10603/27
Log Likelihood	-12147.7	-6814.5	-11860.8	-6740.6
AIC	24307.4	13641.0	23737.5	13497.2
BIC	24355.6	13684.6	23801.7	13555.4

Note: Standard error in parenthesis; *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Table A7. Multilevel logit models examining the impact of economic voting in 27 democracies, dependent variable: Vote for the Head of government party. Source: van Egmond, van der Brug, Hobolt, Franklin, & Sapir, 2013; Schmitt, Popa, & Devinger, 2015.

Dependent variable: Vote for the Head of government party	(I) 2009	(II) 2014	(III) 2009	(IV) 2014
FIXED EFFECTS				
Economy	0.84** (0.15)	1.085** (0.173)	0.85** (0.243)	0.523* (0.265)
PER	-	-	-0.039** (0.011)	-0.045* (0.019)
Ideology - distance	-0.417** (0.015)	-0.626** (0.022)	-0.419** (0.015)	-0.627** (0.022)
Religion	-0.108** (0.017)	0.035 (0.024)	-0.111** (0.017)	0.034 (0.024)
Economy x PER	-	-	-0.004 (0.029)	0.073** (0.026)
Constant	-0.364 (0.438)	-0.146 (0.226)	-0.066 (0.442)	0.196 (0.269)
RANDOM EFFECTS				
Intercept Economy by Country	0.178 (0.421)	0.319 (0.565)	0.164 (0.406)	0.303 (0.551)
Intercept Country	4.676 (2.162)	0.65 (0.807)	4.607 (2.146)	0.663 (0.814)
N (Micro/Macro)	12143/27	7916/27	11967/27	7865/27
Log Likelihood	-5266.7	-3524.7	-5166.6	-3495.5
AIC	10545.3	7061.4	10349.1	7007.0
BIC	10589.7	7103.2	10408.2	7062.8

Note: Standard error in parenthesis; *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

Table A8. Multilevel logit models examining the impact of economic voting in 27 democracies, Ideology independent variable. Source: van Egmond, van der Brug, Hobolt, Franklin, & Sapir, 2013; Schmitt, Popa, & Devinger, 2015.

Dependent variable: Vote for incumb. govt.	(I) 2009	(II) 2014	(III) 2009	(IV) 2014
FIXED EFFECTS				
Economy	0.763** (0.134)	1.214** (0.2)	0.819** (0.19)	0.615* (0.256)
PER	-	-	-0.04** (0.007)	-0.041** (0.014)
Ideology	0.073** (0.007)	-0.046** (0.009)	0.074** (0.007)	-0.046** (0.009)
Religion	-0.102** (0.012)	-0.045* (0.019)	-0.106** (0.012)	-0.041* (0.02)
Economy x PER	-	-	-0.01 (0.02)	0.078** (0.021)
Constant	-1.208** (0.133)	-0.387* (0.185)	-0.903** (0.142)	-0.094 (0.215)
RANDOM EFFECTS				
Intercept Economy by Country	0.192 (0.438)	0.484 (0.695)	0.184 (0.429)	0.477 (0.69)
Intercept Country	0.159 (0.399)	0.113 (0.337)	0.167 (0.408)	0.112 (0.335)
N (Micro/Macro)	19924/27	7916/27	19583/27	7865/27
Log Likelihood	-10624.7	-4881.2	-10407.6	-4844.1
AIC	21261.5	9774.4	20831.2	9704.2
BIC	21308.9	9816.2	20894.3	9760.0

Note: Standard error in parenthesis; *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

Table A9. Multilevel logit models examining the impact of economic voting in 27 democracies for 2009 and 2014 EP elections. Source: van Egmond, van der Brug, Hobolt, Franklin, & Sapir, 2013; Schmitt, Popa, & Devinger, 2015.

Dependent variable: Vote for the incumbent gov.	(1) Pooled model
FIXED EFFECTS	
Economy	0.845** (0.196)
PER	-0.039** (0.007)
2014	0.587** (0.127)
Ideology distance	-0.197** (0.008)
Religion	-0.102** (0.011)
Economy x PER	-0.007 (0.02)
Economy x 2014	-0.297 (0.229)
PER x 2014	-0.001 (0.016)
Economy x PER x 2014	0.076* (0.03)
Constant	-0.031 (0.132)
RANDOM EFFECTS	
Intercept Economy by Country	0.226 (0.475)
Intercept Country	0.108 (0.328)
N (Micro/Macro)	26288/27
Log Likelihood	-14389.0
AIC	28801.9
BIC	28900.1

Note: Standard error in parenthesis; *p<0.05; **p<0.01.

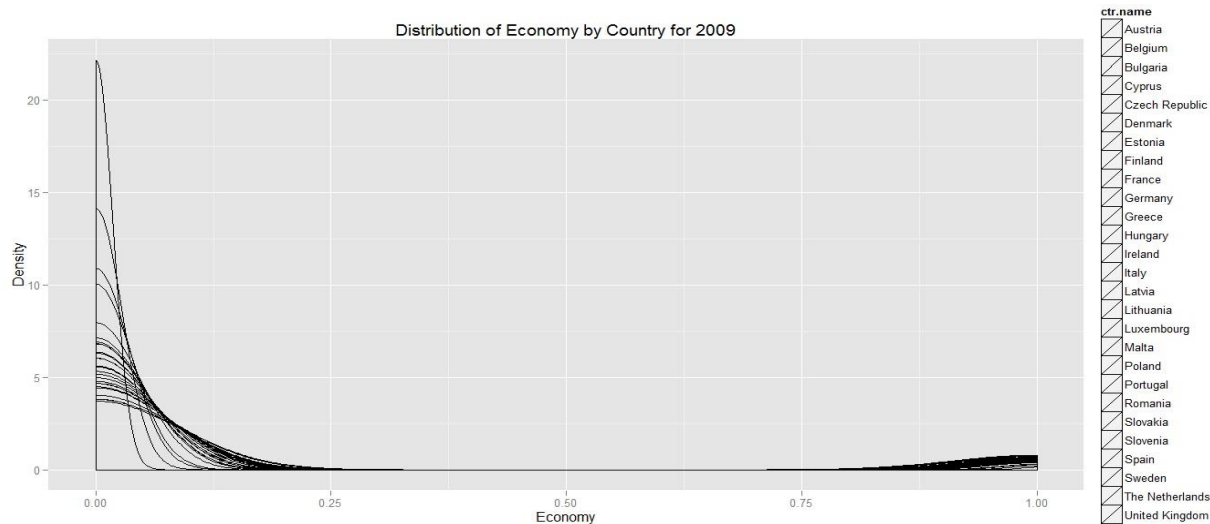


Figure A1. Distribution of economy by country for 2009.

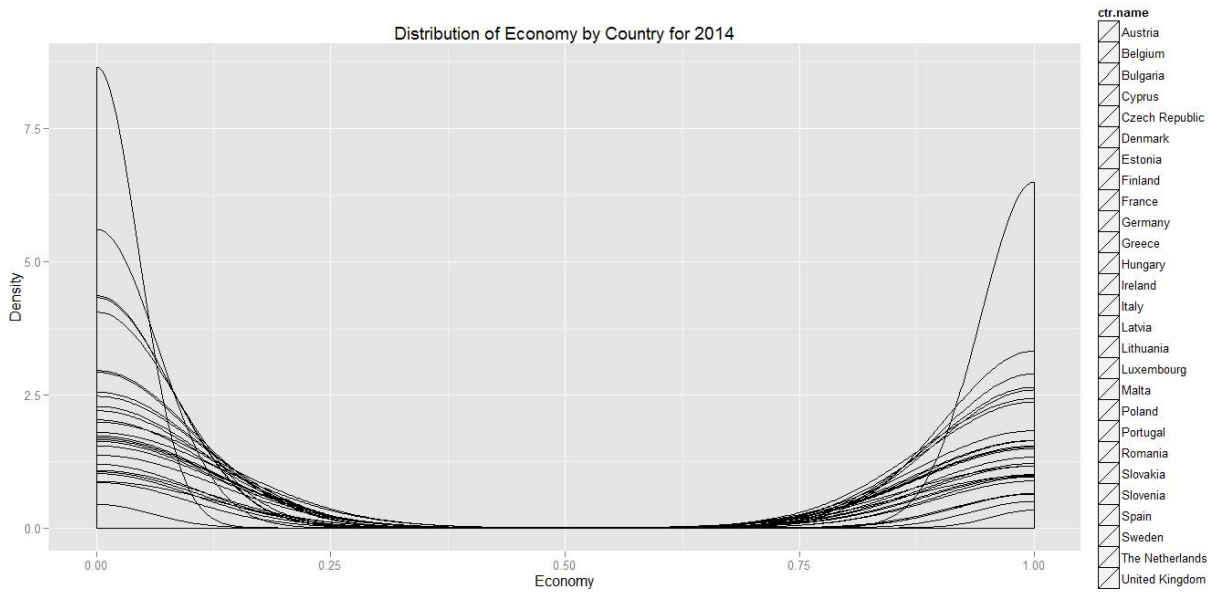


Figure A2. Distribution of economy by country for 2014.

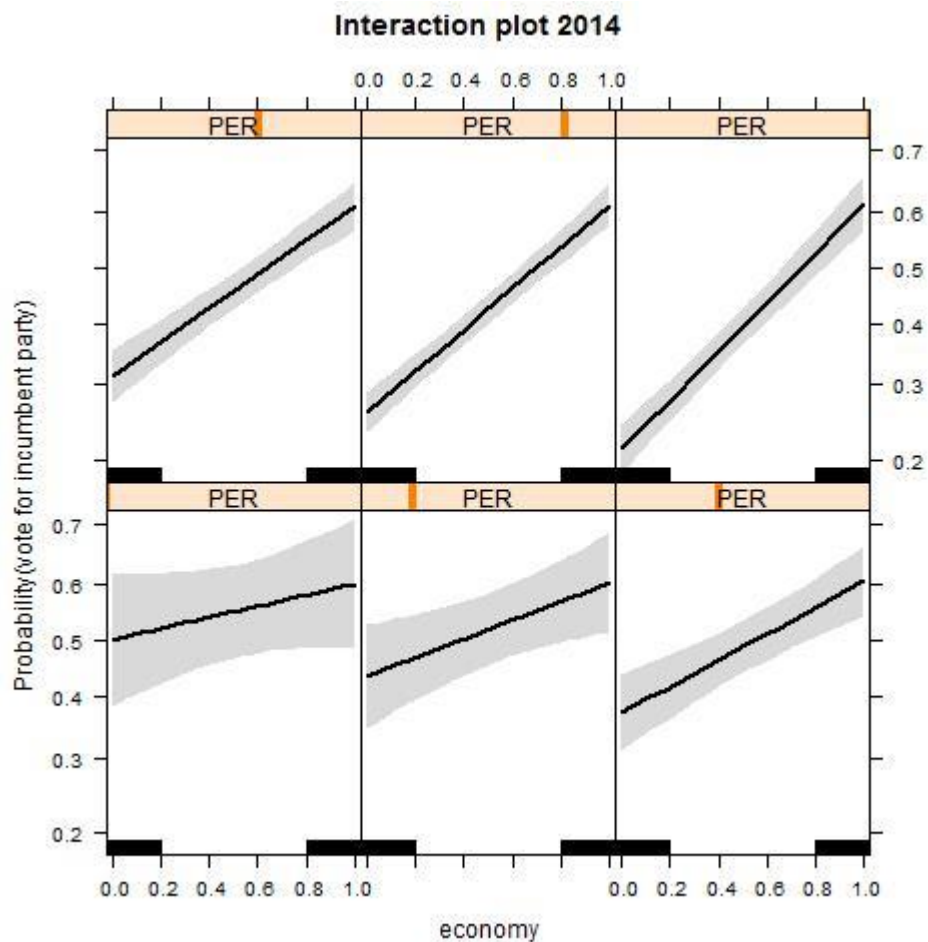


Figure A3. Interaction effect plots between economy and PER among Bailout countries for 2014 EP election. Note: The upper right plot indicates that PER is at the highest level. The lower left plot indicates that PER is at the lowest level.

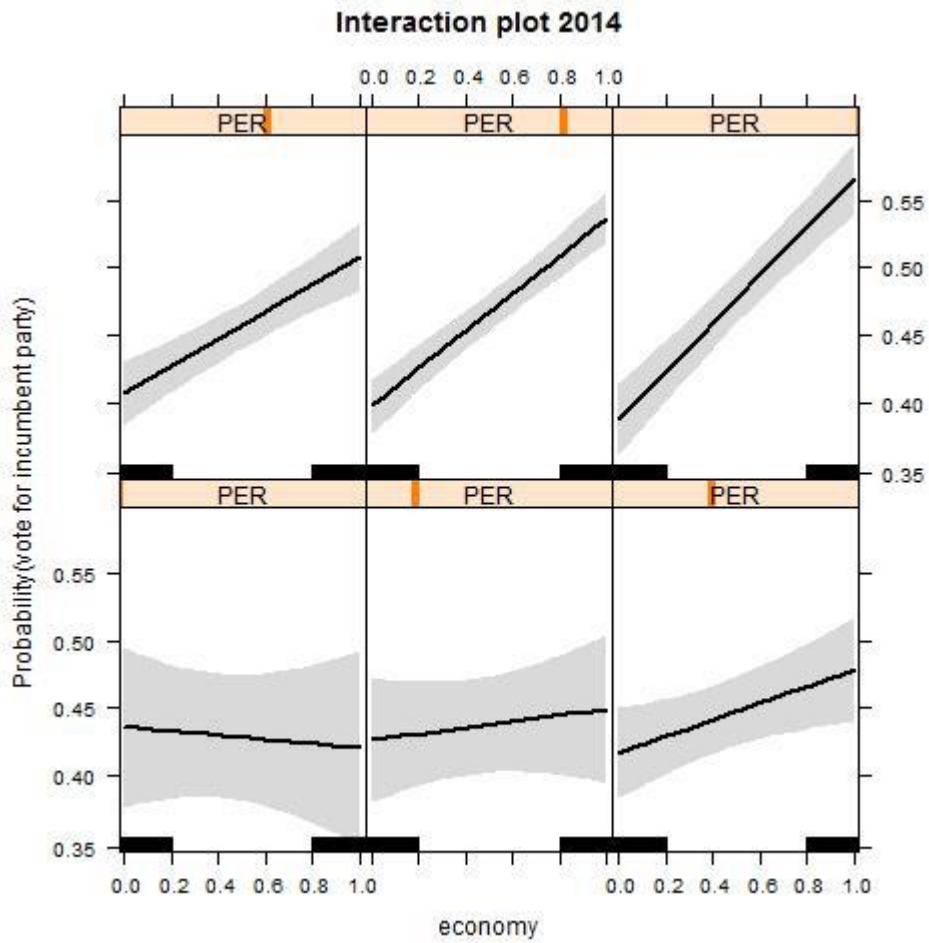


Figure A4. Interaction effect plots between economy and PER among non-bailout countries for 2014 EP election. Note: The upper right plot indicates that PER is at the highest level. The lower left plot indicates that PER is at the lowest level.

Article

European Parliament Elections of May 2014: Driven by National Politics or EU Policy Making?

Hermann Schmitt^{1,2} and İlke Toygür^{3,4,*}

¹ Department of Politics, University of Manchester, Manchester, M13 9PL, UK

² MZES, University of Mannheim, 68131 Mannheim, Germany; E-Mail: hermann.schmitt@mzes.uni-mannheim.de

³ Department of Political Science and International Relations, Autonomous University of Madrid, 28049 Madrid, Spain; E-Mail: ilke.toygur@uam.es

⁴ Istanbul Policy Center, Sabanci University, 34420 Istanbul, Turkey

* Corresponding author

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Abstract

The 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections took place in a very particular environment. Economic crisis, bailout packages, and austerity measures were central on the agenda in many Southern countries while open borders and intra-EU migration gained high salience elsewhere in the Union. A strong decline of political trust in European and national institutions was alarming. At the same time, the nomination and campaigning of “*Spitzenkandidaten*”, lead candidates of EP political groups for European Commission (EC) presidency, was meant to establish a new linkage between European Parliament elections and the (s)election of the president of the Commission. All of this might have changed the very nature of EP elections as second-order national elections. In this paper, we try to shed light on this by analysing aggregate election results, both at the country-level and at the party-level and compare them with the results of the preceding first-order national election in each EU member country. Our results suggest that the ongoing politicisation of EU politics had little impact on the second-order nature of European Parliament elections.

Keywords

economic crisis; EU policy scope; European Parliament elections; migration; second-order national elections

Issue

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1. Introduction: Same Question, Different Europe

Since the very first direct election of the members of the European Parliament (EP) in 1979, the question has been on the table various times: are European Parliament elections still second-order national elections? Is it still mainly national political dynamics that are affecting the voting behaviour of European citizens when they cast their votes in European Parliament elections, or do we find significant traces of EU policy voting? This paper seeks to answer this question for the European Parliament elections of late May 2014.

The European Union of 2014 and the direct elections of its parliament in this year differ from the past in a number of ways. First of all, since the first direct elections, the number of member countries has more than tripled and increased from 9 to 28. Today, the Union includes both the West and the East of the continent, with a lot of variation in electoral and party systems. Secondly, the power of the European Parliament has increased continuously, especially since the Lisbon Treaty. Based on Lisbon stipulations, and for the first time in the history of European Parliament elections, five political groups of the EP offered voters a say re-

garding the presidency of the EC by nominating their lead-candidates for the position ahead of the election. Thirdly, and perhaps not least importantly, the policy reach of the Union has increased continuously, and steeply, from the 1950s onwards (Wallace & Wallace, 2007). This can be demonstrated by the number of EU-initiated legislative acts that arrive in national parliaments for ratification. Since this number is roughly (though not exactly, as not every country is part of every treaty) the same for all EU member countries, it may suffice to study its evolution over the years in Germany (Figure 1). It becomes very clear here that the EU has become an ever more important legislator in all of its member-countries, and in quite a wide range of policy domains (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Schmitt, 2005).

This is the quantitative aspect of the history of the legislative activity of the European Union. For a more qualitative perspective, it might be useful to concentrate on two major EU political projects: the single European market and, in particular, the open borders policy, and the single European currency and the complementary common monetary policy. Both of these policies are said to have had positive consequences regarding the stimulation of economic growth (European Commission, 2015). However, according to the neo-neo-functional theory of European integration (Niemann & Schmitter, 2009; Schmitter, 2005), they are at the same time likely to have caused unintended political side effects of a more critical nature. With regard to the four freedoms of the single European market—open borders for goods, persons, services and capital—the free movement of persons is said to have posed challenges to national identity (Hooghe & Marks, 2009) and social security (Kriesi, 2009; Kriesi et al., 2006). On the side of the economic and public debt crisis, and the monetary policies of the Eurozone that were agreed to counter it, it seems that austerity policies imposed by the EU on debtor countries have had electoral consequences, diminishing electoral support for government parties (Magalhães, 2014) and favouring Eurosceptical parties (Kriesi, 2014). For obvious reasons, this has been more profound in Southern Europe (Bosco & Verney, 2012; Freire, Teperoglou, & Moury, 2014; Verney & Bosco, 2013) than elsewhere, but there are also Western European (*Alternative für Deutschland*) and Northern European (True Finns) examples pointing in that direction.

In this paper, we set out to assess the effects of these EU policies on the results of the European Parliament elections of May 2014. We will do so by comparing EU-policy effects on the support base of political parties with the more conventional second-order elections (SOE) baseline model. We proceed as follows: we first recapitulate the theoretical background of second-order elections and present the basic hypotheses that are customarily derived from it. We confront these with a set of alternative hypotheses focussing on the

potential electoral consequences of EU policy making. Following this, we proceed to briefly present our database, and to test our hypotheses. The last section offers an intermediate conclusion and discusses questions for future research.

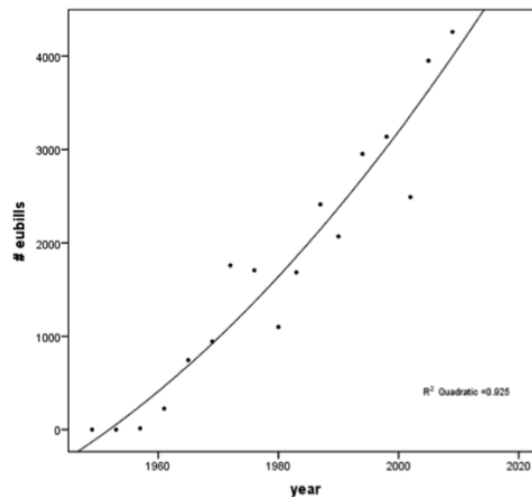


Figure 1. The increase of EU-initiated legislative acts arriving at the German Federal Parliament. Source: Deutscher Bundestag, 2014; Feldkamp, 2010, 2014.

2. Still Second-Order?

In the aftermath of the first direct election of the members of the European Parliament in June 1979, the concept of second-order national elections was proposed in order to understand the outcome of these novel kinds of supranational but still “less important” elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980). Back then, multi-level governance was novel territory in Europe (arguably with the exception of federal Germany, Spain with its autonomous regions, and the special case of Switzerland). The policy reach of the Union was still limited (see again Figure 1), and the powers of the European Parliament were limited too. In such an environment, EP elections were far from deciding who is “in power” in the European Union (or the European Community as it was called back then). National first-order elections determined the composition of national parliaments and governments, and thereby had an impact on European policy making by affecting the composition of the Council of Ministers. In European Parliament elections, therefore, voters did not cast their votes to choose the best candidates for governing the EU, but they did support or oppose parties and candidates primarily for national reasons (Kuechler, 1991). Characteristic of those second-order elections is that there is less-at-stake than in really important elections. The second-order elections model was developed for Western Europe and amended and revised by various scholars (Ferrara & Weishaupt, 2004; Marsh, 1998; Norris & Reif, 1997; Reif, 1984). After the big enlargement of

the Union in 2004 which incorporated at once eight Eastern European countries plus Cyprus and Malta, things have become more complicated again because of the relative electoral instability of the new Eastern member countries. New research reflecting on those effects has been added to the literature (e.g., Hix & Marsh, 2011; Koepke & Ringe, 2006; Schmitt, 2005).

In this paper we analyse the 2014 European Parliament elections in order to see whether they still fit the original claim. While we realise that SOE research has progressed over the years quite considerably—for example with regard to the analysis of micro-foundations of voting behaviour in EP elections (Carrubba & Timpone, 2005; Hobolt & Spoon, 2012; Hobolt & Wittrock, 2011; Schmitt, Sanz, & Braun, 2009; Weber, 2011)—we believe that the original predictions of the SOE model are still the main manifestation of it. In what follows, we will confront those original predictions with an alternative model that focuses on EU-policies. In the original set of hypotheses based on national politics, a first prediction is that fewer voters participate in these elections simply because there is “less-at-stake”. Second-order elections are less politicised and electoral mobilisation is lower than in first-order elections. These reasons behind low participation rates have been investigated in a steadily growing body of research. The results of these studies depend a bit on the research design and the richness of the set of control variables introduced in micro-level models of electoral participation. Overall, the findings suggest that non-voting in European Parliament elections is normally not caused by Euroscepticism and hence not a sign of a legitimacy crisis of the European Union (Franklin, 2001; Schmitt, 2005; Schmitt & Mannheimer, 1991; van der Eijk & Schmitt, 2009) but see also Blondel, Sinnott, and Svensson (1998) for the opposite view. This first hypothesis thus predicts:

H1: Participation is lower in EP elections, compared to the preceding national first-order election.

The second prediction of the second-order national election model claims that national government parties do worse compared to national first-order elections since a number of voters will punish them for the—unavoidable—disappointments they have caused in the national political arena. This kind of punishment can be realised as vote switching away from government parties (when first-order voters support a party other than the previously chosen government party) or as abstention (when first-order government voters abstain in EP elections).

H2: Government parties’ vote shares decline in EP elections, compared to the previous national first-order election.

In addition, it has been proposed that the size of the

government parties’ losses follows a pattern which is related to the national electoral cycle. Already in the 1970, US scholars found that the popularity of the US president follows a cyclical pattern with a post-electoral euphoria right after the victory, a decline in popularity roughly until mid-term, and a gradual recovery in the approach to the subsequent on-year election (Campbell, 1993; Stimson, 1976; Tufte, 1975). Similar phenomena has been confirmed for state elections in Germany (Dinkel, 1978; Schmitt & Reif, 2003), less important elections in Portugal (Freire, 2004), and for by-elections in Britain (Norris, 1990). Second-order European Parliament election results were also found to be shaped by the national electoral cycle (Reif, 1984; Reif & Schmitt, 1980). As first-order national elections are held at different times relative to the date of the EP election, the timing of the latter within the national electoral cycles differs between the EU member countries.

H3: Government parties’ losses follow the national electoral cycle and are more severe towards midterm.

Since second-order elections are “less-important” we assume that there will be less strategic voting than in first-order elections. Strategic voting means that citizens vote for a party other than their most preferred one in order to be able to affect the outcome of the elections (Blais, Nadeau, Gidengil, & Nevitte, 2001). In the first-order electoral arena, strategic voting is expected to strengthen the support for larger parties, since they are more likely to govern. Supporting them reduces the danger of wasting one’s vote. In second-order elections, however, as there is less-at-stake, the consequences of wasting one’s vote are less severe. It is therefore expected that more citizens (in relative terms) cast their vote for smaller parties even if there is no realistic possibility for them to gain parliamentary representation and affect public policy. We therefore expect:

H4: Small parties do better in EP elections, compared to their results in first-order national elections.

Our second set of hypotheses goes beyond the original SOE model and focusses on the impact of EU initiated policies on European Parliament election results. While this possibility was not ignored in the original statement of the model (cf. Reif & Schmitt, 1980, p. 11), it was certainly less prominent than it is today. This perspective adds another two predictions to the original four as we concentrate here on two key EU policies. Both of them originate in the Single European Market project: the policy of open borders and that of a common currency and hence a common monetary policy.

The first EU-initiated policy with alleged consequences for electoral behaviour originates in one of the

four liberties of the Single European Market—the free movement of persons (European Union, 2004). As a result of the completion of the Single European Market in general and the Schengen agreement in particular, the open border policy and intra-EU migration has become a salient political issue long before the refugee crisis that dominates the news at the time of writing. Immigration and national identity are particularly salient issues for parties on the right and the extreme right of the political spectrum (Golder, 2003; Meyer & Rosenberger, 2015; Mudde, 1999; Yilmaz, 2012). As the consequences of the politics of open borders are directly attributable to EU-level policies, our fifth hypothesis predicts:

H5: Parties on the extreme right do better in European Parliament elections as compared to first-order national elections the higher the share of immigrants is in the national population.

The second EU initiated policy with potential consequences for electoral behaviour is the common monetary policy within the Eurozone, and here in particular the “no bail-out clause” (Art. 125 Lisbon Treaty) which makes it illegal for one EU member country to assume the debts of another. This has to be seen in conjunction with the so-called “stability and growth pact” of the Economic and Monetary Union of which all EU member-countries (members and non-members of the Eurozone) are part. This pact sets upper limits for government deficit (3% GDP) and debt (60% GDP) which when breached has severe consequences for the fiscal and budgetary autonomy of a member-country. This is the legal basis of the austerity policy of the Eurozone government which in large parts of Southern Europe has caused economic crises, high unemployment (youth unemployment in particular), social unrest and political protest, and electoral realignments. These phenomena were not restricted to bailout countries or countries with extraordinarily high public debt. Ahead of the 2014 elections to the European Parliament, in Greece, Spain, and Portugal—the most prominent debtor countries of the Eurozone—public protests against the austerity policy of the Eurozone government (the “Troika” of European Commission, IMF and ECB) were dominating the news. On the other side of this new economic cleavage in Europe, in the creditor countries, the critique about the risks of the common currency has lent support to new Eurosceptical parties even where nothing like this was known before (as in Germany for example). At the same time, public support for European integration went down dramatically both in debtor countries suffering from economic consequences of severe austerity measures and, somewhat less so, in the creditor countries (Roth, Nowak-Lehmann D., & Otter, 2013). Given this background, we formulate our final hypothesis as follows:

H6: Compared to their first-order national election results, Eurosceptic parties do better within the Eurozone than outside.

3. Data and Methods

We test our hypotheses on the basis of data provided by the European Parliament itself, on its websites reporting on the official results of the 2014 elections (European Parliament, 2014). Comparable information regarding the previous national election results is taken from the “Parties and Elections” database (Nordsieck, 2015). This database provides information on parliamentary elections in European countries since 1945. Immigration rates are from the Eurostat database, migration and migrant population statistics (Eurostat, 2015). Left-right positions and anti-/pro-European integration positions are mean party locations as perceived by their respective national citizenry. In the case of left and right, left is on the low (=zero) side of the scale while right is on the high (=10) side. For the European integration dimension, 0 indicates “integration has gone too far”, while 10 indicates “integration should be pushed further”. Data are from the 2014 European Election Study (EES) surveys, first and second waves (Schmitt, Hobolt, & Popa, 2015). We use the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) index to determine the format of a party system in consecutive first-order and second-order elections (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979). As will be discussed in detail below, we use this index to test H4. The dataset of Gallagher provides ENEP data for national elections (Gallagher, 2014) and the same formula has been used to calculate comparable data for European Parliament elections.

National-level hypotheses are tested in a bivariate manner, by plotting FOE results against EP election results (e.g. for turnout, government party support, etc.) This step of the analysis is based on 28 cases (member countries). Party-level hypotheses are tested in a multi-level model using the lme4 package of R (version 1.1-7) with 160 cases (parties represented in the European Parliament) on the first level and 28 cases (member countries) on the second.

3.1. Was Participation Lower?

One of the most fundamental assumptions of the second-order elections model is that participation is lower compared to first-order elections, since politicisation and electoral mobilisation is deficient. In addition to the unfavourable comparison with turnout rates at first-order elections, a steady decrease was observed in the participation in EP elections since 1979.¹

¹ The EU-wide turnout rates for the EP elections were: 62% in 1979, 59% in 1984, 58% in 1989, 57% in 1994, 50% in 1999, 45% in 2004, 43% in 2009 and finally again 43% in 2014.

Was turnout in the 2014 election lower than in the preceding first-order election? In order to test this expectation against reality, we compare the respective turnout levels. Figure 2 shows the results of this analysis. We find that participation in the 2014 EP elections is systematically lower than it was in the preceding FOEs of the member states. Exceptions to this rule are Belgium and, to a lesser degree, Luxembourg. Belgium and Luxembourg are organising general elections under a compulsory voting regime, though in Luxembourg this applies only to citizens under 75 years of age. This is why participation in these two countries is about as high as it was in the previous national elections—there is no additional electoral mobilisation necessary there.

In addition to this, Belgium ran simultaneously first-order elections and provincial elections together with the election of the members of the European Parliament. Surprisingly enough, the recorded participation rate for the Belgian EP election is 90 per cent, while it is 88.5 for the simultaneous national first-order election. Belgium then is the only country with a somewhat higher turnout rate in the EP election. Another country that does not really meet our expectations is Greece (EL=Ellada) where electoral participation was very close (only 2.5 per cent lower) to the level of the previous election of the members of the national parliament. As Greece was (and still is) one of the hardest-hit countries in the current financial crisis, we might see this as an indication that the Euro crisis has contributed to the politicisation of EU policies and hence to electoral mobilisation there.

Furthermore there are huge differences in partici-

pation rates between member countries. The five countries with the lowest participation are all Eastern European which share a communist background of un-free elections. The lowest participation rate of all is recorded in Slovakia with only 13.05 per cent. This is the lowest rate ever recorded in a European Parliament election. Slovakia is followed by the Czech Republic with 18.2 per cent, Poland with 23.83 per cent, Slovenia with 24.55 per cent, and Croatia with 25.06 per cent. The highest participation rates among member states, after Belgium and Luxembourg, are recorded in Malta, Greece, Italy, Denmark and Ireland. It is important to underline that there are three crisis countries in the list, even if participation rates were lower than in national elections. The Eurozone crisis and the subsequent politicisation of EU policies seem to have stimulated electoral participation (see Appendix for a detailed table of participation rates).

3.2. Did Government Parties Lose?

Another central prediction of the second-order elections model is that governing parties lose support while opposition parties win. These kinds of elections, it is argued, are frequently used to punish the parties of the incumbent government. In EP election of 2014, this prediction is valid for 20 of the 28 member countries. In four cases (Austria, Belgium, Finland, and Lithuania), governing parties (including parties participating in government coalitions) were able to gain a modestly higher proportion of the valid vote compared to what they had in the last first-order election;

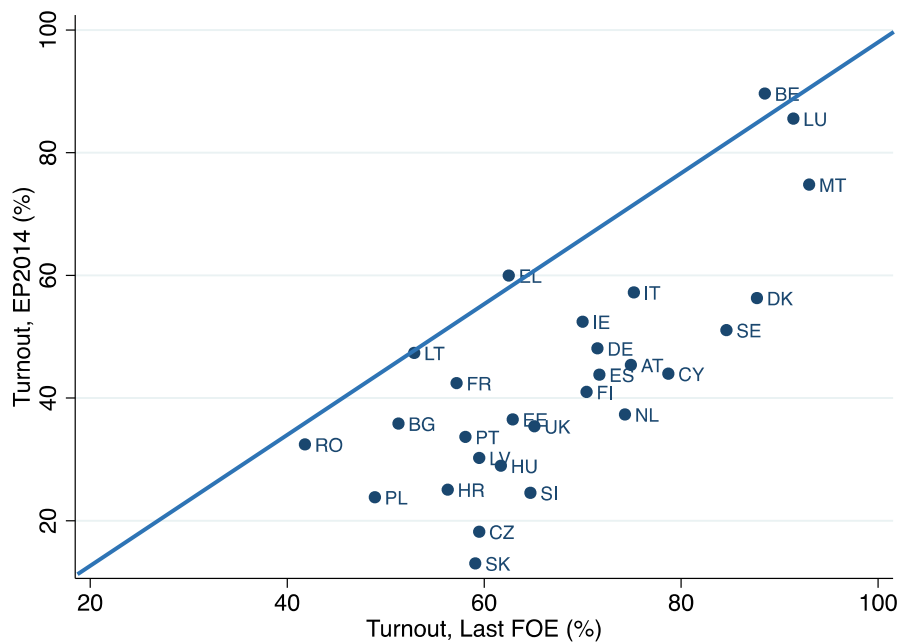


Figure 2. Participation rates in the European Election of 2014 and the preceding FOE.

however the difference in each case is small—less than 3 per cent on average. Two other cases are Hungary and Italy. Hungary ran national elections in April 2014, and the European Parliament election was organised very shortly thereafter. This seems to be a clear case of a post-electoral euphoria. In Italy, the case is similar in substance but somewhat different in the proceedings. The Italian government changed its Prime Minister in February 2014. The positive resonance of the incoming new, young, and energetic leader can therefore be equally understood as a source of post-electoral euphoria (Segatti, Poletti, & Vezzoni, 2015). Figure 3 shows vote shares of government parties in the 2014 European Parliament elections and the preceding first-order national election.

The case of Latvia is another exception to the second-order rule of government losses in second-order elections. Three years after the previous first-order election the governing coalition increased its share of votes. This again has a simple and straightforward explanation: Latvia went through a Prime Minister (PM) change in January 2014. The country's new PM, Laimdota Straujuma was backed by an expanded four-party coalition, including the Unity, two Green parties, and the National Alliance (*The Economist*, 2014).

Turning to the final exception of Slovenia we note that the country ran early elections in July 2014—one month after the EP election in May—after the resignation of the previous government in May. So we assume that the political verdict about the new government was already taken at the moment of the European Parliament election and the subsequent national first-

order election was only rubber-stamping the decision from late May.

3.3. Do Government Losses Follow the National Electoral Cycle?

The second-order elections model not only claims that governments are expected to lose support in these kinds of elections, it also claims that these losses follow the first-order electoral cycle. We have already referred to this cycle when talking about post-electoral euphoria. Earlier research has shown that this regularity is less visible in the new member countries from Eastern Europe (Schmitt, 2005). This was understood as resulting from a lesser degree of saturation of the post-communist party systems originating from the much weaker ties between voters and parties (Schmitt & Scheuer, 2012).

Figure 4 identifies a modest relationship between the differences in governing parties (or coalitions) vote shares and the proportion of national electoral cycle that was completed at the time when the 2004 EP election was held.

We find the expected curvilinear pattern: on average, governing parties lose most around midterm, and do comparatively better shortly after the last and shortly ahead of the next first-order election. There are a lot of cases that do not really follow that pattern, and the relationship is therefore not very strong. However, it is stronger in the West of Europe with its well-established party systems than it is in the much younger and weaker party systems of the new democracies in the East (as is shown in the Appendix to this paper).

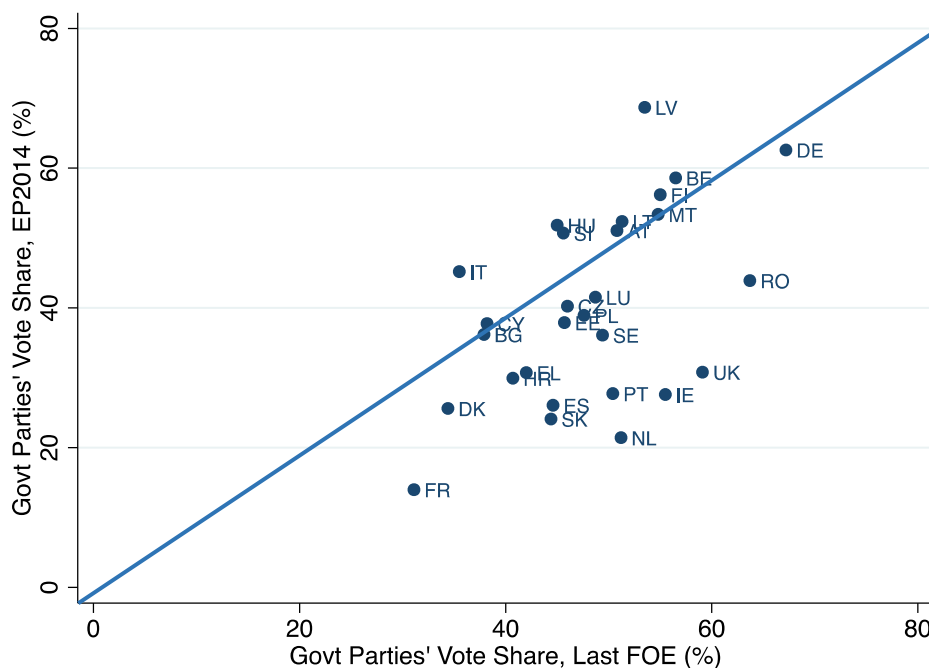


Figure 3. Vote share of government parties in the 2014 European Election compared to the preceding first-order national election.

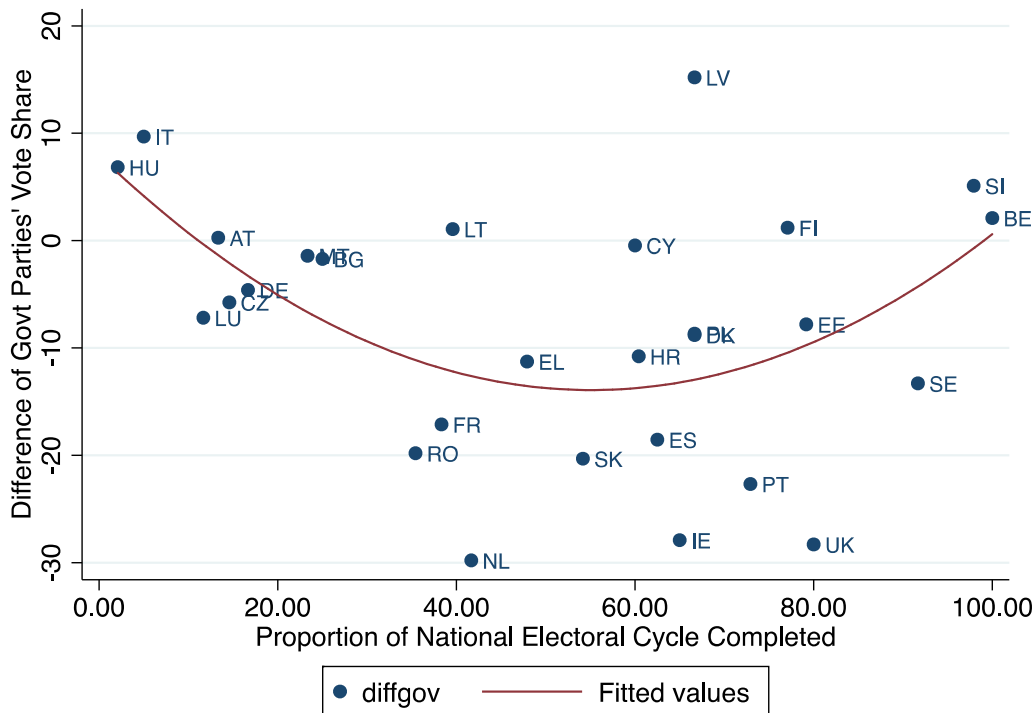


Figure 4. The electoral cycle and vote difference of the governing parties.

3.4. Do Big Parties Lose?

The last, but certainly not the least important assumption of the second-order elections model is related to the prevalent mechanism of vote choice. There are two basic mechanisms—sincere and strategic voting (Alvarez & Nagler, 2000). The model claims that, since there is less-at-stake, citizens have less of an incentive to vote strategically. Instead, they are free to cast their vote in a sincere manner and support their first electoral preference, rather than another (larger, stronger, more likely to govern) party for deliberate reasons. For testing the hypothesis, we need to discriminate small parties from large parties. There is no consensus however on the issue of at what proportion of votes small parties end and large parties begin. For this reason, we compare the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) in a party system both at the EP election and at the previous first-order election. Comparing these two numbers, we expect the index value for the European Parliament elections to be larger—thus indicating a larger number of effective parties in second-order elections. Figure 5 shows the results of this comparison.

Small parties did better in almost all of the EU members, sometimes considerably better. Spain is the first country to mention here since the ENEP has increased by 3.42 points. Even if the reasons are complex and require further study (Cordero & Montero, 2015), we are tempted to speak about a party system change and are not surprised that the significance of smaller parties continued in the 2015 national first-order elec-

tion. The Netherlands follows Spain, with a 3.06 increase in the effective number of parties compared to the 2012 elections.

We can also see that in Romania and Sweden small parties did better. However, there are also some borderline countries, such as Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, and Lithuania in which the ENEP number remained effectively unchanged. Only in Croatia, Italy and Latvia there is a certain decline in ENEP from the national elections to the 2014 European Parliament election, these are the countries that do not support the prediction. Overall, however, the large majority of countries support the theoretical expectation.

3.5. Do EU Policies Affect the Vote in EP Elections?

We turn to testing our two final hypotheses. They state that parties on the right gain in EP elections when immigration is high (H5), and that Eurosceptical parties gain in EP elections when the country belongs to the Eurozone (H6). The dependent variable here is the percentage point gain (or loss) of a party in the European Parliament election of 2014 compared to its result in the last national election. We test these expectations in such a way that their additional contribution (in addition to the indicators specified by the SOEs model) to our understanding of the EP election results is identified (Table 1).

Before we turn to testing these hypotheses, we first have a look at the performance of our well-known SOE indicators in this party-level analysis. What we find

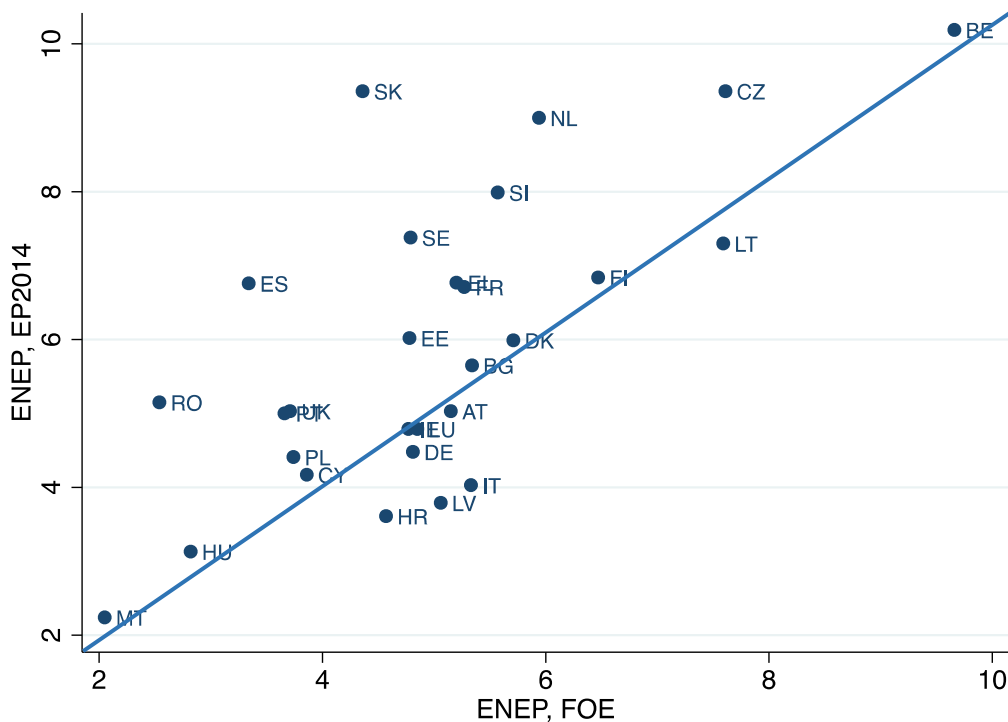


Figure 5. Effective number of parties: EP2014 and the preceding first-order national election.

Table 1. Explaining parties’ gains and losses from the preceding first-order election to the European Election of 2014: A multivariate perspective.

	Model 1: Empty model	Model 2: Basic model	Model 3: Full model
Fixed effects			
Intercept	-0.134 (0.556)	2.471 (3.098)	5.121*** (1.391)
Electoral cycle		-0.010 (0.041)	-0.022 (0.039)
Party in government		-5.291** (2.135)	-4.807** (2.092)
Party size		-0.315*** (0.043)	-0.301*** (0.042)
Party left-right position		0.394 (0.276)	0.378 (0.316)
Party EU support		0.033 (0.500)	-1.971** (0.899)
Share of migrants in country		0.037 (0.074)	0.038 (0.070)
Eurozone member		0.008 (0.979)	0.194 (0.913)
Cycle * government		0.166** (0.072)	0.154** (0.072)
Left-right pos’n * migration			-0.007 (0.054)
EU support * Eurozone			2.878** (1.046)
Random effects (variance)			
Intercept	0	2.042	0.846
Left-right position		0.666	1.879
EU support		1.117	1.218
Residuals	49.1	30.250	27.786
N party/country	159/28	159/28	159/28
Log Likelihood	-535	-500	-593
AIC	1075	1032	1027

Note: * denotes $p < 0.1$; ** denote $p < 0.05$; *** denote $p < 0.005$. All country-level variables (i.e. share of migrants) are grand mean centred. All level 1 variables with random slopes (i.e. left-right position and EU support) are group mean centred.

is quite comforting: the factors of the SOEs model work well at the party-level and confirm our insights from the country-level analysis. We see that small parties win—the larger the party, the higher the losses in EP elections; this is in fact our strongest effect. We also find that national government parties lose in European elections; this effect is statistically significant but considerably weaker compared to the size effect. And last but not least, we find that government parties' losses are moderated by the position of the EP election in the national electoral cycle—they do relatively better, the further away the EP election is to national midterm; this is again a somewhat more modest but statistically significant effect. Model 2 includes, in addition, a number of main effect variables (like share of immigrants and left-right position of party) for merely statistical reasons—we are only interested in their interaction with one another and will not consider them in any greater detail here.

3.6. Do Parties on the Right Win in EP Elections When the Share of Immigrants in a Country Is High?

We do not find any trace of such a mechanism. The interaction between the left–right position of a political party and the proportion of immigrants is not only insignificant but its miniscule effect is also pointing in the wrong direction. It could of course be that this interaction is superseded by the party size variable and manifest itself if the latter would be omitted as a control variable. However, party size is a much more general factor at work on the left and the right.

So we conclude that the free movement of people as one of the core freedoms of the Single European

Market does not benefit the parties on the right in particular. But why then have UKIP and FN had such a spectacular result in the 2014 EP election? Part of an answer could be that different electoral systems are used in national and EP elections in both countries—and that majoritarian systems as applied in national first-order elections in both Britain and France benefit large, centrist parties. Another part could be the weakness of the national government in both countries at the time of the election. However, both arguments do not point to the domain of EU policy making.

3.7. Do Eurosceptic Parties Win If They Compete Within a Eurozone Country?

This is our second EU policy based hypothesis—Eurosceptical parties are expected to win in EP elections as a result of the frictions around the public debt crisis in large parts of the South of the Union. A first quick look at the respective coefficient in Model 3 of Table 1 seems to support the expectation. However, plotting the relative electoral gains and losses of political parties for both Eurozone members and non-members tells us something else (Figure 6).

What we see here is that within the Eurozone, Eurosceptical parties are doing somewhat worse in EP elections than they have done in the previous national first-order election. This effect is very weak and statistically not significant. Outside the Eurozone, however, we find a quite strong opposite effect: Eurosceptical parties do considerably better in EP elections than they have done in the previous national first-order election. In 2014, the turmoil within the Eurozone benefitted Eurosceptic parties of countries that were not part of it.

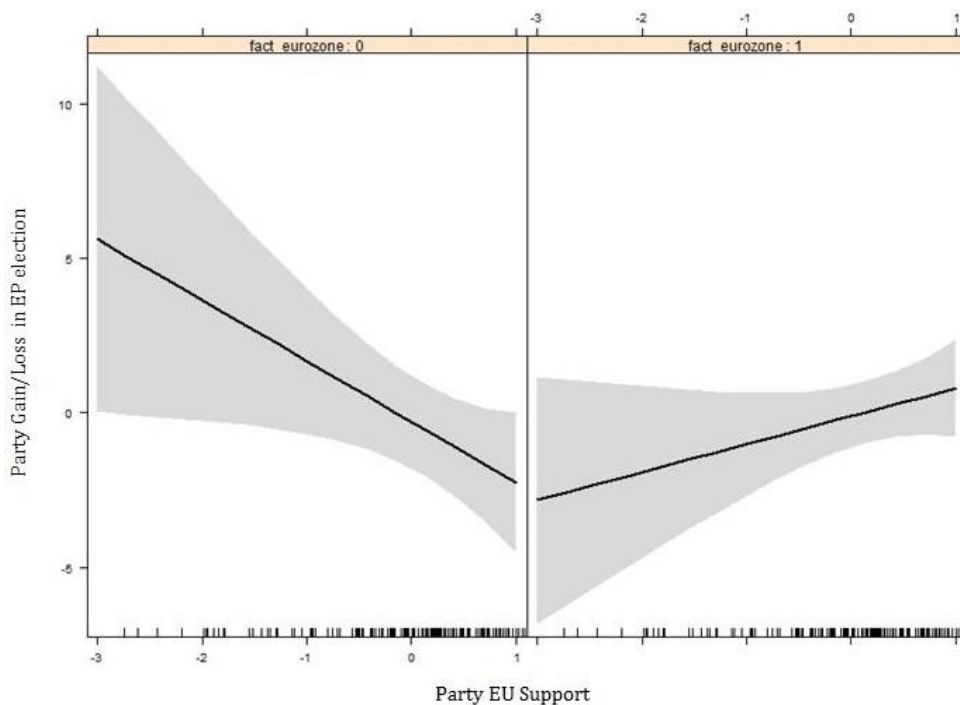


Figure 6. Predicted gain-loss of political parties by their EU support within and outside the Eurozone.

4. Conclusion

This article aims to understand the main dynamics in the 2014 elections of the members of the European Parliament. Two rival expectations are investigated—the second-order national elections model and the EU policy scenario.

According to the first, European citizens decide about their representatives in Brussels mainly according to national criteria. From Reif and Schmitt (1980) onwards, various authors have assessed the “second-orderness” of EP elections, mostly confirming the original predictions. This paper asks the same question for the May 2014 elections, which were held after six years of economic crisis and various political changes in Europe.

According to the second scenario, citizens are impressed by the consequences of the growing scope of EU policy making (we concentrate here on intra EU migration and the Eurozone crisis) and support Eurosceptical parties as a consequence in European Parliament elections. In this second view, it is the policies of the European Union—more specifically the Single European Market and the European Monetary Union—that offers the main stimulus for electoral behaviour, not the national political process.

After testing the second-order elections assumptions, we conclude that in general they still hold. The first prediction we have tested is that participation is lower in EP elections compared to the preceding FOEs in the member-countries. We found it is still valid. The only country where some doubts arose is Greece where electoral participation in the EP election was very close to the participation rate in the preceding FOE.

Another important assumption of the model is that government parties (or members of government coalitions) lose support. This prediction holds up as well, but there are a number of deviant cases. Some of them can be explained as post-election euphoria, while others require further investigation. When we look for the relationship between these losses and the national electoral cycle we conclude that governing parties lose the most at around midterm and do comparatively better shortly after and ahead of subsequent elections. The national electoral cycle is still a stronger moderator of government parties’ losses in the consolidated party systems of Western Europe as compared to the post-communist party systems of Eastern Europe. The fourth assumption was that small parties do better in the EP elections. This was also corroborated. In most of the Member States the “effective numbers of electoral parties” (ENEP) is higher in EP elections than it is in national first-order elections. Among the larger consolidated electoral systems under study, the special case of Spain needs to be mentioned here. In Spain, the effective number of parties rose to 3.42 index points, which might well point towards a severe party system change.

So the “second-orderness” of European Parliament elections, in its main aspects, has again been confirmed. Does this also mean that the EU policy scenario failed to inform our understanding of the 2014 EP election results? This is what we find in our exemplary analysis. Parties on the right do not gain more support under conditions of high immigration; and Eurosceptic parties do not systematically gain more support within the Eurozone versus outside of it—on the contrary, the opposite seems to be the case.

All in all, we can say that the assumptions of the second-order elections model are still valid. The 2014 European Parliament elections were second-order elections, and the politicisation of European Union politics did not really discourage the predictions of the second-order model. The “indirect” election of the President of the European Commission in the course of the 2014 European Parliament election—which has been referred to as the *Spitzenkandidaten plot* (Schmimmelpfennig, 2014)—did not change the institutional context in such a way that these elections would have lost their second-order character. However, future research will have to have an eye on these developments.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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About the Authors



Dr. Hermann Schmitt

Hermann Schmitt is a Professor of Political Science. He holds a Chair in Electoral Politics at the University of Manchester and is a research fellow of the MZES and a Professor at the University of Mannheim. He has been participating in a number of comparative projects; perhaps most important is his involvement, from 1979 on, in the series of European Election Studies. He received substantial research grants from European, German and British institutions. He is the author and editor of numerous books and articles on electoral behavior in multilevel-systems and on political representation in the European Union.



Ilke Toygür

Ilke Toygür is a PhD Candidate at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (UAM), Department of Political Science and International Relations and a Mercator-IPC Fellow in Istanbul Policy Center, Sabancı University. Her main academic research areas include European Union integration, political parties, and elections in Europe. She has been teaching various courses including “Elections and Political Behaviour” and “Politics and Government in the European Union” both in English and in Spanish. She has been a visiting researcher in the European University Institute, Florence and MZES, University of Mannheim.

Appendix

Table A1. Turnout rates in FOEs and EP Elections. Source: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu>

Country	Turnout FOE (Year)	Turnout EP2009	Turnout FOE (Year)	Turnout EP2014
AT	78.8 (2008)	45.97	74.9 (2013)	45.39
BE	91.1 (2007)	90.39	88.5 (2014)	89.64
BG	60.2 (2009)	38.99	51.3 (2013)	35.84
HR	59.5 (2007)	20.84	56.3 (2011)	25.06
CY	89 (2006)	59.4	78.7 (2011)	43.97
CZ	64.5 (2007)	28.22	59.5 (2013)	18.2
DK	86.5 (2006)	59.54	87.7 (2011)	56.3
EE	61 (2007)	43.9	62.9 (2011)	36.52
FI	67.9 (2007)	38.6	70.4 (2011)	41
FR	60.2 (2007)	40.63	57.2 (2012)	42.43
DE	70.8 (2009)	43.27	71.5 (2013)	48.1
EL	70.92 (2009)	52.61	62.5 (2012-II)	59.97
HU	67.8 (2006)	36.31	61.7 (2014)	28.97
IE	67 (2007)	58.64	70 (2011)	52.44
IT	80.5 (2008)	65.05	75.2 (2013)	57.22
LV	61 (2006)	53.7	59.5 (2011)	30.24
LT	48.6 (2008)	20.98	52.9 (2012)	47.35
LU	85.2 (2009)	90.76	91.4 (2013)	85.55
MT	93.3 (2008)	78.79	93 (2013)	74.8
NL	80.4 (2006)	36.75	74.3 (2012)	37.32
PL	53.8 (2007)	24.53	48.9 (2011)	23.83
PT	59.7 (2007)	36.77	58.1 (2011)	33.67
RO	39.2 (2008)	27.67	41.8 (2012)	32.44
SK	54.7 (2006)	19.64	59.1 (2012)	13.05
SI	63.1 (2008)	28.37	64.7 (2011)	24.55
ES	73.9 (2008)	44.87	71.7 (2011)	43.81
SE	82 (2006)	45.53	84.6 (2010)	51.07
UK	61.3 (2006)	34.7	65.1 (2010)	35.4

Note: There have been six national elections in 2014. Hungary had one in April 2014 and Belgium had simultaneous first-order and EP elections. However, Bulgaria (Oct.), Latvia (Oct.), Slovenia (July) and Sweden (Sept.) had them after May 2014 elections. For this reason, they are not included in this table.

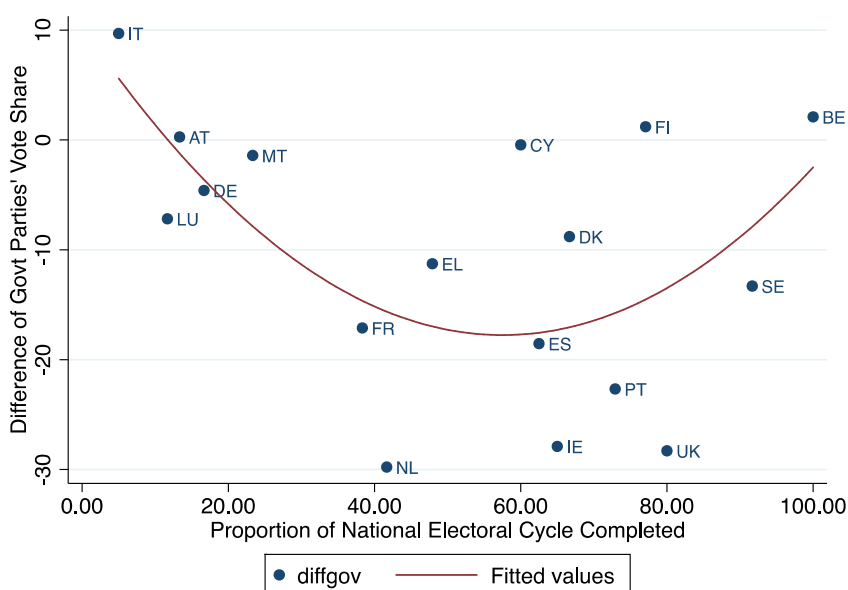


Figure A1. The electoral cycle and vote difference of the governing parties, for Western Europe.

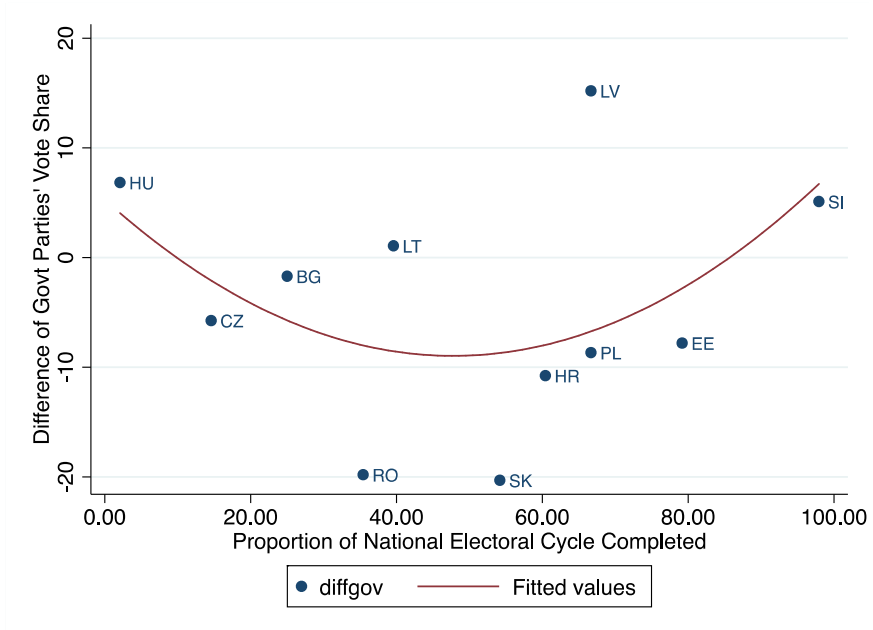


Figure A2. The electoral cycle and vote difference of the governing parties, for Eastern Europe.

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