What type of Europe? The salience of polity and policy issues in European Parliament elections

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Abstract

How much and why do political parties emphasize Europe in election campaigns? The literature is increasingly focusing on two aspects of party issue competition: position and salience. However, recent studies on salience tend to ignore the fact that Europe is a compound political issue. This article contributes to the debate by highlighting the crucial difference between constitutive and policy-related European issues. Using data from the Euromanifestos Project for 14 EU member states for the period 1979–2009, we first show that Europe is much more salient in European Parliament elections than previously assumed. Second, EU issue salience depends on party position and party system polarization over European integration. However, different explanations come into play once we bring in the polity-vs.-policy distinction. This has important implications for our understanding of party competition on European integration.

Keywords

European elections, European integration, manifestos, party competition, salience

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Introduction: Disentangling European integration

By now, it is no longer contested that European integration has become an object of public controversy in party politics. The politicization of Europe – to take up the term revitalized by Hooghe and Marks (2009) to capture this phenomenon – might vary over time and across countries, but it is here to stay and likely to shape the future course of integration. Moving beyond questions of whether and to what extent Europe has become politicized, current studies are starting to focus on the 'differentiated' forms such politicization takes (e.g. de Wilde et al., 2016; Hutter et al., 2016a; Risse, 2015). A recurring distinction is drawn between conflicts over constitutive and policy-related European issues. According to Bartolini (2005: 310), the former centre on fundamental features of the EU polity, i.e. membership, competencies and decision-making rules. The latter, by contrast, refer to policy questions in fields where EU institutions are involved in daily policy-making.

As astute observers argue (Mair, 2000, 2007; Risse, 2010), debating the two types of European issue impacts the future of the EU and democracy in Europe in two different ways. In his influential work on integration and party competition, Mair's (2000, 2007) hunch is that the EU's institutional setting favours conflicts over constitutive topics, which ultimately undermines the system's legitimacy because most controversies take the form of principled support vs. principled opposition. He suggests that a mechanism to avoid more conflict over the fundamentals of the EU polity is a division of labour between national and European elections. The European Parliament (EP) has become co-responsible for policy decisions at the EU level, but it plays a less pivotal role in treaty reforms or the accession of new member states. Thus, Mair advocates that EP elections should become *the* arena for contesting European policies, whereas national elections should centre on constitutive issues. Similarly, Risse (2010) calls for more debates over which EU policies are preferable. In his opinion, 'politicizing European policies is likely to lead to transnational disputes and, thus, to further create a European community of communication' (Risse, 2010: 251).

This article presents the first systematic large-N longitudinal study on the salience of these two essential types of European issue. Despite strong normative claims, such a study is still lacking. Following Mair's argument, we start to disentangle 'Europe' in the context of EP elections. Thus, our main research questions are as follows: How salient are constitutive and policy-related European issues in EP elections? Do the conditions differ under which the two types of issue are salient? By taking issue salience, a key component of politicization (Green-Pederson, 2012), as our dependent variable, we contribute to a growing body of literature on the salience of Europe in party competition (e.g. Adam and Maier, 2011; de Vries and van de Wardt, 2011; Guinaudeau and Persico, 2013; Hoeglinger, 2016; Kriesi, 2007; Netjes and Binnema, 2007; Pennings, 2006; Spoon, 2012; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2015). This literature has not yet systematically incorporated the distinction between the two types of issue. Moreover, our general knowledge about the salience of Europe in EP elections is still fairly limited. In the most thorough study to date, Spoon (2012) shows

that – in contrast to predictions of the 'second order election' thesis (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt, 2005) – parties devote a significant part of their EP election manifestos to European issues. However, her work shares the limitation of other studies in the field as it only focuses on constitutive aspects of integration.

We argue that taking into account the 'polity-vs-policy' distinction affects the answers to both *how* salient Europe is in EP elections (even more salient than previously assumed) and *why* certain parties are more likely to emphasize it. More specifically, we focus on the effects of two party-level factors (i.e. positions on and intra-party dissent over European integration), and polarization over the issue in the party system. The standard expectations are that Euro-critical and united parties have the most to gain from emphasizing Europe and that its systemic salience increases with the polarization in the party system as a whole. These expectations are based on the idea that Europe is a 'wedge issue' (van de Wardt et al., 2014). That is, orientations towards Europe cut across the traditional left-right divide (e.g. Hooghe et al., 2002; Kriesi et al., 2006, 2008). This offers an opportunity for challengers to mobilize against the pro-European consensus in the party system and to produce severe intra-party conflict within mainstream parties (e.g. de Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Hobolt and de Vries, 2015). However, as we argue in this article, this might only be the case for constitutive EU issues. By contrast, positions on policy-related EU issues are usually embedded in the left-right conflict (e.g. Hix et al., 2007). Taking this into account opens up a different perspective on the dynamics of EU issue competition as parties not only face the trade-off between emphasizing European or national issues but they can also shift attention to policy-related European topics.

To test our expectations, we use a new integrated data set from the Euromanifestos Project for 14 EU member states and the period 1979–2009 (see Braun et al., 2015). As the coding scheme of this project is adapted to EP elections, the data offer an ample basis for studying the compound nature of European issues. Altogether, we study 401 Euromanifestos and explore the determinants of the salience of the two types of EU issues both separately and in combination, employing regression analysis with a Prais–Winsten transformation technique. Overall, our findings show that a differentiated conceptualization of EU issues has important implications for the understanding of party competition in EP elections. Europe is much more salient and different explanatory factors come into play once we bring in the polity-vs-policy distinction. Most importantly, constitutive issues are emphasized by Euro-critical parties, while policy issues are put on the agenda by Euro-friendly parties and in less polarized contexts.

The salience of Europe: Emphasizing what and why?

The 'what': EU polity and policy contestation

Scholars of EU politics increasingly put the spotlight on the salience of Europe in party competition. Although they focus on different arenas and rely on various

data sources, such as expert surveys (e.g. de Vries and van de Wardt, 2011; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2015), media coverage (e.g. Helbling and Tresch, 2011; Kriesi, 2007) or party manifestos (e.g. Popa and Dumitrescu, 2015; Spoon, 2012), they treat European integration as a single political issue. That is, they do not differentiate between particular aspects or types of European issues. More specifically, the literature tends to focus on the 'constitutive' side of integration. This is most obvious in Spoon's (2012) analysis of Euromanifestos – which comes closest to the study we present here. Spoon looks at the percentage of a party manifesto devoted to EU issues by relying on the so-called EUSUM variable, which includes 'items such as favourable mentions of the EC/EU, competencies of various European institutions, and mentions of a European way of life'. The media-based study by Kriesi (2007) also focuses on a single category: statements on 'European integration (including enlargement) or EU membership'. In the case of expert surveys, it is not so easy to tell. However, the phrasing of the question[1] is most likely to evoke judgement of the relative importance of European integration regarding its constitutive elements, or very general statements related to integration rather than regarding daily policy-making.

At the same time, we know from more exploratory research that parties address European policies in their programmatic statements as well. In an early automated content analysis of national election manifestos, Pennings (2006), for example, shows that although the share of co-mentions of 20 policy areas and European integration is relatively low, there are pronounced party- and time-differences.[2] Similarly, Guinaudeau and Persico (2013) highlight that the specific European issues addressed vary greatly between election manifestos. Based on a qualitative reading of British, French and German manifestos, they identify 69 issue categories (ranging from very specific policy proposals to general integration-related statements). On average, 8.7% of the content of the manifestos issued in the period 1986–2009 was devoted to EU issues. Furthermore, roughly 60% of these contents referred to specific EU policies (own calculation). Two other recent studies have also taken up the 'policy' vs 'polity' distinction. For the case of Austria, Senninger and Wagner (2015) show that parties addressed European issues in about 9% of their press releases during national election campaigns in 2008 and 2013. Most importantly, all parties addressed EU policies to a fairly large extent (the two mainstream parties in government talked about such issues in more than 50% of their press releases). Based on a larger sample of 61 national elections in six West European countries, Hutter et al. (2016b) find that, on average, EU policies account for around 2% of all party statements reported in the media (the average salience of all European issues is 6.6%). They show that, in relative terms, policy issues are less salient than constitutive issues in all the countries (the differences are smaller in EU member states compared to the non-EU member Switzerland).

To sum up, we can draw three conclusions from this exploratory work. First, even in the case of national elections, we lose a significant share of EU-related party contestation if we do not consider policy issues. In other words, the studies support

our general point that political parties not only face a trade-off between talking about Europe or national issues in election campaigns but by contrast they also face the choice of talking about different types of European issues. Second, it seems that EU policies are more salient in direct party communication (i.e. in manifestos or press releases) than in mass media-filtered communication. Finally, the extent to which EU policies are addressed varies across countries and parties – although we lack more systematic evidence on this point given the rather limited samples covered by the studies cited.

What do we expect regarding the salience of Europe in EP elections based on this evidence? First of all, we assume that policy-related topics make up a significant portion of all European issues, given that we focus on: (a) direct party communication by means of election manifestos and (b) EP elections, which have become ever more important in EU policy-making over time. To put it differently, where if not in Euromanifestos should domestic parties discuss the way Europe intervenes in daily policy-making? As a consequence, we expect that the overall salience of Europe in party competition in EP elections is much higher than has been shown by previous studies (Fazekas et al., 2015; Spoon, 2012). It might not seem surprising that parties choose to focus on European issues in general and EU policies in particular in their Euromanifestos. However, note that our predictions contrast with ones that regard EP elections as (still) second-order elections fought in the shadow of national political conflicts and issues (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Schmitt, 2005).

The 'why': EU positions, intra-party dissent and polarization

Inspired by the work of Schattschneider (1960), theories on the dynamics of issue competition have posited that political parties will focus on different issues in a way that benefits them electorally. As Carmines (1991: 75) aptly puts it, 'All successful politicians instinctively understand which issues benefit them and their party and which do not'. A major claim in this literature is that parties emphasise issues on which they hold distinct and strong positions which offer them an advantage over their competitors (for a recent formulation, see de Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Hobolt and de Vries, 2015). Translated to European issues, most contributions to the debate expect political parties to profit the most from emphasizing Europe in their discourse if they have: (a) a clear Euro-critical position and (b) face no major intra-party dissent over Europe (e.g. de Vries and van de Wardt, 2011; Kriesi, 2007; Spoon, 2012; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2015). By challenging the pro-European consensus of mainstream parties and the political elite more generally, Euro-critical parties are seen as the strongest force driving the salience of Europe in party politics. The dominant role of Eurosceptics in integration conflicts is explained not the least by the fact that European issues cut across the traditional left-right dimension (e.g. Hooghe et al., 2002; Kriesi et al., 2006, 2008), thus producing severe intra-party conflict within mainstream parties (e.g. Franklin et al., 1996). For this reason, mainstream

parties are expected to dismiss such issues with the aim of neutralizing internal conflicts.

These expectations reflect the state of the art in the literature. However, as we said in the introduction, they were mainly developed and tested in relation to struggles over Europe in general and over its constitutive aspects in particular. Given parties' general positioning on the further integration of Europe, these issues can be characterized as 'wedge issues' (van de Wardt et al., 2014), with all the potential to restructure political competition. However, conflicts over policy-related European issues do not necessarily follow the same logic because parties' positions on these issues usually do not cross but are instead embedded in the dominant left-right divide (Hix et al., 2007). Therefore, debating policy-related European issues does not tend to pose the same threat to the internal cohesion of mainstream parties and can more easily be accommodated by them. As Börzel and Risse (2009: 219) argue, 'European mass integration parties of the centre-left and centre-right could actually profit from politicization, the more Europeans stop fighting over the European *finalité politique* and start debating what kind of European policies they would prefer' (see also Risse, 2010: 249–252). This reasoning implies that, especially in the context of EP elections, pro-European and internally divided political parties should attempt to shift attention away from constitutive debates over the further deepening and widening of Europe. However, this de-emphasizing strategy should not come at the expense of talking about Europe altogether. Instead, we expect that parties will emphasize European policies in their manifestos. That is, they will elaborate on how the EU should make use of its competencies in daily policy-making – for example, by adapting EU regulations to stimulate economic growth or tightening EU rules to protect the environment.

Party positions on European integration

H1a: The *more* Euro-critical parties are, the *more* they will emphasize *constitutive* European issues in their EP election manifestos.

H1b: The *less* Euro-critical parties are, the *more* they will emphasize *policy-related* European issues in their EP election manifestos.

Intra-party dissent over European integration

H2a: The *less* parties are internally divided on EU issues, the *more* they will emphasize *constitutive* European issues in their EP election manifestos.

H2b: The *more* parties are internally divided on EU issues, the *more* they will emphasize *policy-related* European issues in their EP election manifestos.

Apart from party-level factors, we also expect systemic characteristics to differently impact on the salience of the two types of EU issues. Ultimately, the challenge

posed by Euro-critical forces should increase polarization over European integration in the party system as a whole and, thus, affects the competitive context faced by all parties in the system (see Meijers, 2015). Also, the more parties differ in their EU positions, the more likely voters will be to vote on the basis of these positions (e.g. de Vries, 2007). In turn, this should offer further strategic incentives to parties to publicly emphasize these differences. As argued, Euro-critical parties will attempt to focus attention on differences regarding constitutive issues and rarely talk about EU policies, whereas the 'Europhiles' would ideally put most emphasis on policy-related European issues. However, when faced with sizable Euro-critical parties, it gets more likely that they are forced into talking about constitutive issues as well. Therefore, we expect that both party-level factors and polarization over Europe in the party system have different effects on the salience of the two types of issues. The focus on policy issues should be more pronounced in a context where parties disagree *less* on the fundamentals of integration. By contrast, the salience of constitutive issues should be greater in contexts characterized by high levels of polarization over European integration. Again, note that we do not expect that decreasing polarization leads to less emphasis on Europe in party manifestos but rather to increasing emphasis on European policies.

Polarization over European integration

H3a: The *more* polarized the party system is over European integration, the *more* parties will emphasize *constitutive* European issues in their EP election manifestos.

H3b: The *less* polarized the party system is on European integration, the *more* parties will emphasize *policy-related* European issues in their EP election manifestos.

Data and methods

Our dependent variables are defined as emphasis on two major types of European issue mentioned in election manifestos issued ahead of EP elections. To measure these dependent variables, we use information from the Euromanifestos Project (EM). The EM data cover party manifestos of all the relevant parties issued ahead of EP elections from 1979 to 2009.[3] As the EM project coded manifestos for EP elections and not for national elections, the original coding scheme of the Comparative Manifesto Project has been adapted accordingly (Wüst and Volkens, 2003). Although some criticism has been raised vis-a-vis the usage of manifesto data in general (Mikhaylov et al., 2012), we are convinced that in the case of our undertaking, the EM data source is unique and highly appropriate. The advantages outweigh shortcomings as e.g. the fact that we 'only' cover official party statements, although we will discuss the impact of the chosen data source critically in the concluding section of the article. Most importantly for our purpose, the data cover many issue categories related to the political system of the EU and a variable

called 'governmental frame'. This frame variable lists the policy level to which an argument in a sentence refers. The variable has four categories: national, European, global or unspecified. For example, a coder would assign a European frame to the following statement, '[t]he EU has taken the lead on action to deal with climate change'. By contrast, '[w]e will resist efforts by Labour to push through Heathrow expansion' clearly refers to national politics and is therefore coded accordingly (the two examples are taken from the Euromanifesto of the British Conservative Party in 2009). Note that the European political level is used by the coders when the governmental frame of the content *explicitly* refers to the European level.

The two innovations mentioned above allow us to distinguish between constitutive and policy-related European issues in a Euromanifesto (on the concepts, see Bartolini, 2005; Schmitt, 2007). Constitutive issues cover all categories related to the fundamental features of the EU's political system, such as the competencies of different European institutions, membership issues or questions related to the legitimacy or complexity of the EU (The online appendix provides detailed information on the assignment of the various coding categories). Policy-related issues, by contrast, refer to questions about how European institutions should use their competencies in policy making. Typical examples in this regard are categories related to economic policies, foreign special relationships, environmental protection or immigration. For these categories, our categorization effort benefited from the inclusion of the governmental frame variable. In other words, we only coded statements as policy-related *European* issues when coders assigned the European political level as the governmental frame. Due to the expanding competencies of the EC/EU over time, the assignment of some issue categories depends on the year in which they were raised. To illustrate, we treat support or opposition towards the European Single Market as a constitutive issue until the implementation of the Single European Act in 1987. After that, such statements are classified as policy-related (see the online appendix). In the end, our dependent variables are the sum of positive and negative mentions of either constitutive or policy-related European issues as a percentage of all the coded quasi-sentences in a manifesto.

To operationalise our independent variables, we draw on the well-known Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker et al., 2012; Ray, 1999; Steenbergen et al., 2007). For indicators of parties' general positions towards European integration and party system polarization (*H1*, *H2* and *H3*), we use the 'position' variable from the CHES data set. By taking this variable indicating a party's support or opposition towards the EU from another independent data source, we avoid the problem that the positional variables are created from the salience measure used as our dependent variable.[4] Party system polarization is calculated according to Esteban and Ray's (1994) index. This indicates how much parties' EU positions differ from each other and takes into account the size of a given party (as measured by its vote share). Moreover, in this article, we address recent calls to systematically distinguish the effects of polarization from simple positional divisions (see Esteban and Ray, 1994; Esteban and Schneider, 2008; Indridason, 2011). In contrast to polarization, which takes into account the position and size of all competitors, divisions

refer to the greatest distance in EU positions between the most extreme parties in the system regardless of their size. Finally, to measure intra-party dissent on European issues, we use the 'dissent' indicator provided by the CHES data (*H2*). As one might assume a curvilinear relationship between intra-party dissent and the salience of European issues, we decide to take into account two variables, both the single and the squared term (see Steenbergen and Scott, 2004).

Moreover, with an eye to previous research (in particular Spoon, 2012) we also take into account some additional control variables in our model, namely public opinion on Europe, party size, government status and party family. In the case of public opinion, we draw on data from the European Election Study and Eurobarometer to measure ambivalence[5] in citizens' attitudes to EU integration. Party size is measured as the party's vote share in the last national elections. Government status indicates whether the party was part of the national government at the time of a given EP election. We use the party family as indicated in the EM data, generating dummy variables for green, regional and nationalist parties. The online appendix provides detailed descriptions of the operationalization, data sources and descriptive values.

To identify the determinants of European constitutive and policy issues in EP party manifestos, we use Prais–Winsten regression analysis. We decide to use this technique instead of a time-series cross-sectional analysis with a lagged dependent variable and panel-corrected standard errors (as proposed by Beck and Katz, 1995; applied by Spoon, 2012) because the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable 'tends not only to absorb large parts of the trend in the dependent variable, but likely biases estimates' (Plümper et al., 2005). Moreover, and in line with Spoon (2012), we take two important decisions regarding the model specification. First, we cluster the standard errors by party because it seems unlikely that a party's manifestos are written independently of each other. Second, we include our independent variables as lagged variables because the writing process of a party manifesto starts about a year before the election in question (Däubler, 2012; Dolezal, 2012). Due to our use of the CHES data, we have a kind of natural lag which is smaller than that had we taken the five-year lag between two consecutive EP elections.[6]

Before starting with the empirical analysis, it seems important to spend some lines on the unit of observation and the case selection. The *unit of observation* is one party per country and year represented by one manifesto issued ahead of an EP election. Altogether, the number of observations per country pooled for all elections ranges from 10 (Italy) to 55 (Belgium). The EM data set comprises a total number of 624 European party manifestos in 27 EU member states and seven elections (1979, 1984, 1989, 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009). For the following reasons, the final number of cases is reduced for our analysis to N(party) = 401 and N(country) = 14 (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Portugal, Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom and Ireland).[7] First, we opt to exclude the countries that joined the EU in the 2000s since we are interested in the longer term evolution and want to compare our

results to the existing literature (e.g. de Vries and van de Wardt, 2011; Spoon, 2012; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004). In addition, the party systems in central and eastern European countries are still considered less stable when it comes to EP elections (Schmitt, 2005). Second, as not all party manifestos have been coded due to missing documents for some early EP elections, we decide to exclude country/election combinations from the analysis for which the coded party manifestos represent fewer than 50% of voters in an election. Third, for some periods, information on our main independent variables is not available in the CHES data for all parties.

Mapping European issues in Euromanifestos

How much space do parties dedicate to European issues in their Euromanifestos? To begin with, the results in Table 1 show that European issues (about 75%) are far more salient than national issues (about 24%) and the share of 'uncodable' quasi-sentences is negligible. Based on the election manifestos, EP elections are about European issues. This finding contrasts with the standard view of EP elections as 'second order' elections fought in the shadow of national politics. By contrast, our results are in line with recent survey-based research that shows that voters do take European issues into account when making their voting decisions in EP elections (e.g. Clark and Rohrschneider, 2009; de Vries and van de Wardt, 2011; Hix and Marsh, 2011; Hobolt, 2009; Schmitt et al., 2009). Regarding trends over time, one would expect political actors to have directed more and more attention to European issues, given the increasing transfers of authority, the inclusion of new member states and the trend towards 'constraining dissensus' in the last decades (de Wilde and Zürn, 2012; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Research based on expert

Table 1. Salience of European and national issues in Euromanifestos (shares as percentages).

		European issues			
Election	National issues Mean (SD)	Policy issues Mean (SD)	Constitutive issues Mean (SD)	Uncodable Mean (SD)	N
1979	22.82 (14.12)	51.31 (14.94)	25.44 (10.82)	0.43 (0.76)	25
1984	28.17 (19.00)	49.98 (19.10)	21.45 (9.81)	0.40 (0.72)	30
1989	25.35 (18.63)	58.09 (18.88)	16.15 (9.78)	0.41 (0.59)	40
1994	25.08 (18.04)	54.97 (17.32)	19.45 (9.19)	0.49 (1.29)	67
1999	23.32 (19.53)	56.29 (17.88)	19.73 (9.01)	0.65 (3.39)	81
2004	20.64 (16.12)	59.50 (16.06)	19.56 (10.40)	0.30 (0.79)	79
2009	23.53 (15.49)	59.87 (17.28)	16.02 (11.38)	0.58 (1.29)	79
All	23.66 (17.42)	56.81 (17.49)	19.05 (10.30)	0.49 (1.77)	401

Note: The table shows the average share of European and national issues in the pooled dataset.
Source: Euromanifesto data 1979–2009. See Braun et al. (2015).

surveys (de Vries and van de Wardt, 2011: 174), mass media content (Hutter and Grande, 2014: 1010) and parliamentary debates (Rauh, 2015: 128) indicates an increasing, but non-linear, trend in salience. Based on the authoritative statements of parties in the context of EP elections, our findings do not support this expectation (Table 1). On average, European issues were as salient in Euromanifestos in 1979 as in 2009.

What do we gain from taking into account both constitutive and policy-related European issues? First, the descriptive results in Table 1 show that European issues are much more salient if we consider policy-related discussions. While in Spoon's (2012: 561) analysis, the average salience of European issues in Euromanifestos ranges between 19 and 25%, our findings show that European issues are much more relevant, with salience at around 75%. This confirms our expectation that EU policies make up a larger share of all European issues in Euromanifestos than in direct – and even more so than in mass-mediated – party communications in national elections (see Guinaudeau and Persico, 2013; Hutter et al., 2016b; Pennings, 2006; Senninger and Wagner, 2015). Second, there is some increase in the numbers of policy issues mentioned in the manifestos, whereas the salience of constitutive issues has instead decreased over time. More precisely, we observe a higher share of policy issues in all campaigns from 1994 onwards as compared to the first two EP elections in 1979 and 1984. In a way, this is good news, given Mair's (2000) normative argument on what should be discussed in the context of EP elections.

How to explain the salience of European issues in EP election manifestos?

In the explanatory part of our empirical analysis, we run three different models: the first has the share of constitutive European issues as dependent variable (CON), the second has policy-related European issues (POL) and the third the overall share of European issues (EU). Each of these models is built up stepwise. In the first step (Main Model), we introduce our expected main determinants of EU issue salience to single out the effect of party position towards the EU, the degree of intra-party dissent and the polarization in the party system while controlling for party division (hypotheses 1–3). In the next step, we extend this Main Model by introducing further control variables. In Control Model I, we account for public opinion towards the EU and the size and government status of each party as this has an impact on parties' involvement in European politics and thus might affect our findings. In Control Model II, we take into account party families to see whether the effect on EU issue salience of a party's position on Europe can be attributed to specific party families as shown in Spoon's (2012) study.[8]

The results presented in Table 2 indicate that the more Euro-critical parties are, the more they tend to put emphasis on *constitutive European issues* in their EP election manifestos (supporting hypotheses 1). By contrast, neither intra-party dissent (*H2*) nor party polarization (*H3*) have a statistically significant effect on the

Table 2. The impact of systemic and party level factors on the salience of European integration.

	Main Model			Control Model I			Control Model II		
	CON	POL	EU	CON	POL	EU	CON	POL	EU
Independent variables									
EU party position (H1)	0.82*	−2.45***	−1.76***	0.91*	−2.66***	−1.88***	0.68	−2.20***	−1.61**
	(0.46)	(0.64)	(0.66)	(0.48)	(0.64)	(0.66)	(0.52)	(0.63)	(0.69)
Intra-party dissent (H2)	0.50	−1.11	−0.61	0.45	−0.83	−0.37	0.98	−1.41	−0.43
	(1.44)	(1.86)	(2.02)	(1.41)	(1.83)	(2.07)	(1.40)	(1.82)	(2.10)
Intra-party dissent (squared term) (H2)	−0.06	0.20	0.14	−0.06	0.19	0.13	−0.10	0.23	0.13
	(0.16)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.16)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.16)	(0.22)	(0.23)
EU party system polarization (H3)	1.25	−6.30***	−5.43***	1.05	−5.48***	−4.74***	0.83	−5.29***	−4.73***
	(0.89)	(1.24)	(1.28)	(0.94)	(1.25)	(1.26)	(0.90)	(1.27)	(1.30)
Control variables									
EU party division	−0.77	1.01	0.36	−0.69	0.70	0.15	−0.56	0.59	0.14
	(0.51)	(0.74)	(0.74)	(0.53)	(0.74)	(0.74)	(0.51)	(0.73)	(0.74)
Public ambivalence				0.10	−0.41***	−0.31***	0.10	−0.39***	−0.29**
				(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.11)
Government party				0.41	0.45	1.21	0.17	0.80	1.22
				(1.16)	(1.43)	(1.53)	(1.07)	(1.41)	(1.55)
Vote share				0.04	−0.12	−0.10	0.02	−0.14	−0.12
				(0.06)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.07)	(0.11)	(0.11)

(continued)

Table 2. Continued

	Main Model			Control Model I			Control Model II		
	CON	POL	EU	CON	POL	EU	CON	POL	EU
Party family: green							−6.97***	5.00	−1.77
							(1.58)	(3.37)	(3.46)
Party family: regional							2.69	−3.88	−1.16
							(2.74)	(3.68)	(4.18)
Party family: nationalist							9.27*	−16.26***	−6.70
							(5.04)	(4.76)	(6.30)
Constant	19.01***	56.93***	75.92***	16.07***	68.01***	84.08***	16.50***	68.15***	84.62***
	(0.77)	(1.22)	(1.14)	(2.08)	(2.81)	(2.83)	(2.12)	(3.17)	(2.93)
Adjusted R squared term	0.17	0.19	0.24	0.16	0.20	0.24	0.19	0.22	0.24
Clusters (party)	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106	106
Observations	401	401	401	401	401	401	401	401	401

Note: The table entries are regression coefficients (b-values) from a Prais–Winsten regression correcting for panel-specific autocorrelation in error terms over one period (AR 1). Panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variables are the salience of constitutive (CON) and policy (POL) European issues and the full (compound) salience of European issues (EU) in 14 Western European countries (as data for Luxembourg is missing in the Chapel Hill data, we omit this country from our analysis) for seven EP elections (1979–2009). The independent variables are centred for the analysis.
*$p < 0.10$; **$p < 0.05$; ***$p < 0.01$.

salience of constitutive European issues. It seems that specific party positions matter most in explaining this type of EU issue emphasis in EP elections. The finding that party positions matter corresponds with studies that rely on expert surveys (e.g. de Vries and van de Wardt, 2011; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004; Whitefield and Rohrschneider, 2015). However, for party position towards Europe we need to mention that the effect is at a rather low level of statistical significance ($p < 0.10$) in both the Main Model and in Control Model I, and although the effect is still positive in Control Model II it is no longer statistically significant.[9] Instead, two party family indicators result in statistically significant effects: Green parties tend to put less emphasis on constitutive European issues, while the opposite is true for parties belonging to the nationalist party family. This offers further support for our first hypothesis: Euro-critical parties – in the first two models indicated by a critical EU position and in the third model introduced simply via the nationalist party family – put more emphasis on constitutive issues.

We observe striking differences if we turn to *policy-related European issues*. First of all, our results show that the less Euro-critical parties are, the more likely they are to emphasize European policy issues in Euromanifestos (*H1*). The same can be observed for party polarization (*H3*). The more polarized the party system is over Europe, the less parties tend to emphasize European policies in their manifestos. In other words, EU policy issues are more likely to be emphasized by Euro-friendly parties and in an environment that is less polarized over European matters. This finding provides strong support for our claim that the dynamics of EU issue competition are fundamentally different when we look at EU policies. Pro-European forces have far less to lose – or, according to Börzel and Risse (2009), might even benefit – from focusing the debate on EU policies. These two effects remain stable in all the models even when taking into account the two sets of control variables – again, there is no significant effect of intra-party dissent on EU issue emphasis (disconfirming *H2*). This time, two interesting effects appear within the control models. First, public opinion on Europe matters for the salience of EU policy issues. The less ambivalent public opinion is over Europe, the more parties tend to emphasize European policies in their manifestos. Spoon (2012: 570) interprets the opposite effect in her results (but with constitutive European issues as dependent variable) as indicating that parties may not be responsive to voters. Our results suggest the opposite: if the public takes a clear stance on European integration, parties tend to focus more on policy-related EU issues. Second, the nationalist party family again has an impact on EU issue emphasis. The negative effect displayed in Table 2 (Control Model II) signifies that nationalist parties tend to put less emphasis on European policy issues. However, this time the negative effect of EU-criticism remains statistically significant even if we control for party families.

Moreover, the third model including the overall share of European issues (*EU*) as dependent variable nicely illustrates the main drivers of EU issue salience in general. All the main effects are almost identical to the policy models which means that taking into account policy issues has important implications for our understanding of EU issue salience in EP elections. That is, according to our findings,
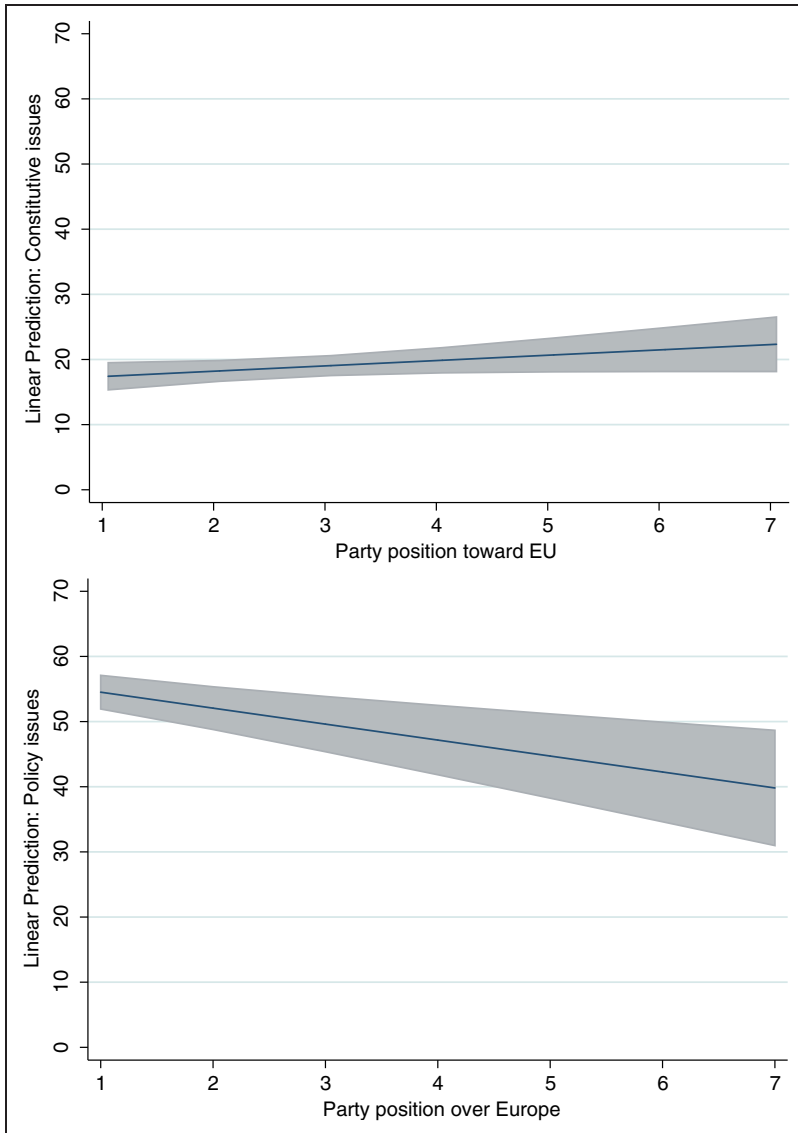
Figure 1. Link between European issues and party position towards the EU.
Note: The estimations are based on the results gained from the Main Model. Adjusted predictions with 95% confidence intervals. The Y-axis represents the share of constitutive or policy issues in a Euromanifesto per country and election (constitutive issues range from 0 to 75%; policy issues from 0 to 91%). The X-axis represents the party position towards Europe, ranging from 1 (=Pro-EU) to 7 (=Anti-EU).
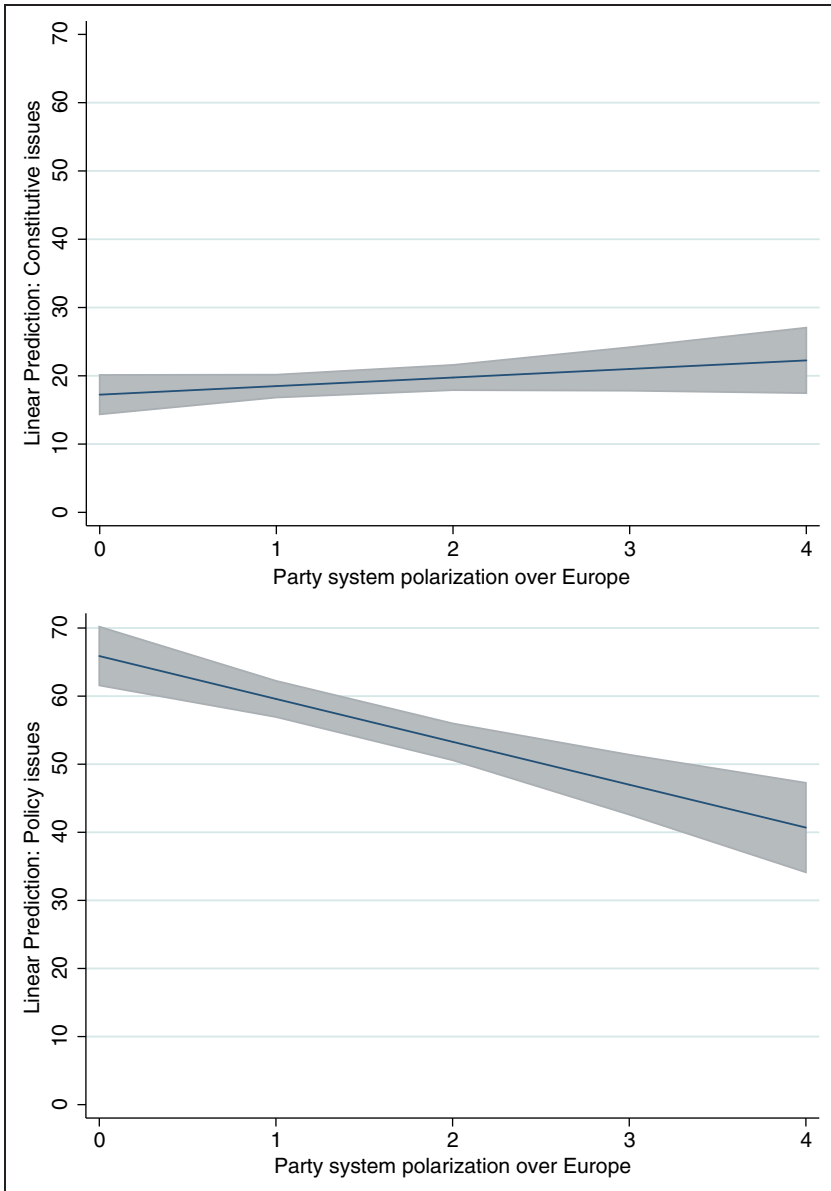
Figure 2. Link between European issues and party polarization over Europe.
Note: The estimations are based on the results gained from the Main Model. Adjusted predictions with 95% confidence intervals. The *Y*-axis represents the share of constitutive or policy issues in a Euromanifesto per country and election (constitutive issues range from 0 to 75%; policy issues from 0 to 91%). The *X*-axis represents party polarization over Europe, ranging from 0 (=low degree) to 4 (=high degree).

Europe is more likely to be emphasized by pro-European parties and in a party system that is less polarized over Europe. This is important insofar as the existing literature mainly offers arguments for why Euro-friendly parties might try to de-emphasize (constitutive) European issues, but these arguments do not fit well when trying to explain parties' different emphases on policy-related European issues.

Obviously, the initial idea of a need to differentiate among EU issue types matches the empirical evidence. Our findings clearly show that the salience of constitutive issues involves different mechanisms to the salience of policy issues. To illustrate this in more detail, Figure 1 plots the different effects of party position towards the EU (*H1*). The graphs show that there is a positive relationship between the party position towards European integration and the salience of constitutive issues, whereas we can see a clear negative link in the case of policy issues. Hence, anti-European parties are less likely to refer to policy issues, while pro-European parties put much more emphasis on European policies in their manifestos. Numerically this means that if a party position changes one unit from a pro-European to an anti-European position, the share of policy issues *decreases* by 2.45 percentage points; in contrast, the share of constitutive issues *increases* by 0.82 percentage points. Figure 2 is even more telling when it comes to the dissimilar patterns between constitutive and policy European issues. The graphs show that there is no significant relationship between party system polarization (i.e. the distance between parties weighted by party size) towards European integration and the salience of constitutive issues, whereas we can identify a strong effect in the case of policy issues. If the polarization of the party system changes one unit from no or little polarization over Europe to a high degree of polarization, the share of policy issues *decreases* by 6.30 percentage points.

Discussion and conclusion

How much and why do political parties emphasize European issues in their appeals to the public? Our knowledge about the partisan supply in EP elections is still fairly limited – at least when compared to vote choice in EP elections. EP elections were, and to a large extent still are, characterized as 'second order national contests' in which domestic concerns trump over European issue contests. However, there is increasing evidence that European issues play a more important role in both the demand and supply sides (for a review, see Hobolt, 2015). Our findings support this latter view to a large extent. Conducting the first large-N empirical study that systematically distinguishes between polity and policy contestation has allowed us to reconsider previous findings on the salience of Europe and its driving forces in EP elections.

We can summarize our main results as follows. First, by distinguishing between constitutive and policy-related European issues, we have been able to show that European issues are much more salient in the partisan offer than is often assumed. Manifestos issued before EP elections are about European issues and, most importantly, parties discuss the kind of European policies they want at length.

Thus, based on the programmatic statements of parties, EP elections conform to the normative standard introduced by Mair (2000, 2007) and Risse (2010). They are about European policy-making and do not primarily focus on the fundamentals of the EU polity or purely domestic questions. Second, the two types of European issues are salient under different conditions. Different dynamics are at play depending on the kind of European issue at stake. The party position on European integration is highly relevant: if a party takes a more Euro-critical position, it is more likely to highlight constitutive issues in its Euromanifesto, whereas Euro-friendly parties tend to put more emphasis on policies. Moreover, in contexts characterized by less polarized conflicts over European integration, all parties are more likely to emphasize such EU policies. Overall, this confirms our expectation that Euro-critical challengers sense the opportuneness of emphasizing constitutive European issues with all their potential to restructure domestic party competition. However, at least in their Euromanifestos, pro-European forces do not shy away from talking about Europe, but they emphasize another type of Europe by debating the way Europe does (and should) intervene in daily policy-making.

Altogether, our study has provided new insights for the understanding of EU issue competition. First, and most importantly, we have been able to demonstrate the importance of distinguishing between different types of European issues. Of course, this raises further questions about comparisons to other arenas. Is the salience of policy and constitutive issues comparable in manifestos and public debates? Why is it that although European policies are very salient in Euromanifestos they do not seem to make it into the media (Adam and Maier, 2011; Dolezal, 2012; Schuck et al., 2011)? In this context, future research should examine what role party strategies and the media logic play in explaining these differences. Moreover, we need more research on the question of how much we can generalize from manifesto data, or to put it in common terms: What are the differences between the several data sources exploited for research questions on issue salience – e.g. namely manifesto data, public debates and expert surveys. Second, the negative effect of polarization on the salience of policy-related European issues merits further investigation. It might indicate that in EP elections Euro-critical forces can prevent more salient debates over EU policies, which supports recent work on the contagion effect of Euroscepticism on mainstream competitors (Meijers, 2015). Moreover, our closer look at the polarization-salience nexus offers interesting insights for the literature on the politicization of Europe too. Debating European policies is more likely in contexts characterised by fewer fundamental integration conflicts. However, in such contexts, we might not necessarily observe *less* politicization but different manifestations of politicization. Finally, our results point to some degree of normalization of EU issue competition as European policies have become more salient relative to constitutive issues in the post-Maastricht period. However, our study has only made a first step and more work is needed to explain the pronounced variation over time and across countries. In sum, there is much to discover if we take Marks's (2004: 241) advice

seriously: 'European integration is diverse [...]. It depends on what issue one is talking about'.

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Notes

1. In the Chapel Hill Survey, experts are asked to rate the 'relative importance of European integration in the party's public stance' on a five-point scale, ranging from 'no importance, never mentioned' to 'most important issue for the party' (Bakker et al., 2012).
2. Pennings (2006) finds that fewer than 10% of the explicit co-mentions per policy domain refer to European integration. However, as he notes, the automated procedure is rather restrictive, which might have led to underestimation of the degree of Europeanization in national party manifestos.
3. Unfortunately, data for the 2014 EP election is not available so far.
4. However, note that our key findings are the same if we rely on EM data, i.e. the position variable created by subtracting negative from positive references to the constitutive issues listed in the online appendix.
5. This variable thus maps whether the respondents have a clear-cut (positive or negative) opinion towards the EU, or are ambivalent over Europe. We assume that a non-ambiguous (good or bad) evaluation of the EU leads to higher levels of party-based EU issue salience since parties attempt to address their voters' positions on the issue.
6. For *H1*, *H2* and *H3*, for the 2009 EP elections, we therefore take CHES data from 2006 (and according to the same logic for 2004 we take 2002; for 1999, 1996; for 1994, 1992; for 1989, 1988; and for 1979 & 1984, 1984). Unfortunately CHES data is only available starting from 1984. However, the online appendix (robustness check), where we present the results for the Main Model without data from 1979, shows quite similar results.
7. As a matter of fact, the number of Euromanifestos varies over time for a single country. For instance, in the German case, our data set includes seven observations for the Social Democrats – one observation per election (1979–2009), whereas data for the Austrian 'Liste Hans-Peter Martin' are only available for one election (2009), for the Portuguese CDU for two elections (2004, 2009) and for the Greek Syriza for three elections (1999, 2004 and 2009).
8. In addition to these models we perform a large set of different robustness checks for our Main Model (see the online appendix) to demonstrate the stability of our results. We check whether the results remain stable if we drop the 1979 election and run our

model with a classical Time-Series-Cross-Section Analysis with panel-corrected standard errors and a lagged dependent variable. Moreover, we run some fixed effects models and test a modified version of our two dependent variables. Finally, we take into account the length of manifestos.

9. When we control for the length of a manifesto the effect for party positions towards the EU on constitutive European issues is also no longer statistically significant (see the online appendix). At the same time, we observe that the shorter a manifesto, the more parties tend to emphasize constitutive issues. Additional tests suggest that, in many countries, Eurocritical parties tend to produce smaller manifestos for EP elections. In a way, this supports our claim that Eurocritical parties focus on the key constitutive features of integration and do not discuss the direction of EU policies at length. However, more research is needed to study the process of how Euromanifestos are generated and how much Eurocriticism and/or professionalization influence the length of a manifesto.

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