The manuscript might engage with the literature on politicization as well as blame attribution to the EU and supranational EU actors within it (e.g., Vasilopoulou et al. in JCMS; Rittberger et al. 2017 in JCMS; Schlipphak & Treib 2017 in JEPP; Traber et al. 2019 in EJPR; Sommer 2019 in JCMS; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020 in PaG).

These contributions usually emphasize the communicative disadvantages of supranational EU actors as well as their technocratic nature (e.g., Gerhards et al. 2009 in PVS; Schlipphak & Treib 2017 in JEPP).

On the contrary, several recent contributions emphasize supranational actors’ willingness and ability to engage in public communication and actively respond to politicization and blame attributions (e.g., Ecker-Ehrhardt 2018; Heinkelmann-Wild & Zangl 2020 in Governance; Rauh et al. 2020 in EJPR; Heinkelmann-Wild & Zangl 2021 in PVS; see also JEPP Special Issue ‘EU Actors Under Pressure’ edited by Bressanelli et al. 2020).

**Vasilopoulou, S., Halikiopoulou, D. and Exadaktylos, T. (2014), Greece in crisis. J Common Mark Stud, 52: 388-402.** [**https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12093**](https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12093)

According to this theoretical perspective, populism is fundamental to the sustenance of the Greek political system as it forms the main division of party competition according to which there is one overall cleavage in Greek society between ‘us’ the people and an ‘exploitative establishment’. If this theory is correct and populism is indeed a defining feature of the Greek political system, then we should expect that:

*H1*: Populism is likely to be expressed through the narratives of Greek political actors.

Dynamics change at times of crisis, which open up political opportunities for smaller actors in the system. This should entail a populist contagion across the party system. Populism becomes a master narrative adopted by all parties engaged in electoral competition. Therefore we should expect that:

*H2*: Populism is likely to be widespread across the political spectrum and is independent of party ideology.

Theories that focus on blame avoidance identify a variety of strategic options for political actors facing situations of crisis (Weaver, [1986](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jcms.12093#jcms12093-bib-0027)). These may be summarized as problem denial, problem admission but responsibility denial, and problem and responsibility admission (Hood *et al*., [2009](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jcms.12093#jcms12093-bib-0008)). Blame is an essential tool available to political actors who engage in a populist rhetoric, as an attempt to maintain the existing state of affairs and their own political legitimacy. This entails an engagement in a populist blame-shifting game – that is, a focus on who is to blame for the crisis, directing responsibility to a range of ‘others’. Therefore we should expect that:

*H3*: Populist rhetoric is likely to be expressed in the forms of blame-shifting and exclusivity.

This consolidated a division between the two larger parties that had access to power and therefore access to rents and the smaller parties that did not. Therefore, we should expect that:

*H4*: The rhetoric of blame-shifting populism is likely to differ depending on position in the party system, between the mainstream parties that do have access to rents and the fringe parties that do not have access to rents.

Blame targets:

In order to measure populism, we focus on an analysis of actors’ political communication strategies. We employ a sophisticated framing analysis (Jagers and Walgrave, [2007](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jcms.12093#jcms12093-bib-0009)) of the speeches of the leaders of the five political parties in the Greek parliament during the period under examination. In order to capture blame-shifting and exclusivity in Greek populism, we identify the following political/social categories that may be targeted by Greek party leaders:

1. *Party of government*: references to the party that was in government during the period between 2009 and 2011 – that is, PASOK. We have coded references to PASOK, the government, Prime Minister Papandreou and PASOK ministers and MPs.
2. *Main opposition party*: references to the largest opposition party in parliament during the 2009–11 period – that is, ND. We coded references to ND, Samaras (its leader), former Prime Minister Karamanlis and ND MPs.
3. *Both party of government and main opposition party*: joint references to PASOK and ND.
4. *Lesser opposition*: references to the three smaller parliamentary opposition parties, including the radical right wing Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS), the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) and the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), and their MPs.
5. *External elites*: references to international actors including the EU, the United States, the IMF, the ‘Memorandum’, and specific EU Member States (for example, Germany and France).
6. *Specific interest groups*: references to special interest groups, both specific to Greece and external, of mainly economic character including banks, industries, investors, multinational corporations and rating agencies.
7. *All parties in the system*: references to the entire party system.
8. *Party of government and main opposition party and external elites combined (categories 1, 2, 3 and 5 combined)*: references to PASOK, ND or both, operating in collaboration with external elites.
9. *Party of government and main opposition party combined with specific interest groups (categories 1, 2, 3 and 6 combined)*: references to PASOK, ND or both, operating in collaboration with specific social groups.

**Rittberger, B., Schwarzenbeck, H., and Zangl, B. (2017) Where Does the Buck Stop? Explaining Public Responsibility Attributions in Complex International Institutions. JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 55: 909– 924. doi: 10.1111/jcms.12524.**

We argue that in complex policy-making systems responsibility tends to be attributed to implementing actors. PRA reflect the structure of policy implementation: (1) PRA for EU border controls target the EU; (2) PRA for the distribution of refugees target member states; (3) PRA for welfare migration are untargeted.

**Bernd Schlipphak & Oliver Treib (2017) Playing the blame game on Brussels: the domestic political effects of EU interventions against democratic backsliding, Journal of European Public Policy, 24:3, 352-365, DOI:**[**10.1080/13501763.2016.1229359**](https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1229359)

This article develops the argument that European Union (EU) intervention to protect its core values is likely to provoke unintended and undesired consequences at the domestic level. EU intervention will typically invite the accused government to play the blame game on Brussels. By criticizing the EU for illegitimately interfering with domestic affairs, the government may frame EU intervention as a threat from the outside and present itself as the only safeguard against this threat. As a consequence, support for those domestic actors that were supposed to be weakened by EU intervention is likely to increase in the aftermath of a European intervention, while EU support might significantly drop. the EU should be very cautious with such external interventions, since they may easily strengthen anti-EU and illiberal political forces at the domestic level. To minimize the risk of such undesired consequences, bottom–up mechanisms against democratic backsliding should be installed, which would allow disadvantaged domestic groups to appeal to an independent European democracy watchdog if they feel that democratic rules are being violated in their country.

Regarding the European financial crisis, Vasilopoulou et al. (2015) have shown that Greek élites blamed each other but also international actors like the Troika and other EU member countries

In sum, government parties face the challenge of potentially being the object of blaming and being unable to blame other domestic actors. Yet, in a multilevel world with international actors and especially the European Union intervening more and more into domestic decision-making, governments are now able to shift the blame to external actors and to frame negative events as being induced by the outside, thus sustaining citizens’ confidence in their competence and trustworthiness. Avoiding blame by shifting it to the international level is even more promising, as doing so usually does not entail major domestic political costs.

**TRABER, D., SCHOONVELDE, M. and SCHUMACHER, G. (2020), Errors have been made, others will be blamed: Issue engagement and blame shifting in prime minister speeches during the economic crisis in Europe. European Journal of Political Research, 59: 45-67.** [**https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12340**](https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12340)

This article investigates prime ministers’ communication strategies during the most recent economic crisis in Europe. It argues that when electoral risk is high but governments’ policy options are severely limited, prime ministers will use specific communication strategies to mitigate electoral risks. Two such communication strategies are analysed – issue engagement and blame shifting – by applying state-of-the-art quantitative text analysis methods on 5,553 speeches of prime ministers in nine European Union member states. Evidence is found for both strategies. Prime ministers talk about the economy more in response to both high (domestic) unemployment and low (domestic) gross domestic product growth. Furthermore, it is found that the (domestic) unemployment rate is the most consistent predictor of blame shifting: as the domestic unemployment rate goes up, this is followed by an increase in blame shifting towards banks, Greece and the Troika of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

To identify blame shifting, we conducted a ‘keyword-in-context’ analysis (quanteda package in R; Benoit et al. 2018). First, we decided on five ‘blame units’: the EU, the Troika (ECB, IMF and European Commission), banks, Germany and Greece. We chose these because we identified them as core actors in the European economic crisis. Second, we searched for these keywords in the speeches and saved each of their occurrences. Third, we saved the 15 words before and after these keywords in a separate corpus.22 Finally, we performed a sentiment analysis on these corpora to construct our dependent variable

When national economic conditions worsened during the economic crisis in Europe, governments tried to shift blame towards banks and the Troika. Conversely, they talked more negatively about the EU when EU-wide unemployment increased. Besides international institutions and banks, we were also interested whether governments would blame two countries that played a specific role in the discourse about the European crisis: Greece and Germany. While negative sentiment towards Greece increased with higher levels of unemployment, we found no clear evidence for a relationship between adverse economic conditions and blame shifting to Germany.

**Heinkelmann-Wild, T, Zangl, B. Multilevel blame games: Blame-shifting in the European Union. Governance. 2020; 33: 953– 969.**[**https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12459**](https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12459)

In line with the first strand, we assume that policymakers have a preference for shifting blame onto actors on a different level from themselves. In line with the second, we suppose that opportunities for doing so depend on institutional responsibility for policymaking and policy implementation. We check the plausibility of our integrated model by examining policymakers' blame attributions in three cases where European Union migration policies have been contested: border control, asylum, and welfare entitlements. We find that our integrated model does better in explaining blame-shifting in these cases than the isolated models.