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The Evolving Nature of EU Integration

Issue embedding in the EP election online campaign communication

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Contents

1. Overview
2. Theory
4. Data
5. Method
7. Next steps

Overview

- ▶ How issues around EU integration shape party competition

Research Questions

Across online campaign communication:

- ▶ Which parties are the main drivers behind the salience of the EU issue?
- ▶ How do parties link (embed) the EU to other political issues?

2019 EP Campaign Findings

- ▶ Dominant mainstream parties tend to be the main promoter of EU issues
- ▶ Greens and far-left/moderate eurosceptics are more likely to embed EU policy issues
- ▶ Far-right eurosceptic parties seem to link the EU to a narrower set of issues than dominant parties

EU issues - The role of challenger parties

- ▶ EU issues (Polity vs. Policy)
- ▶ Salience of these issues has increased over time (De Vries, 2018; Braun and Grande, 2021; Bakker et al., 2018)
- ▶ EU salience previously driven by challenger parties (De Vries and Hobolt, 2020; Hobolt and de Vries, 2015; Ehin and Talving, 2021)
- ▶ But pattern appears to have changed around 2009
- ▶ Little difference between dominant/challenger parties by 2014 (Adam et al., 2017; Eugster et al., 2021)

EU issues - Polity or Policy?

- ▶ Gradual shift from challenger parties outward hostility to EU, towards calls for reform (Braun et al., 2016; Brack, 2020; Treib, 2021)
- ▶ Dominant parties general focus on EU policy
 - ▶ But post-Brexit, shift towards emphasising positives of the EU project (Hobolt et al., 2022)

EU issues - Polity or Policy?

- H1 Challenger parties are more likely to **embed EU policy issues** than dominant parties.
- H2a Green parties are more likely to **embed EU policy issues** than dominant parties.
- H2b Far-right eurosceptic parties are more likely to focus on EU **polity debates** than dominant parties.
- H2c Far-left & moderate eurosceptic parties are more likely to **embed EU policy issues** than dominant parties.

EU policy issues - Type of embedding

How many other issues do parties link to EU policy debates?

- ▶ Challenger parties
 - ▶ Can link EU to their core issue owned at the national level
 - ▶ Thereby boosting its relevance

- ▶ Dominant parties
 - ▶ Broad embedding allows for transferring broad public appeal from national level
 - ▶ Can help accommodate intra-party dissent

EU policy issues - Type of embedding

- H3a** Dominant parties have **broader policy appeals** in their EU related communication in comparison to challenger parties.
- H3B** Among **challenger parties**, we expect far-right eurosceptic parties to have the **broadest policy appeals** in their EU communication

Data

- ▶ EP 2019 Political campaigning on twitter dataset ([Stier et al., 2020](#))
 - ▶ All tweets by MEP candidates, as well as public replies, mentions, and retweets
 - ▶ 16 million tweets
 - ▶ 28 countries, 31 languages
 - ▶ 500,000 MEP candidate tweets
 - ▶ 23 April - 30 May 2019

Manual Coding

- ▶ 17 research assistants hired to code tweets across 11 languages
- ▶ 9,000 tweets per coder
- ▶ tweets split by candidate/public, then by country (for candidates), and language
- ▶ random sample taken for each language
 - ▶ weighted so that 75% candidate tweets, 25% public
- ▶ for languages with more than one coder, 2,000 of the tweets were coded by both for inter-coder reliability checks

Sampling

Table: Tweet language distribution and sampling

Country	Language	All tweets		Sampled tweets	
		Candidates	Public	Candidates	Public
UK	English	131,332	5,113,760	13,500	4,500
France	French	62,403	2,911,611	13,500	4,500
Spain	Spanish	52,824	2,328,691	13,500	4,500
Italy	Italian	17,826	1,834,711	13,500	4,500
Poland	Polish	43,770	1,048,559	13,500	4,500
Ireland	English	14,697	0	6,000	0
Netherlands	Dutch	13,793	433,309	7,500	2,750
Germany*	German	13,156	371,372	13,156	4,500
Greece*	Greek	4,349	72,301	4,349	32,000
Hungary*	Hungarian	326	2,118	326	2,118

* All candidate tweets were manually coded for these countries

Coding Process

- ▶ Coders were asked to label tweets across a range of features, including:
 - ▶ sentiment
 - ▶ communication style (broadcasting opinions, vs engaging with other users)
 - ▶ campaign messaging
 - ▶ political issues

For tweets that mentioned political issues, these were then grouped into 10 categories:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1. Economy | 6. Support for democratic values |
| 2. Environment | 7. Opposition to democratic values |
| 3. Immigration | 8. Anti-elitism |
| 4. Brexit | 9. Crime and justice |
| 5. EU | 10. Other (transport, health, education) |

Machine Learning Classifier

- ▶ For countries/languages where all tweets cannot be manually coded, we apply classification methods using the human coded training set
- ▶ Text pre-processing
- ▶ Binary classification models for each individual issue at the tweet level
 - ▶ Extreme Gradient Boosting (xgBoost) models
- ▶ Model performance varies across issues and languages, performing worst where we have limited human coded samples

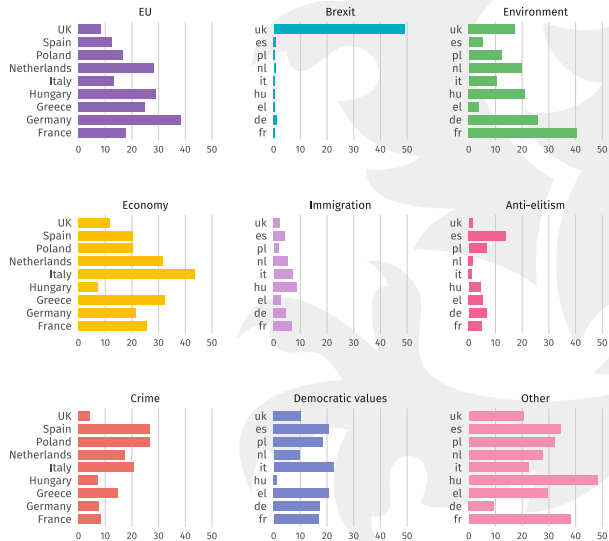
Descriptives

Table: Issue Salience - Country summaries

	Personal	Other political	EU alone	EU embedded
France	0.05	0.88	0.02	0.05
Germany	0.12	0.71	0.10	0.06
Greece	0.13	0.79	0.04	0.05
Hungary	0.16	0.69	0.07	0.07
Ireland	0.11	0.83	0.03	0.02
Italy	0.01	0.96	0.01	0.02
Netherlands	0.07	0.84	0.05	0.03
Poland	0.08	0.88	0.03	0.01
Spain	0.02	0.95	0.01	0.01
UK	0.11	0.67	0.18	0.04

Political Issues Discussed by 2019 EP Candidates on Twitter

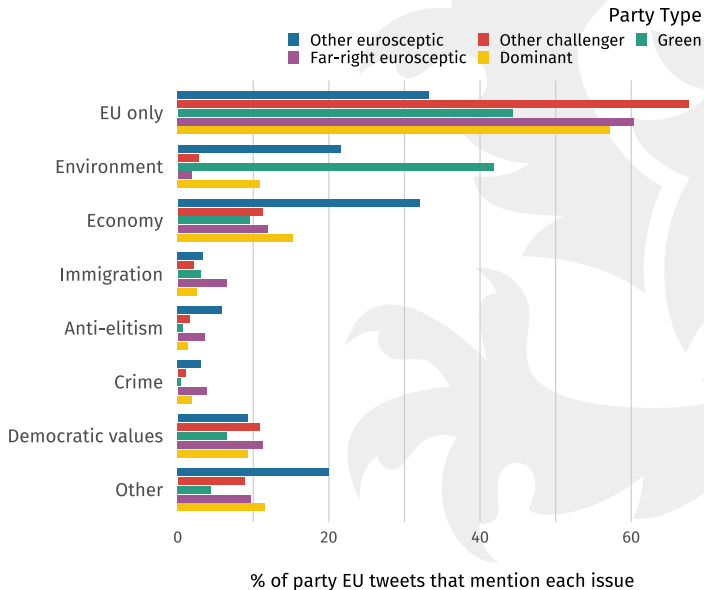
Tweets by 2019 MEP candidates that mention at least one political issue



% of country tweets that mention each issue

The Issues Parties Mention when Discussing the EU

Tweets by 2019 MEP candidates that mention the EU



Analysis

Dependent Variables

- ▶ **EU issue salience**
 - ▶ Proportion of candidate tweets mentioning EU issue / All candidate tweets

- ▶ **EU issue embedding**
 - ▶ Proportion of tweets that mention the EU + other issues / All EU issue tweets

- ▶ **Embedding style**
 - ▶ Normalised Shannon's H Information Entropy, ranges between 0-1
 - ▶ Measures how tweets are distributed across different issues
 - ▶ (0 = all tweets concentrated in single category, 1 = tweets evenly distributed across all issue categories)

Independent Variables

- ▶ **Dominant/Challenger party (dummy)**
 - ▶ Dominant = has ever been in government

- ▶ **Party Types**
 - ▶ Dominant (baseline)
 - ▶ Greens
 - ▶ Eurosceptic far-right parties
 - ▶ Other Eurosceptic parties (far-left & moderate)
 - ▶ Other challenger parties

- ▶ **Controls**
 - ▶ Country fixed effects
 - ▶ Candidate incumbency, Party EU dissent, General issue attention diversity (embedding style)

Table: EU salience as proportion of all campaign Twitter communication

	(1) All	(1) HC	(2) All	(2) HC
Challenger party	-0.23*	-0.25		
	(0.11)	(0.13)		
Eurosceptic party			-0.31*	-0.29*
			(0.12)	(0.14)
Green-challenger			-0.58*	-1.00**
			(0.26)	(0.32)
Other challengers			-0.25	-0.35
			(0.20)	(0.23)
Politicians	2235	1915	2235	1915
Parties	61	61	61	61
Var: party	0.14	0.19	0.13	0.16

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Dominant mainstream as baseline.

Table: EU embedding as EU tweets including other issues from total EU tweets

	(1) All	(1) HC	(2) All	(2) HC
Challenger party	0.09 (0.13)	0.10 (0.16)		
Eurosceptic party			0.42* (0.20)	0.35 (0.24)
Eurosceptic FR party			-0.15 (0.18)	-0.12 (0.22)
Green-challenger			0.85** (0.31)	1.45*** (0.43)
Other challengers			-0.09 (0.23)	-0.09 (0.27)
Politicians	1842	1400	1842	1400
Parties	61	61	61	61
Var: party	0.18	0.24	0.14	0.17

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Dominant mainstream as baseline.

Table: Broadness of EU embedding as Normalized Shannon's H (politician level)

	(1) All	(1) HC	(2) All	(2) HC
Challenger party	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.03)		
Eurosceptic party			0.04 (0.06)	0.10* (0.05)
Eurosceptic FR party			-0.15** (0.05)	-0.11* (0.04)
Green-challenger			-0.13 (0.08)	-0.06 (0.07)
Other challengers			-0.02 (0.07)	0.00 (0.05)
Politicians	1657	1174	1657	1174
Parties	61	61	61	61
Var: party	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00
Var: residual	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.05

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Dominant mainstream as baseline.

Results

► **Salience**

- Substantial degree of cross-national variation
- Challenger parties, particularly Greens and Eurosceptics, dedicate less attention to the EU than dominant parties

► **Embedding**

- No sig overall differences between dominant/challenger parties in terms of EU issue embedding (H1)
- No sig difference between far-right eurosceptic, and dominant parties likelihood of embedding EU issues (H2B)
- Greens and Non-far right eurosceptic parties more likely to embed policy issues with EU compared to dominant parties (H2A, H2C)

► **Embedding style**

- No sig overall differences between dominant/challenger parties in terms of style of EU issue embedding (H3A)
- Far right eurosceptic parties seem to embed across a narrower range of issues than other parties (H3B)

Next Steps

1. Complete manual coding for all 11 languages
2. Extend analysis to all EU member states
3. Categorise opened ended 'other issue' category
4. Explore interplay between different types of candidates (viability, pro-anti EU position), and strategies of dominant/challenger parties
5. Decide on issue attention diversity aggregation method
6. Explore party EU position as well as/rather than dominant/challenger typology

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