



Rethinking First- and Second-Order Elections

Media Negativity and Polity Contestation
during the 2014 European Parliament
Elections in Germany and the UK

Charlotte Galpin and Hans-Jörg Trezz



ARENA Working Paper 3/2018

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ARENA Working Paper 3/2018
April 2018

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ARENA Working Paper (online) | ISSN 1890-7741

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Abstract

European Parliament (EP) elections have been considered a mechanism to create an engaged European public. Traditionally, a distinction has been made between first- and second-order elections, where politicised first-order European elections see EU issues debated and contested by European actors. Despite many years of EP elections and new strategies such as the *Spitzenkandidaten* campaign, a historic number of Eurosceptic parties entered the EP in 2014. The politicisation of EP elections therefore seems to have taken place along identitarian lines rather than traditional partisan divisions. We argue that the traditional distinction between first- and second-order elections is insufficient to capture the public sphere dynamics of politicised EP elections, where debates over the fundamental legitimacy of the EU can transform into first- and second-order 'Eurosceptic' public spheres. We identify two interrelated media biases that intervene to shape the nature of EP election debates: a media negativity bias in the selection and framing of EU news and a media polity bias that privileges contestation of the constitutional make-up of the EU over political and policy-based debates. We therefore develop a typology of EP election campaigns that also distinguishes between types of conflict (politics and polity) and degrees of Europeanisation (second-order and first-order campaigns).

To investigate this empirically, we analyse EP election news during the 2014 European Parliament elections, taking Germany and the UK as ideal-type cases. We find that the UK news demonstrates a strong negative bias towards the EU polity, remaining at the same time a primarily second-order campaign, whereas in Germany EP debates focus more strongly on EU politics and policies and in fact demonstrate a positivity bias with regard to assessments of the legitimacy of the EU polity. The German case is therefore developing towards a first-order polity campaign. We therefore argue for the importance of media biases in analysing EP election campaigns by incorporating tone and type of conflict into studies of first- and second-order European election campaigns.

Keywords

European Parliament Elections – Euroscepticism – Media Bias – Media Negativity – News Values

Introduction

European Parliament (EP) elections have long been touted as a mechanism to create an engaged European public. In their analysis of the first EP elections in 1979, Reif and Schmitt classified them as second-order national elections, where there is less at stake than the more important first-order elections, which determine political office and policy-direction (1980). One reason for this is the 'absence of government-opposition antagonism' typical in national parliaments (Reif & Schmitt 1980; Schmitt 2005). In recent decades, increasing opportunities for contestation between parties in the EP has been seen as a key strategy for promoting EU-level democratic participation, and therefore to promote the development of first-order European elections. In this vein, the 2014 EP election introduced the new *Spitzenkandidaten* strategy, intended to encourage debate 'about politics in, not only of, the EU' (Follesdal & Hix 2006, p. 554). Introducing an element of competition over political office would thus trigger 'government-opposition' conflicts at EU level and encourage citizens to express preferences towards EU policies or politicians (Hix & Marsh 2007; Hobolt 2014). First-order election campaigns would then take place through Europeanised public spheres in which EU actors are visible and EU issues are debated and contested (Gerhards 2000; Koopmans & Statham 2010; Risse 2010).

However, the new *Spitzenkandidaten* strategy could not prevent the unprecedented success of Eurosceptic parties in the turnout of the elections. Even though the salience of the EU in the news increased between the 2009 and 2014 EP elections, (Kleinnijenhuis & van Atteveldt 2016), this politicisation of the EU in public debates is mainly driven by more fundamental conflicts about EU constitutional issues, the EU's external relations or crisis (De Wilde et al. 2013; Hutter et al. 2016). The intended politicisation of the EP elections has therefore not necessarily happened along the left/right spectrum but along identitarian lines (Grande and Kriesi 2014; Hooghe and Marks 2009). Public debates converge on Euroscepticism and not on the *Spitzenkandidaten*. In the 2015 EP elections right-wing Eurosceptic party groupings altogether gained a significant minority of the seats. The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), formed by former British Prime Minister David Cameron in 2009, won 70 seats (9.32 per cent), and two newly formed groups – Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) and Europe of Nations and Freedom won 48 (6.39 per cent) and 39 (5.2 per cent) respectively.

We argue that the traditional distinction between second-order and first-order European elections is insufficient to grasp the public sphere dynamics of politicised EU election campaigns, which enhance conflicts over European integration itself. Through salience given to Eurosceptic actors and debates over the legitimacy of the EU, Europeanisation of EP election campaigns can take place in such a way as to contribute to the development of 'Eurosceptic' public spheres (Bijmans et al. 2017; Gattermann & Vasilopoulou 2017). To understand why EP elections do not necessarily take place in the way that their 'architects' intended, we explore two interrelated public sphere and media biases that account for the convergence on Euroscepticism in public and media debates about the EU: a bias towards negativity in the selection and

framing of EP election news, and a bias towards polity contestation over policy or political contestation. Both biases in the media representation of EU elections allow us to distinguish EU politicisation as a case of 'opposition of principle' (de Wilde & Trenz 2012; Mair 2007), which represents EU politics primarily as a struggle over nationalist interests and systematically disregards partisan competition about politics and policies.

In this article, we develop a typology of EP election campaigns that distinguishes between types of conflict (politics and polity) and degrees of Europeanisation (second-order and first-order campaigns). We then examine a set of indicators including the salience of issues, the main actors/contestants, and the tonality of debates that allow us to measure election campaigning from a comparative perspective. In our content analysis of EP election news coverage, we look for key differences between the UK, a country with a strong tradition of Euroscepticism, and Germany, where Eurosceptic parties have, until recently, been relatively unsuccessful. Our findings shed light on the key differences in media selection and framing as a main characteristic of the differentiated politicisation of European public spheres (de Wilde & Lord 2016). In the case of the UK, the success of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in 2014, and by extension, the vote to leave the EU in 2016, is explained in the context of a strong negative bias towards the EU polity. In Germany EP debates focus more strongly on EU politics and policies and in fact demonstrate a positivity bias with regard to assessments of the legitimacy of the EU polity. The article therefore contributes to our understanding of the importance of media framing in the analysis of first- and second-order European election campaigns and argues for an inclusion of tone and type of conflict into studies of partisan contestation of the EU.

Taking media logics seriously

When considering the role of the media as a driving force of EU politicisation, the focus is often laid on external mobilisation strategies of political actors. European public sphere researchers assume that political parties and candidates can have an impact on public opinion to the extent that their claims are made visible in the media (Koopmans & Statham 2010). The greater visibility of EU and European actors in the public debates, the more Europeanised the public sphere is considered to be (see also Risse 2010). When it comes to the *Spitzenkandidaten* and the 2014 elections, scholars have found wide variation in visibility of the lead candidates across the EU (Hobolt 2014, p. 1534). There are also differences in the scope of articles – Schulze (2016), for example, finds that German journalists are more likely to write about the EP elections from an EU perspective shedding light on the campaigns of EU actors, whereas the UK coverage is predominantly national. Media salience of EU actors is further found to correlate with a better knowledge of candidates and a higher likelihood of turning out to vote (de Vreese & Boomgaarden 2006; Gattermann et al. 2016; Schmitt et al. 2015).

EU politicisation is however not only driven by external media strategies of political actors, but also shaped to a considerable degree by internal media logics. Journalistic practices of news selection and framing account for systematic biases in the way political actors are made salient and meaning is attributed to EU stories. Media frame

analysis has contributed to our understanding of Europeanisation as the convergence of meaning structures across national public spheres (Díez Medrano 2003; Risse 2010; Sift et al. 2007). The framing of Europe through media debates is held accountable for people's identification with Europe and shifting patterns of support and opposition with European integration. When news stories focus on the Euro crisis or the Ukrainian conflict, for instance, the visibility of candidates and parties in EU news is not an indicator for support for European integration but often generates opposition or enhances Eurosceptic attitudes (Kleinnijenhuis & van Atteveldt 2016). In the same vein, the news coverage of the EU crisis is found to give selective salience to Eurosceptic actors and lower visibility to EU actors and their policies (Boomgaarden et al. 2013, pp. 621-623). EU politicisation does in this sense not necessarily lead to a more Europeanised public sphere but is rather a symptom of growing Euroscepticism in the media and the nationalist framing of EU debates (Brüggemann & Kleinen-von Königslöw 2009, p. 40). To understand the development of politicised EU elections in the context of growing Euroscepticism, it is, therefore, necessary to consider not only exogenous mobilisation strategies of political parties, but also how endogenous media logics contribute to the shaping of public discourse about the EU (de Wilde et al., 2013). We therefore suggest taking media autonomy seriously and turn towards the role of the news media as a driver, amplifier and interpreter of EU contestation (Statham & Trenz 2012). The focus then shifts to understanding the work of journalism and its potential biases as important intervening variables that shape political discourse about the EU.

We identify two potential biases of EU news coverage that drive EU politicisation in partial independence of the campaigning efforts of political parties and candidates. The first media bias regards the tonality of the debate. One consistent finding across news formats and cultures is that bad news is more newsworthy than good news (Soroka 2014). This is an incentive for journalists, who work in an increasingly competitive environment, to apply negativity filters to political news as a way to increase the value of their product (Galtung & Ruge 1965). Of particular relevance for EU coverage is that media negativity relates, in particular, to foreign news coverage where other criteria for news selection (like familiarity, personalisation, or cultural proximity) are less readily available (Cappella & Jamieson 1997; de Vreese & Kandyla 2009; Entman 2004). Attention to distant events is more easily drawn when stories convey a notion of threat or when the integrity of particular actors and institutions can be undermined. Negativity can lead to distrust in politicians, political cynicism and depress political engagement (Cappella & Jamieson 1997), particularly negativity that focuses on strategy or personal characteristics of candidates (Crigler et al. 2006; de Vreese 2004). Indeed, scholars have analysed the tone of EU news and found that exposure to negative evaluations of the EU leads to more support for Eurosceptic parties (van Spanje & de Vreese 2014).

Our first hypothesis is therefore that a media negativity filter applies in the selection and framing of EU news stories. As a result, journalists would display a preference for negatively framed stories and give preference to political actors who interpret the EU in negative terms. Increasing the salience of the EU through politicised EP elections, then, would therefore also result in more negativity about the EU. Negative tone alone does not, however, necessarily mean that the EU is delegitimised. Indeed, negativity

in news can be understood as a form of democratic accountability (Soroka 2014). In the context of elections, negativity in the form of coverage slanted towards one candidate over another can also mobilise turnout and promote political knowledge and awareness of candidates (Dunaway et al. 2015; Scheufele 2008). It is therefore important to interpret media negativity in relation to a second potential media bias, which involves the type of conflict amplified by the media.

In the EU setting, such an element of fundamental conflict is introduced by translating politics into polity contestation. Rather than promoting contestation between European political candidates, European elections are often found to debate questions of membership or 'different visions of democracy in the European Union' (Hobolt 2014, p. 1538; see also Treib 2014). According to Mair (2013, p. 109-110), national politicians intentionally focus on such polity issues during EU elections, issues upon which the EP is ineffective, while debating the EU polity is avoided during national elections when there could be an impact on the choice of government and its EU preferences, in order to avoid external constraints. The news media are, however, also found to play an active role in amplifying such fundamental polity conflicts (de Wilde et al. 2013). National media has also been found to ignore the 'everyday', 'bread and butter' politics of the EU and focus instead on crises, EU summits and further integration (van Noije 2010).

Accordingly, our second hypothesis is that a 'media polity filter' applies to the selection and framing of news stories in a way that challenges the legitimacy of the EU in fundamental terms. As a result of this second bias, journalists would frame the EU primarily in terms of the constitutional make-up of the EU, often in nationalist terms or through identity conflicts, rather than ideological or partisan contestations. They would also disproportionately rely on sources who contest the EU in these terms, rather than those interested primarily in discussing EU policy choices and programs. Promoting partisan competition during EP elections would thus increase the predominance of EU polity rather than policy contestation, turning the multi-dimensional field of EU electoral politics into a bipolar constellation in which national self-determination and EU sovereignty fundamentally oppose each other.

The question is how these two systematic media biases are amplified during EP election campaigns, particularly in relation to the new *Spitzenkandidaten* concept which was intended to a) enhance the legitimacy of the EU system and generate trust in EU institutions, especially in the Parliament and Commission and b) open an arena of politics driven by partisan contestation over EU policies and candidates. To explore the relationship between these two biases, we distinguish between negativity in the context of normal political debate over politics or policy and negativity in the context of EU polity contestation. Following Lengauer et al. (2011), we distinguish between overall non-directional negativity and directional negativity targeted towards different types of actors at EU and national level. We also differentiate between 'specific' negativity directed towards the EU's institutions or representatives or 'diffuse negativity' towards a vague or general notion of 'Europe', 'the EU' or 'Brussels' (Easton 1965). Negativity in the context of EU polity contestation is considered to be more damaging for EU legitimacy than negativity in the context of

EU politics or policy contestation, which might encourage engagement with European parties and knowledge of the ‘everyday’ politics of the EU. Our third hypothesis therefore regards the country differences in our case selection: we expect that a ‘negative polity bias’ in the media applies to contexts where support for European integration is generally low (the case of the UK), whereas the negativity bias remains confined to the level of EU partisan and policy contestation in contexts where support for the EU remains high (the case of Germany).

We thus propose an analytical grid of media-driven EU contestation, which relates the tonality of news about the EU with the type of conflict brought to the fore. Combining the traditional distinction of first-order and second-order elections with our distinction of polity contestation as opposed to contestation about policies and politics, we can identify four trajectories of EU politicisation in the EP electoral context (Figure 1). In the first, and to date the most common case, EU contestation would be low, grounded in the old permissive consensus, and contestants would focus on national issues (second-order politics campaigns). As a consequence, primarily domestic actors would be salient and the *Spitzenkandidaten* and EP parties would fail to gain visibility. The salience of Eurosceptic parties would not be higher than their share of votes. EU topics, if covered at all, would be framed predominantly in a neutral way.

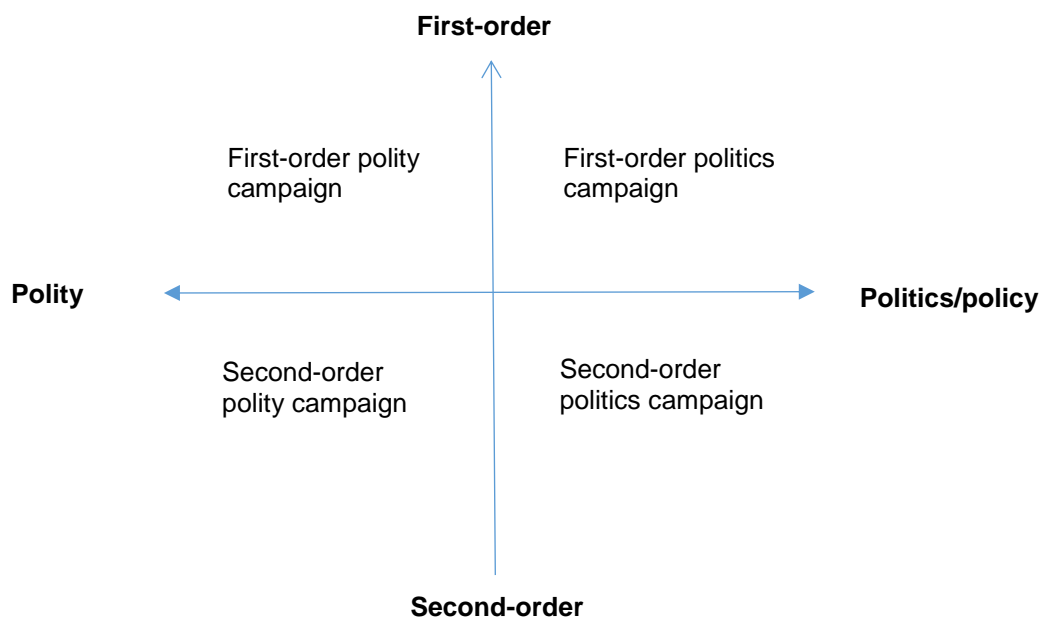


Figure 1: First- and second-order elections

In the second case, there would be a clear shift towards polity contestation that mobilises EU opponents and supporters at a domestic level. EU debates would take place in the form of domestic-identitarian contestation along a pro- anti-European cleavage rather than a left-right domestic cleavage (Hooghe & Marks 2009) (second-order polity campaign). The drivers of polity contestation would be mainly domestic Eurosceptic actors. The campaign would still be ‘second-order’ because both EU and foreign actors would be marginal and EU politics/policies not be at stake. It would

however be fundamentally different from the old 'permissive consensus' because the EU would be salient and tonality would be predominantly negative.

In the third case (first-order politics campaign), newspapers would write extensively about EU policies and politics. European and domestic actors would engage in partisan contestation and discuss political choices from a European perspective. The visibility of Eurosceptic actors would correspond to their actual share of vote in the election. EU polity contestation would be low but partisan contestation along the left-right spectrum high. If a negativity bias manifests itself, it would be rather specific in the context of policy debates or politics and not diffuse against the political system as such. This would be the type of campaign envisaged by the *Spitzenkandidaten* strategy and its drivers would be mainly pro-European mainstream parties.

In the fourth case, EU, foreign and domestic contestants would engage in EU polity contestation (first-order polity campaign). In this case, Eurosceptics and pro-Europeans would have a significant transnational impact by questioning EU legitimacy but avoiding partisan contestations about political positions and policies. In absence of a coordinated pro-European initiative, such as in support of a European constitutional project, such a struggle over the future direction of integration is likely to be dominated by Eurosceptic actors (domestic, foreign and EU). The highly salient Eurosceptic campaigns in one country would then be responded to by domestic actors in a way that opens up a European conflict arena and an overall negative assessment of European integration.

These four scenarios are built on two separate cleavages. In the following, we do not consider them as alternatives but rather wish to understand how they interrelate and apply to different countries. Germany and the UK constitute ideal-type cases on the basis of our schema for differentiated politicisation of EP elections. Germany is the most likely case for an Europeanised first-order politics campaign and the UK the most likely case for a second-order polity campaign. There has traditionally been a strong pro-European consensus amongst German political elites and the media, who have considered the country to be the 'Musterknabe' (model boy) of European integration (Lees 2002). Germany has thus been viewed as having a strong 'European vocation' where German and European interests overlap (Paterson 2011). Nevertheless, the newly formed Alternative for Germany (AfD) won seven seats in the 2014 election. While the party could, at the time, be categorised as a 'soft Eurosceptic' party (Arzheimer 2015) the result was nevertheless significant in a country with a long-standing pro-European consensus.

The UK, however, has long been considered the EU's 'awkward partner' (George 1994) with traditionally high levels of Euroscepticism. In 2014, UKIP was a growing challenge to the mainstream parties and in 2013 David Cameron had promised to hold a referendum on EU membership should the Conservatives win a majority in the 2015 general election. The UK's liberal media system has a long history of Euroscepticism, exercising 'destructive dissent' in their reporting of European integration (Daddow 2012), particularly as a result of newspaper ownership becoming concentrated in a small number of billionaire proprietors who have ideological and financial reasons for

opposing the EU. Compared with other countries, British EU correspondents have less knowledge of the EU institutions and EU politics (van Noije 2010, p. 261). Although the UK press has been described as the 'most parochial' in the EU (Pfetsch et al. 2004), the looming possibility of a referendum and the salience of the Euro crisis in recent years would be expected to have increased the visibility of EU issues in the UK press during the 2014 election campaign.

We would expect contestants in the UK to open up the possibility for a second-order polity campaign with a high salience of prominent domestic Eurosceptic actors and a high level of diffuse negativity, thus contributing to the development of a transnational European arena of contestation. In Germany, coverage of Euroscepticism abroad could be interpreted as a case of remote conflict that leads to a defence of the EU domestically. This development would fundamentally undermine the character of first-order European election campaign characterised by contestation about EU politics and policies. Instead of first-order electoral contestation, we would be confronted by the new situation of first-order polity contestation.

Operationalisation

To account for a media negativity bias as an element of news coverage of EP election campaigning we analyse generic frames at two interrelated levels: a) story-level negativity (as attributed to the journalists); b) source-level negativity (as attributed to particular actors in their statements covered by the news). These are not particular story lines or interpretive frames to be reconstructed through qualitative discourse analysis (see Patterson 2000, p. 11) but a simple quantitative measurement of tonality of the story. Generic frames have the advantage of providing a reliable measurement for cross-national comparative analysis: they directly test thesis and antithesis in our variables and they are irrespective of specific topics and actors.

Adapting the standardised coding instructions from Lengauer et al. (2011), we rank the tone of journalistic story telling on a scale from negative (-1), neutral/ambivalent (0) to positive (1). A set of indicators for negative and positive tone (such as failure, crisis, frustration, etc. vs. success, achievement, enthusiasm) is used to support the coders' choices. We code for overall non-directional negativity, as well as negativity directed at different actors, that is, whether a negative story targets its negativity at the EU ('specifically' towards its institutions or representatives or towards a diffuse notion of 'Europe', 'the EU' or 'Brussels'), or towards domestic national, opposition or populist opposition actors. This allows us to differentiate between general negativity and negativity most likely to provoke anger or distrust in the EU specifically.

In addition to this basic coding at story level, we measure the statements of particular actors quoted in the articles along the same criteria, thus shifting the emphasis from the positive or negative framings of EU news stories by journalists to the dimensions of actor contestations in the news. Borrowing from claims-making analysis (Koopmans & Statham 2010), we also code for type of actor (government, legislative, etc.) and scope (e.g. EU, national). We also code for actor country as well as party family along the lines of radical and populist right, conservative, liberal, social democrat, green and

radical and populist left. We are thus able to show to what extent news coverage in the member states awards high salience to radical/populist right actors, whether the coverage of EP election campaigning focuses primarily on the EU or national representatives, and whether they silence EU candidates and their programmes.

To account for the polity bias, we measure the dimension of articles and actor statements along the line of policy, politics and polity, and scope of article (EU, national, other EU member state, etc.). Variations along this variable are used to demonstrate how the salience of the EU, inclusion of actors and tone of debate intersect to support particular types of campaign in EP election debates (see Table 1). In this article, we present findings according to the following: issue salience (conflict dimension), inclusion of actors, and polarisation of opinion (tonality).

To apply this codebook, we analyse news articles about the EP elections in Germany and the UK from a three-week period spanning the elections of 22nd-25th June 2014. We collect articles from six newspapers: the two most visited online left-leaning and conservative-leaning quality newspapers and the most visited tabloid-style newspaper from each country via the European Media Monitor and the online archives of the newspapers.¹ This includes *welt.de*, *spiegel.de* and *bild.de* for Germany and *guardian.co.uk*, *telegraph.co.uk* and *dailymail.co.uk* for the UK. All articles dealing centrally with the EP elections are selected for analysis, including news and opinion articles but excluding interviews. We took a random stratified sample by newspaper of 50 per cent of the articles collected. Altogether, 335 articles and 1128 actor statements were coded by a team of four coders applying Krippendorff's alpha for reliability tests (Hayes & Krippendorff 2007).²

Findings

The media negativity bias

Corresponding with our expectations, a media negativity bias in political news persists in both countries and across news formats (see Table 1). Negativity as a news value is applied as generic frame of the article (what we code as overall non-directional tone) and in assessing the performance of government both at national and EU level (directional tone). Country differences do not matter at this generic level of news-framing. There is also no significant difference between countries with regards to tone towards domestic Eurosceptic/populist parties,³ although the UK media tends to be more positive and also overall gives UKIP far more attention than the German press

¹ This survey was part of a wider project looking at online news and user engagement, which dictated our choice of sampling the most-visited open-access news websites with comments sections.

² As a case of exploratory coding (De Swert 2012), we accepted the lower score of .60 for the tone variables to allow for the subjective nature of this coding. The average score for all tone variables used at article and actor statement was .65. The average of the other variables was .84 and 0.77 for all variables. Reliability was further enhanced through team coding, regular discussion and checking of problematic cases, as well as a final coding check by us.

³ Overall tone: $p = .587$, *Somer's d* = -.031; government tone: $p = .167$, *Somer's d* = -.095; domestic Eurosceptic tone: $p = .057$, *Somer's d* = .155

gives the AfD, who are generally ignored. It is only when we look at negativity towards the EU that the two countries differ significantly.

Table 1: Article tone

	German news	UK news
Overall tone		
Predominantly negative	47.8% (77)	51.1% (89)
Neutral/ambivalent	43.5% (70)	40.2% (70)
Predominantly positive	8.7% (14)	8.6% (15)
	100% (161)	100% (174)
EU tone		
Predominantly negative	17.9% (21)	35.7% (46)
Neutral/ambivalent	67.5% (79)	58.1% (75)
Predominantly positive	14.5% (17)	6.2% (8)
	100% (117)	100% (129)
Government tone		
Predominantly negative	27.7% (23)	41.7% (55)
Neutral/ambivalent	68.7% (57)	49.2% (65)
Predominantly positive	3.6% (3)	9.1% (12)
	100% (83)	100% (132)
Populist/Eurosceptic opposition tone		
Predominantly negative	30.4% (14)	24.4% (33)
Neutral/ambivalent	63.0% (29)	54.8% (74)
Predominantly positive	6.5% (3)	20.7% (28)
	100% (46)	100% (135)

*Ordinal measure of association *Somer's d* calculated on the basis of tone as the dependent variable.

As can be seen from the Figure 2 below, EP election news in the UK is much more negative towards the EU institutions and actors than German news. We find a small-moderate effect of country on EU tone ($p = .000$, *Somer's d* = $-.220$). In the UK, 35.7 per cent of all articles coded for tone towards the EU were negative, and just 6.2 per cent as positive (see Table 1). In Germany, just slightly more articles were coded negative than positive.

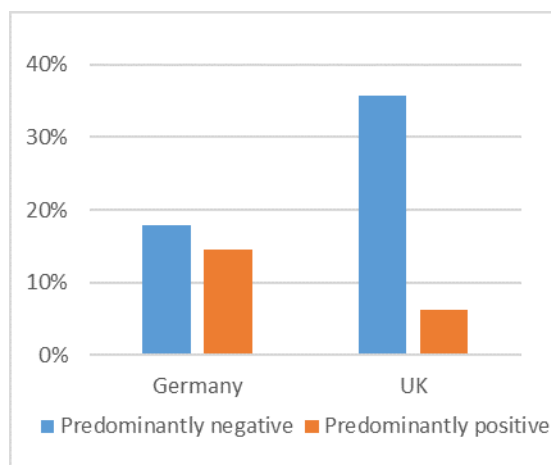


Figure 2: Article tone towards the EU

When we look at how actors evaluate the EU in the media, the two countries diverge to an even greater degree. While the overall tone of actors tends to be slightly more negative in the UK, there is again no significant relationship between country and tone towards government and domestic Eurosceptic/populist parties (see Table 2). Both countries therefore confirm the general negativity bias in the selection of quotes by journalists, who display a preference for sources who talk about issues in a negative way. We find, however, a highly significant moderate relationship between country and actor tone towards the EU ($p = .000$, *Somer's d* = $-.334$, Figure 3). In the German newspapers, we find a positively bias, with 33 per cent of quotes coded as positive compared with 22 per cent negative. In the UK newspapers, over 45 per cent of quotes were negative towards the EU with just one in ten coded as positive. German journalists therefore tend to quote actors who discuss the EU and its actors in an affirmative way, whereas British journalists quote actors who are much more critical of EU actors and institutions. We therefore confirm that there is a media negativity bias in the framing of news stories and actor statements in both countries, with the exception of the positivity bias in the selection of quotes about the EU in the German press.

Table 2: Actor tone

	German news	UK news
Overall tone		
Predominantly negative	35.5% (149)	45.6% (323)
Neutral/ambivalent	42.1% (177)	37.3% (264)
Predominantly positive	22.4% (94)	17.1% (121)
	100% (420)	100% (708)
EU tone		
Predominantly negative	22.0% (44)	45.9% (107)
Neutral/ambivalent	45.0% (90)	43.3% (101)
Predominantly positive	33.0% (66)	10.7% (25)
	100% (200)	100% (233)
Government tone		
Predominantly negative	45.6% (47)	36.4% (90)
Neutral/ambivalent	36.9% (38)	42.1% (104)
Predominantly positive	17.5% (18)	21.5% (53)
	100% (103)	100% (247)
Populist/Eurosceptic opposition tone		
Predominantly negative	30.1% (25)	35.7% (82)
Neutral/ambivalent	42.2% (35)	38.7% (89)
Predominantly positive	27.7% (23)	25.7% (59)
	100% (83)	100% (230)

*Ordinal measure of association *Somer's d* calculated on the basis of tone as the dependent variable.

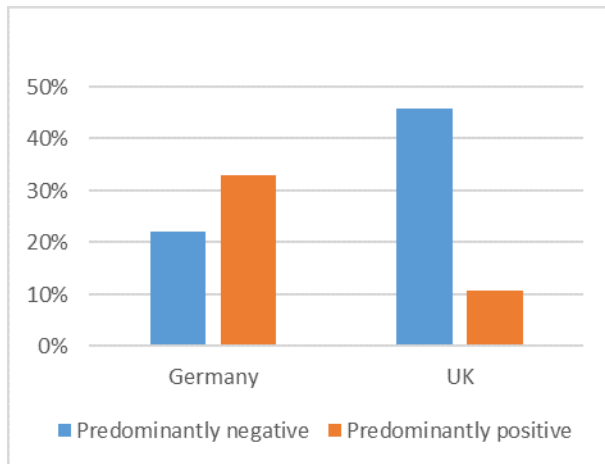


Figure 3: Actor tone towards the EU

Furthermore, when we look at the way in which different types of actors discuss the EU, we also find clear differences between countries (see Table 3). In the UK, all actors discuss the EU in predominantly negative terms. In Germany, all actors except for European actors from other member states discuss the EU predominantly positively. When it comes to EU actors specifically (e.g. MEPs, EU officials, Commission representatives, *Spitzenkandidaten*), over 40 per cent discuss the EU or its actors and institutions in positive terms, compared with the UK, where over 40 per cent of actors discuss the EU in predominantly negative terms, which can be explained by the high number of Eurosceptic MEPs quoted in the UK news.⁴ Thus, findings further confirm that negativity about the EU from actors is a predominantly foreign phenomenon in the German news. Furthermore, this suggests that increasing the presence of EU actors in the news does not necessarily lead to more positive impressions of the EU. Rather, the journalistic biases of the national context interact to determine the representation of the EU in national public spheres.

Table 3: Types of actors and tone towards the EU (in per cent)

	EU		European national		Domestic		European other		Domestic other ⁵	
	DE	UK	DE	UK	DE	UK	DE	UK	DE	UK
Predominantly negative	11.9	41.0	60.0	60.0	18.4	43.3	16.7	37.5	18.5	50.0
Neutral/ambivalent	47.0	33.3	20.0	37.0	46.1	50.0	41.7	43.8	63.0	36.0%
Predominantly positive	40.7	25.6	20.0	2.9	35.5	6.7	41.7	18.8	18.5	13.6

⁴ A chi square test of independence finds a statistically significant relationship with a medium effect between actor tone towards the EU and actor type for the German news, $p = .000$, *Cramer's V* = .276. The test for the UK could not be carried out due to insufficient numbers in all categories.

⁵ Also includes very small numbers of non-European other

The media polity bias

Table 4: Issue salience

	Articles		Actors	
	German news	UK news	German news	UK news
European	72.0% (116)	59.2% (103)	66.7% (277)	45.1% (319)
National	28.0% (45)	40.8% (71)	33.3% (138)	54.9% (389)
	100% (161)	100% (174)	100% (415)	100% (708)

One of the key criteria for Europeanised, first-order campaigns is that European topics are made salient in the news media. This aim is achieved in both countries, where the scope of news articles is dominantly European, demonstrating a weak statistical relationship between country and article scope ($p = .018$, $\Phi = .135$) (see Table 4). We also find that German journalists are more likely to quote actors who discuss European issues than national ones ($p = .000$, $Cramer's V = .210$). Germany is therefore a case for a more first-order election than the UK which in this respect remains more second-order.

According to our polity bias thesis, the salience of the EU in the news alone is however not a sufficient measure of a politicised campaign. Rather, the type of conflict presented is key and it is here that we find a highly significant difference between the two countries ($p = .000$, $Cramer's V = .399$). In the UK in particular, we find that almost half of articles in the UK press discuss the EU in polity terms compared to just over a quarter in Germany (see Table 5 below). Some of this relates to David Cameron's promised referendum on EU membership, which made the EU membership issue highly salient, but also to the emphasis placed by journalists on more fundamental questions of membership and institutional make-up, bringing the legitimacy of the EU into question instead of adding a politics dimension to the EU. Journalists rarely focus on what is actually at stake in the election.

Table 5: Type of conflict in German and UK news

	Articles		Actors	
	German news	UK news	German news	UK news
EU policies	6.2% (10)	4.0% (7)	8.0% (33)	4.1% (29)
EU member state ⁶	18.6% (30)	1.7% (3)	16.1% (67)	8.8% (62)
National policies	2.5% (4)	5.7% (10)	1.2% (5)	6.4% (45)
EU politics	21.1% (34)	6.3% (11)	26.5% (110)	8.5% (60)
National politics	24.8% (40)	33.9% (59)	30.8% (128)	48.0% (340)
EU polity	26.1% (42)	47.1% (82)	16.1% (67)	23.7% (168)
National polity	.6% (1)	1.1% (2)	1.2% (5)	.6% (4)
	100% (161)	100% (174)	100% (415)	100% (708)

While EU politics failed to resonate in the UK, journalists allow EU politics to unfold in Germany by opening an arena of partisan contestation. Issues in other EU member states are also considerably more salient in Germany than in the UK, which primarily results from a focus on Euroscepticism in Germany as a 'foreign' problem. In neither country, however, are EU policy issues raised often. Altogether, over 45 per cent of

⁶ EU member state policies, politics and polity have been collapsed into one category

articles in Germany related to European politics and policies, compared with just 12 per cent for the UK, where such issues were often transformed into polity contestation. Whereas Germany goes some way towards meeting the criteria for a first-order European campaign, then, the UK falls into the category of a second-order polity campaign with most articles dealing with national politics or a fundamental questioning of membership.

However, the EU polity contestation bias is driven not just by the framing of the articles, but also by the inclusion of Eurosceptic actors who contest the legitimacy of the EU. This might be confronted by pro-European actors who speak positively about the EU polity. A first-order polity campaign is thus driven by European-level actors who raise fundamental issues of EU legitimacy instead of engaging in debates about EU politics and policy. Combined with the EU negativity bias, such a polity campaign would heavily lean towards Euroscepticism, but this Eurosceptic agenda would be a trans-European one mobilised by actors whose voice is heard across the European public sphere. When it comes to actors, therefore, we also find a significant difference between countries ($p = .000$, *Cramer's V* = .325). It becomes evident that on the one hand, the proportion of actors discussing EU polity issues is significantly higher in the UK than in Germany. Just over 20 per cent of actors in the UK news discuss European policies and politics compared with over 45 per cent in the German news. UK journalists are also more likely to quote EU actors who contest the EU polity whereas most EU actors quoted in the German press discuss EU politics (see Table 6). This is likely to be related to the high numbers of Eurosceptic MEPs quoted in the UK press and the salience of the *Spitzenkandidaten* in Germany. This would confirm the pattern of a first-order politics campaign in Germany while the UK resembles more the case of a second-order polity campaign.

Table 6: What EU actors discuss

	Germany	UK
EU policies	16.7% (12)	9.0% (7)
EU member state ⁷	0.0% (0)	23.1% (18)
National policies	0.0% (0)	1.3% (1)
EU politics	58.3% (42)	21.8% (17)
National politics	5.6% (4)	12.8% (10)
EU polity	19.4% (14)	32.1% (25)

We also find an over-representation of radical/populist parties in both countries ($p = .000$, *Cramer's V* = -.141, see Table 7).⁸ The Eurosceptic voice in the media is most dominant in the UK where almost a third of all party actors are from UKIP or other radical/populist right parties. Added together with Conservative actors and radical/populist left, this makes two thirds of all party actors likely to express Eurosceptic views. In Germany, 17.2 per cent of the voices during the campaign can be attributed to the radical/populist right (compared to just 7.1 per cent of the voting

⁷ EU member state policies, politics and polity have been collapsed into one category.

⁸ To remove the effect of the different parties in government in the two countries, we condensed party families into two categories: mainstream and radical/populist.

share that went to AfD). While the UK quotes more radical/populist parties, there is a disproportionate space given to them in both countries.

Table 7: Party family of actors

	German news	UK news
Mainstream	81.9% (262)	68.9% (394)
Radical/populist	18.1% (58)	31.1% (178)
	100% (320)	100% (572)

If we only look at party affiliation of EU-level actors, we find, however, a striking difference between the countries. In the German press, EU actors cover the wide ideological left-right spectrum and the Eurosceptic voice is completely absent (thus showing a medium-strong significant relationship between party family and actor type – $p = .000$, *Cramer's V* = .363). In the British press on the other hand, almost half of all EU actors quoted belong to radical/populist parties ($p = .001$, *Cramer's V* = .164, see Table 8).⁹ When it comes to actors in other EU member states, instead, the German media pays considerable attention to radical/populist parties, constituting over 43.1 per cent of actors from other member states. We can conclude from this that there is a potential for a first-order polity campaign in both countries but that the driving factors of such a campaign are quite different. In Germany, the newsworthiness of foreign Eurosceptic actors and their messages (mainly through the voices of the protagonists Le Pen and Farage) is a driving factor, but these actors remain strongly contested in the media. Meanwhile, in the UK, Euroscepticism is primarily home-grown, coming closest to a second-order polity campaign with elements a first-order polity campaign.

Table 8: Types of actor by party type

	EU	European National	Domestic National
Germany			
Mainstream	100.0% (65)	56.9% (37)	83.9% (156)
Radical/populist	0.0% (0)	43.1% (28)	16.1% (30)
	100% (65)	100% (65)	100% (186)
UK			
Mainstream	50.7% (34)	62.7% (42)	73.1% (310)
Radical/populist	49.3% (33)	37.3% (25)	26.9% (114)
	100% (67)	100% (67)	100% (424)

Towards a first-order polity campaign of Euroscepticism?

Our final hypothesis was the expectation that these two media biases interact to transform into a 'negative polity bias' in the UK news, whereas negativity remains on the level of political and policy contestation in the case of Germany. This expectation is confirmed. Firstly, we consider the target of EU-directed tone in articles, that is, whether it is directed towards specific EU actors or institutions (what we call specific negativity), or towards the 'EU' in general, a vague notion of 'Europe' or 'Brussels' (diffuse negativity). When looking at the relationship between negative and positive

⁹ Only political actors have been included in this analysis.

tone and specific vs. diffuse tone (see Figure 4) in the German news, we do not find a statistically significant relationship. There is no bias when discussing the EU in general terms (and the majority of diffuse article are neutral), reflecting the general pro-EU consensus among political elites. In the UK, however, we find significantly more specific negativity and significantly more diffuse neutral/ambivalent tone ($p = .003$, *Somer's d* = .286). Thus, less diffuse negativity does not translate into more positivity in the UK news, but more ambivalence. When the EU is discussed in specific terms, there is a very clear negativity bias in the UK news with over half of articles coded for EU tone identified as negative, and a slight negativity bias in Germany. In other words, EU negativity in the German news is part of the critique of EU actors, institutions and policies that is equilibrated by a positive assessment, whereas in the UK negativity is both specific and directed against a diffuse idea of Europe. Thus, in this respect, Germany meets our criteria for a first-order European campaign and the UK meets our criteria for a first/second-order polity campaign.

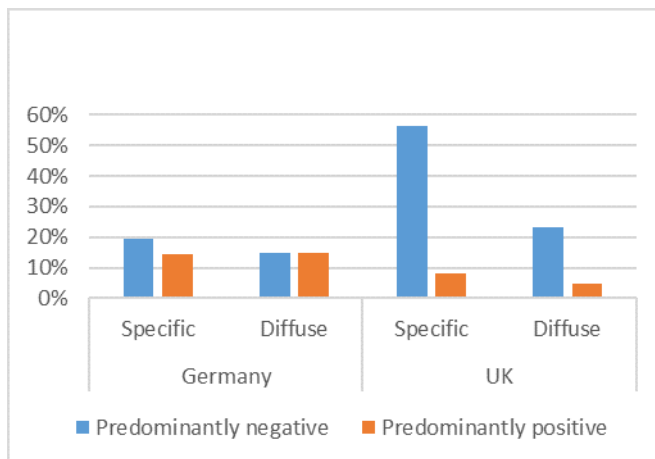


Figure 4: Article tone towards the EU – specific vs. diffuse

The positivity bias already identified amongst German actors grows when we look at specific vs. diffuse tone (Figure 5) and issue dimensions (Figure 6). German actors tend to be more negative with regards to specific tone, but when discussing the EU in general, diffuse terms, they are much more positive (although this relationship is not significant). In debates about the EU polity, almost half of statements are positive about the EU. Only when it comes to debates about EU policies does negative tone predominate. In the UK, actors generally speak negatively about the EU whether the tone is specific or diffuse (no significant relationship) and regardless of the dimension.¹⁰ In debates about the EU polity, over half of all statements are negative and very few positive. We therefore confirm the pro-European elite and media consensus in Germany towards the principle of European integration. Euroscepticism abroad is met with a defence of the EU at home, alongside discussion about EU politics and a contestation between *Spitzenkandidaten*. In the UK, the relatively high salience of the EU in the 2014 transforms, contrary to the intended effects of EP politicisation

¹⁰ A chi-square test for independence for the UK could not be conducted due to low numbers of observations in the politics and policies categories.

through elections, not into a first-order politics campaign but into a primarily second-order negative polity campaign that delegitimises the EU in the public sphere.

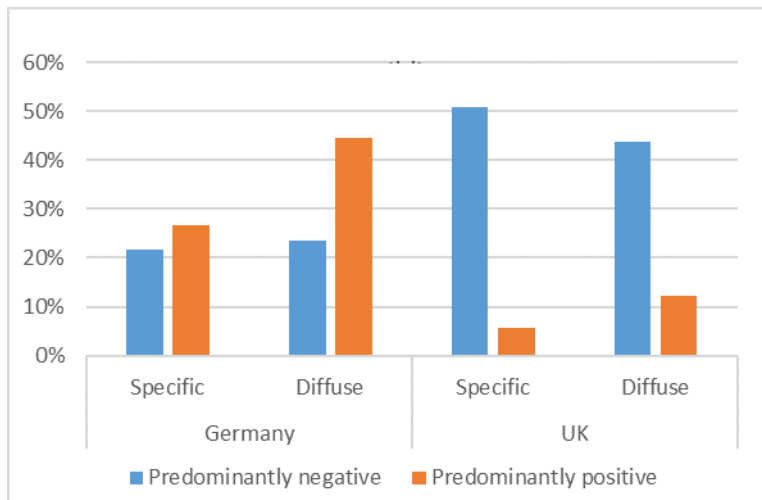


Figure 5: Directed actor tone towards the EU – specific diffuse negativity

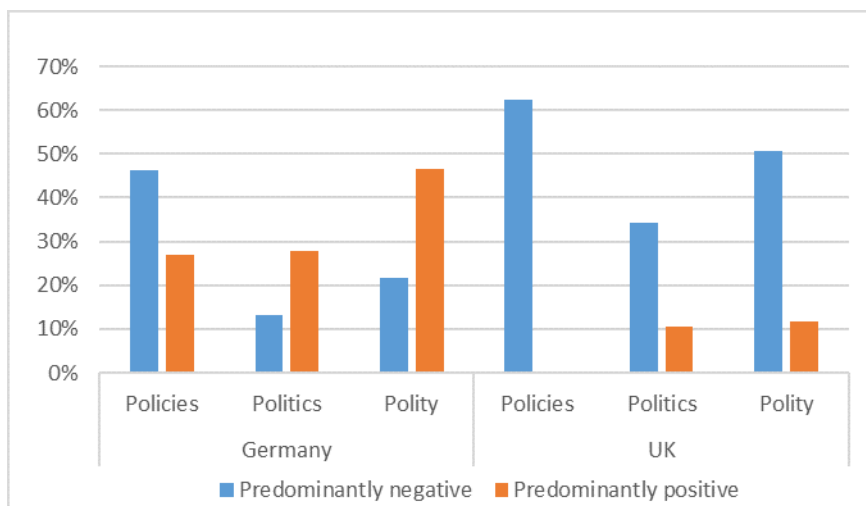


Figure 6: Issue dimension of statement and actor tone towards the EU

Conclusion: First- and second-order election campaigns reconsidered

In comparing EP election campaigns in the UK and in Germany, we have considered media selection and framing as central for understanding the limits of the first- and second-order model of EP elections. We found that a double media bias applies to EU election news. First, EU campaigners faced a general negativity bias in the form of filters that select and frame EU news in a dominantly negative tone. Secondly, EU partisan actors were confronted with an EU polity bias that translates EU politics into an ‘opposition of principle’ that contests the EU in fundamental terms. This gave disproportionate salience to Eurosceptic actors in both countries, who voiced such principled opposition while successfully competing for media attention. Instead of enhancing an EU politics dimension, the EU thus becomes politicised in a way that is can transform into a struggle over nationalist interests, identity and sovereignty.

Our findings contribute to an understanding of the particularity of EU politicisation that is different from ‘politics as usual’. The enhanced media attention of politicised debates transforms the traditional patterns of second-order campaigning, which were characterised by generally low levels of conflict over EU political choices. At the same time, however, the dominant form of media contestation and negativity fails to meet the conditions for enhancing EU representative democracy through a first-order European election campaign in which EU political choices are discussed controversially across the member states. Transforming instead into a form of fundamental conflict that can undermine the legitimacy of the EU in systemic terms, EU politicisation in the context of EP elections also supports new dynamics of either second-order or first-order polity campaigning that exposes quite different features to the intended first-order partisan campaign as the target of EU democratic design. Our findings overall confirm the hypothesis of a general negativity bias of political news. In both countries, this negativity is not only generic but clearly directed towards the EU or its actors and institutions. In other words, the more the EU is made salient and targeted as an object of political debates in specific terms (i.e. in the assessment of particular policies, actors and institutions), the more it is evaluated negatively by journalists.

News media would thus systematically translate EU legitimisation campaigns into Eurosceptic opinion as a way to respond to the demands of media audiences for news stories that challenge EU legitimacy. There would be, in other words, a media-driven ‘spiral of Euroscepticism’ that amplifies the negativity and identity drama of the EU bringing Eurosceptic actors and discourses effectively to the enhanced attention of Eurosceptic audiences (De Vreese 2007).

Apart from this general trend towards negative polity campaigning, politicisation is found to differ between and within member states – a process of ‘differentiated politicisation’ (de Wilde et al. 2015). By focusing on Germany and the UK we selected poles among the member states where we could expect high variation in the media coverage of EP election news. Elaborating on these country differences, we found Germany, as expected, to be the more likely case for a first-order partisan campaign, while the UK case tended towards a second-order polity campaigning. In the case of Germany, patterns of second-order partisan contestation still prevail, yet the floor is opened for EU partisan, *Spitzenkandidaten*-led campaigns. However, the news also covered regularly debates in other member states and quoted foreign actors. By following our criteria, we would, however, not be able to classify the German case as a first-order partisan debate, primarily because Euroscepticism was the main topic when covering election campaigns in other member states. The Eurosceptics thus entered the German debate through the backdoor and pushed the campaign towards a first-order polity campaign. German journalists gave relatively lower attention to domestic Eurosceptic actors (the AfD) and instead made foreign Eurosceptics like Nigel Farage and Marine Le Pen ‘prominent’ in the German debate. The response to the salience of Euroscepticism is an elite positivity polity bias in the German media, thus focusing on issues over which the EP does not have power and undermining the purpose of opening up an arena for EU electoral contestation.

In sharp contrast, there was a highly pronounced negative polity bias in the UK news. The news media gave considerable voice to radical/populist European and domestic actors to the exclusion of voices that defend the EU polity or principle of European integration. UK press coverage of EP elections is thus characterised by an excess of negativity and the almost complete absence of affirmation both in the ways the EU is covered by the journalists and contested by political actors.

What is striking in the UK coverage is thus the deeply biased journalism which not only fails to cover the different sides of the political spectrum in EU-level election campaigning but also overtly amplifies and supports Eurosceptic positions in the way it selects and frames EU news. The UK case thus constitutes a clear second-order polity campaign, which is only undermined by the overall low salience of EU actors in the debate and the notorious absence of coverage from debates in other member states. The UK media debate is in this sense characterised by a Brexit consensus, making all mainstream parties except one (the Liberal Democrats) appear in the media as Eurosceptic. We therefore show that the EU membership question was highly salient during the 2014 EP election and that the news media in the UK has contributed to an environment that facilitated the 2016 vote to leave the EU.

It is further possible that the lack of EU politics or the reluctance of *Spitzenkandidaten* to enter such controversies beyond the general pro-European consensus is substituted in the media in both countries by a focus on 'polity' contestation offering a platform for those Eurosceptic voices who undermine the legitimacy of the EU. This explains why, from a perspective of German media, the UK debate becomes highly newsworthy. The prominence of Eurosceptic leaders and the resonance of their campaigns in other countries can in this sense be regarded as a driver towards a first-order polity campaign. News media facilitate the transnational diffusion of Euroscepticism and set the agenda for a new type of polity contestation that fundamentally challenges the character of second-order EP election campaigning.

Finally, we can contribute to the debate on the still largely unexplored normative implications of differentiated politicisation. In light of the fragmented media landscapes in Europe, reception contexts differ widely. For obvious reasons this poses a challenge to European campaigners who enter the arena as *Spitzenkandidaten* for the office of a European executive. If 'different "Europes" are demanded by different people, in different settings' (de Wilde et al. 2015, p. 15), the *Spitzenkandidaten* will find it hard responding to demands voiced in fragmented national arenas of contestation. The normative implications of these findings go, however, beyond simple technical issues of campaigning. Our findings also imply that the same opportunity for democratic authorisation and control leads to very diverse responses in terms of the dynamics of public contestation. When filtered through the news media European campaigns empower actors unequally: those actors who frame the EU dominantly in negative terms are rewarded with media attention. This does not mean that the positions of such EU polity contestants are also legitimated by the news media. Yet, the Eurosceptics are the most successful media-agenda setters and as such are able to affect the course of the debate in important ways by discussing the limits of sovereignty transfer and questions of membership instead of EU politics and policies.

At the same time, there is a tendency that the pro-European actors who are represented in the media continue to focus on EU politics and policy, and leave the EU legitimacy claims of Eurosceptic actors uncontested.

What does this mean for the possibility of EP elections to enhance the democratic quality of the EU parliamentary system of representative democracy? From a democratic perspective, one needs to conclude that the authorisation effect of EP campaigning remains low, because partisan positions are not made salient and voters' preferences align along pro- and anti-European cleavages, which are not represented by the *Spitzenkandidaten* and their policy agendas. The effects of differentiated politicisation are in this sense balanced by media logics which apply similarly in different contexts and which offer, above all, a window of opportunity for Eurosceptic opposition. The convergence towards Euroscepticism is, however, not the only result of EP electoral campaigning. The media logics must be also held accountable for the renationalisation of the debates, which, in turn, would reinforce the patterns of differentiated integration. In this sense, the politicisation of EP elections varies widely between Germany and the UK and we can expect even more variation with regard to reception in the new member states or in those countries worst affected by crisis.

Ultimately, our research design was aimed at measuring media biases in campaigning coverage. This is not a sufficient indicator for predicting voters' preferences and choices. We can expect, however, that for the voters who receive information about the EU primarily through the mass media, it makes a decisive difference whether mediated conflicts remain within the ambit of electoral contestation of candidates and policy choices or whether they challenge or undermine the legitimacy of the representative system of democracy as such. In this last sense, the relative success of Eurosceptic parties in the elections and the media biases that applied during election campaigning are closely related.

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