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# **Politicization and European Integration: Lessons from the Constitution Case**

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## **Abstract**

This article studies political contestation in Constitutional public debates in France, Germany and Britain. Theoretically, it addresses debates on EU politicization by advancing a conceptual approach based on political actors' claims-making in the public sphere. It applies claims-making analysis. Findings show that EU politicization occurs through a nationally filtered language of claims and critical narratives that resonate with national political understandings. While the German and British public spheres remained relatively de-politicized and had a 'bystander' function, politicization was evident in France in the form of domestic party contestation stimulated by the referendum. Notably, party contestation emerged among mainstream parties at the core of the political system. Findings indicate that conflicts were not only the outcome of strategic interactions between party leaders, but importantly occurred before a public through mass-mediated debates. The case demonstrates that politicization is not equivalent to a form of Eurosceptic, nationalist, 'identity politics', because 'interests' were crucial to a successful framing.

**Keywords:** politicization; Constitution; claims-making; public sphere; European integration

## **Introduction**

When the Euro-zone's monetary policy is publicly debated and politically contested across the region on a daily basis, it seems odd that a decade ago Europe's elites were principally concerned by EU citizens' lack of attention for the integration project. While EU politicization now seems obvious, in 2001, Europe's elites embarked on a Constitution-making project, with the stated aim of bringing the EU to the people and constructing a legitimate and meaningful European political community. These hopes hit the rocks after the Treaty's public rejections in referendums in France and the Netherlands, in 2005. In this article, our aim is not to re-tell the story of Constitutional failure, but to examine *how* a specific process of EU politicization unfolded and took form in the public debates over the Constitution. We undertake an empirical study of the degree and form of political contention between collective actors over the Constitution that was publicly visible in mass media debates in France, Germany and Britain.

Debates about the role of politicization within advancing European integration have been central to European Studies from the early functionalist notion that a shift in power to the European-level would lead to a political 'spill over' from member states (Haas 1958). After the Constitution failure, there has been an upsurge of academic interest in the processes of EU politicization and its outcomes (Kriesi et al 2008; Fligstein 2008; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Checkel and Katzenstein 2009; Koopmans and Statham 2010; Risse 2010; de Wilde 2011; de Wilde and Zürn 2012). Typically, these approaches argue that structurally grounded conflicts over European integration and the EU polity are becoming politically salient to a degree that they are consciously perceived by the groups involved, and that some collective actors mobilize and organize politically on this basis. However, there are important differences in theories and

explanations, and most authors concede that conceptual and analytic developments have outstripped empirical verifications of EU politicization processes.

Pieter De Wilde's (2011:560-6) excellent critical review and synthesis points out that there is no single overarching definition or analytic framework for EU politicization, but the discussion crystallizes around distinct forms and functions. The main forms consist of an increase in: political conflict and party politics in the EU multilevel polity; the dominance of political actors relative to technocrats/bureaucrats in decision-making; the public contentiousness of European issues. The main functions of politicization are: (re)structuring political conflict in the EU multi-level polity; raising questions of (lack of) democratic legitimacy; and altering the course of integration and character of the EU. De Wilde sets an empirical research agenda by arguing that we need to know, how the distinct forms of EU politicization connect to and combine with the different functions. For this he comes up with a working definition for EU politicization (2011:560), 'as an increase in the polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formation within the EU... (P)oliticization involves actors presenting themselves as representatives publicly and thereby contesting other representatives. It is this practice of competitive representative claims-making that may function to crystallize dimensions of conflict, raise the question of EU legitimacy and alter the course of integration.'

In this article, we aim to make a contribution to understanding of EU politicization by examining an important case of 'competitive representative claims-making' that crystallized new dimensions of conflict, raised questions of EU legitimacy, and altered the course of integration: the attempt to ratify the Constitutional Treaty. The Constitution has been identified as an important juncture that advanced EU politicization decisively (Risse 2010). We do not go into

details of EU Constitution-making procedures and Constitutionalization. Our entry point is to use the Constitution case as an important example of EU politicization, and empirically study the degree and form of contestation that took place between political actors and was manifest in their public claims-making acts. We treat the EU's Constitution-making as a quasi-experimental setting for the emergence of a political public sphere, which (to some degree) was its intention. There are obvious limitations in the extent to which a case study can inform general understandings of EU politicization. However, a case study approach has an advantage of allowing the analysis to relate the outcomes in public debates to context and the specific political conditions and configurations that brought them about. We want to contribute to understanding on the mediating processes for politics between the EU multi-level polity, on one side, and general publics, on the other. Our specific aim is to make a contribution by unpacking *how* the patterns of contestation unfolded between political actors over the Constitution in public debates in France, Germany and Britain. This can be achieved through an analysis of collective actors' contestation in mass mediated public debates, i.e., claims-making analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999). We can then relate these findings back to literature on the dimensions and forms of conflict between political actors –e.g., party competition, contentious politics– that are considered to shape EU politicization.

In the next section, we critically discuss some perspectives on EU politicization, which informs our own public sphere approach and analytic model. We then present our empirical findings, first, generally, on the degree and form of contestation between political actors over the Constitution, over time, and across the three countries; and second, specifically, on mobilization and framing by the main French political parties in the referendum. The concluding section draws lessons from the case study findings with regard to the EU politicization literature.

## **Perspectives on EU Politicization**

There are many common features that run across the emerging middle range theories on EU politicization (Kriesi et al 2008; Fligstein 2008; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Checkel and Katzenstein 2009; Koopmans and Statham 2010; Risse 2010; de Wilde 2011; de Wilde and Zürn 2012). Reminiscent of the general approach taken by cleavage theories, these commonly identify a structural tension over advancing European integration that provides a ‘new’ political potentiality for a political entrepreneur to take advantage of, and advance its own influence over decision-making relative to other political actors. The ‘gap’ or disjuncture which creates tension and a political potentiality is the mismatch between the increasing scope, depth and influence of European integration, on one side, and the resilience of national publics, identities and understandings, on the other. This latent potential can be taken up by political entrepreneurs, who when they see favourable conditions, i.e. ‘political opportunities’, decide to politically mobilize and thematize European integration issues, thereby issuing a challenge to the existing system of the EU polity.

Differences occur between perspectives on EU politicization, first, in how the structural tension is conceptualized and defined (e.g., as ‘identity’ or ‘interest’ based, or both), and second, how the conflict between political actors is conceived. On this second point, public sphere oriented perspectives emphasize the importance of a wide range of collective actors, including executives, parties, interest groups, NGOs and social movements, responding to the available political opportunities to mobilize over Europe (e.g., Koopmans and Statham 2010). By contrast, political science perspectives have tended to apply theories of strategic competition among political parties to explain which parties are likely to mobilize over Europe, and when, in response to which conditions (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2009). However, these approaches are not mutually

exclusive, not least because some authors have sought to explain the new political conflicts over European integration by examining the competitive mobilization of claims and framing in the public sphere by political parties (Kriesi et al 2008, Helbling et al 2009, Statham and Koopmans 2009).

Leaving aside the many common agreements in the EU politicization literature, our interest is in the potential of mass-mediated public debates as mechanisms that a) allow political actors to challenge decision-making and engage in contestation with one another, and b) supply flows of communication about this political contestation to general publics. For this reason we now discuss the role that has been attributed to the mass media and the public sphere as a forum for political competition and for political actors to mobilize challenges in theses on EU politicization.

In their influential thesis on EU politicization, Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks (2009) advance a perspective that emphasizes the strategic actions of political parties within domestic party politics and points towards a new salience of ‘identity’ in conflicts over Europe. This perspective takes a pessimistic normative stance on the consequences of an increasing exposure to party contestation for the EU. The authors point towards negative outcomes of politicization, for example, in the rise of new populist nationalist parties, who mobilize an anti-immigrant anti-elitist identity politics by tapping into the (supposedly) anti-European and xenophobic tendencies of national mass populations. Here, there is some overlap with Neil Fligstein’s (2008) ‘Euroclash’ thesis, which considers that the consequences of globalization (to which Europeanization is central) have produced new groups of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ within society, who increasingly politically self-identify themselves as such, and mobilize on that basis within domestic national politics.

Hooghe and Marks (2009) describe the political mechanisms at work. First, from 1991 onwards the ‘permissive consensus’ whereby executives had more or less a free hand within their national political arenas to advance European integration was replaced by a ‘constraining dissensus’. Now party elites from national governments increasingly watch their backs when negotiating European issues, because their actions come under strategic challenges from their own domestic political arena. Europe is increasingly subjected to party competition driven by the strategic decisions of party leaders (2009: 9): ‘European issues have entered party competition. On major issues, governments, i.e., party leaders in positions of executive authority, try to anticipate the effect of their decisions on domestic politics. Public opinion on European integration has become a field of strategic interaction among party elites in their contest for political power.’

Hooghe and Marks argue that because the core centre-left and centre-right parties have carried European integration, it is populist non-governing parties that use the issue to strategically challenge them, with the result that (2009: 21): ‘The debate on Europe has been framed by opponents of European integration, i.e. populist *tan*<sup>1</sup> parties, nationalists in conservative parties, and radical left parties.’ According to them, this rise of populism, in particular by parties that mobilize exclusive national identities, has increasingly made political competition over Europe about *identity politics* (‘who we are’), rather than *interest politics* about concerns of redistribution (‘who gets what’). The other part of the equation that makes this development possible is that, first, they see ‘mass’ publics as easily influenced over Europe which makes them susceptible to claims by nationalist populist parties, and second, they see public opinion as an inherent source of Euroscepticism. ‘Most mainstream parties continued to resist politicizing the

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<sup>1</sup> *Tan* stands for traditionalism/authority/nationalism that opposes *gal* green/alternative/libertarian in the cleavage structure which Hooghe et al (2004) find shapes party positions over Europe.

issue. But a number of populist, non-governing, parties smelt blood. Their instinctive Euroscepticism was closer to the pulse of public opinion' (2009: 21).

For an approach where the shift of decision-making from the closed world of interest group bargaining to the public domain of mass politics is central, Hooghe and Marks' view of EU politicization has little to say about the role of political communication or mass media. Their only reference depicts national mass media systems that are able to supply information only in a way that entrenches public attachments to the nation (2009: 14): 'National peculiarities are more pronounced among publics than elites because publics are more nationally rooted and are more dependent on information filtered by national media.' While we agree with many aspects of their observations of political developments, Hooghe and Marks' theoretical pessimism with regard to the media and public leads them to give insufficient consideration to mass communication processes that we consider can act as a linking mechanism between political elites and the general public. In short, we think that they underplay how the presence of a public stage can transform the political game.

A public sphere perspective on politicization envisages the transformation of the European multi-level political system within a context of the advancing Europeanization of national politics, on one side, and increasing forms of political contestation over Europe for which mass mediated public debates are essential, on the other. In his version, Thomas Risse (2010: 232) argues that the 'democratic deficit' does not result from a lack of sense of political community among Europeans. On the contrary, he sees the people as a source for advancing European democracy and that public communication carried by mass media allows this to happen: "Media representations and mutual observation enable citizens to make informed decisions about Europe and the EU. In addition, transnational communities of communication are essential for the

development of democratic policymaking beyond the nation-state. Without Europeanized public spheres to enable cross-border communication, European politics would be next to impossible.”

In our view, the multi-level nature of the European Union’s institutions contains contradictions between different levels of the polity, different member states, and different political actors, which stimulate public communication and political contention. As European-level influence in decision-making increases, a diffuse awareness by European citizens that the ‘EU matters’ drives a new polarization of opinions or interests, which then leads to an increase in public claims by collective actors that address policy formulation. Here we agree with de Wilde and Zürn (2012: 140) that EU politicization entails, “both an increased level of resistance against the EU and its policies, but also an increased utilization of these political institutions by societal groups to achieve desired goals.” Importantly, in this view a public sphere includes not only those who take an active part in the debate, but it presupposes that communication resonates among others, a ‘public’, for whom it is also relevant. This resonance of public communication between institutional actors and publics is carried primarily by mass-mediated political debates. This effectively ‘brings the public back in’ to European politics. The idea that people can be part of a shared political community through the structure of their communicative relationships draws from the classical work of Karl Deutsch (1953).

The theoretical idea underpinning our approach is that EU politicization is driven by an expanding public discourse that is carried by an independent self-steering mass media. Public debates fulfil an important democratizing function: they can enhance legitimacy by making executive decisions transparent, including civil society, and providing important critical feedbacks to policy decisions (Trenz and Eder 2004). While it is not the only forum, or form, of public debate, the mass media is crucial, because it is where the general public can gain access to

information about executive decision-making and the stances of political actors who challenge decisions. This public debate and contestation occurs between a broad range of different political actors –executives, parties, interest groups, NGOs, social movements etc.– and, because it is mass mediated, in front of a public. From one side, the presence of a public importantly shapes the behaviour of political actors who try to shape public opinion, while, from the other, the visibility of public contestation over issues allows the possibility for public opinion formation and collective learning processes. Mass mediated public communication is central to the possibility for this interaction. Hence the public debate carried by the mass media is an important location where EU politicization takes place (and so can be a good source of data for studying it).

### **Opportunities and Claims-making: Analytic approach**

We apply a claims-making approach (Koopmans and Statham 1999, 2010) that combines insights from political mobilization and communications research. This approach has the advantage of making a direct link between the institutional-level of decision-making and the field of public contestation that emerges around it, carried by mass media. It focuses on political actors and their contestation through acts of public claims-making over Europe. Hence it captures data on actors’ attempts to critically evaluate Europe in the public domain by retrieving acts of ‘politicization’ from the media discourses where they occur.

Political opportunities are defined by Tarrow (1994: 94) as, “consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations of success or failure.” This literature emphasises that levels and forms of mobilization by social movements and interest groups are strongly influenced by the institutional structure and public discourses of the political

systems in which these groups operate. Traditional political opportunity approaches focussed on institutional opportunities in the form of the chances of access and influence for citizens in decision-making (institutional openness versus closure) and the reactions of authorities to challengers (repression or facilitation of mobilization) (e.g., Kriesi et al 1995). It is not enough that political opportunities simply 'exist'. To be accessible for collective actors they need to be made visible and meaningful in the public domain. The mass media has become the prominent player informing the public about politics, and is increasingly indispensable to the political communication efforts of social organisations. At the same time, political actors have had to adapt to the requirements of an environment shaped by the mass media. So in this world of 'mediated politics' it is important to take the 'discursive opportunities' (Koopmans and Statham 2000, 2010) and constraints into account.

Institutional opportunities determine a collective actor's chances of gaining recognized access and new advantages (Gamson 1975) in their interactions with institutional decision-makers, as well as the likelihood of repression or facilitation. However, 'discursive opportunities' determine which claims in specific public policy debates have a high likelihood of gaining visibility in the mass media, of resonating with the positions of other public actors, and of achieving legitimacy in the public discourse (Koopmans and Statham 2000, 2010). We find here the components of politicization. The structure of public communication over a contentious policy issue-field shapes the opportunities that face a claim-maker in her/his attempt to gain media attention (visibility), to challenge existing viewpoints and provoke reactions from other public actors (contestation), and to become the dominant way of perceiving a problem (public resonance and legitimacy). By linking discursive opportunities into a wider framework for (institutional)

political opportunities, it becomes possible to include the framing approach of those who emphasise the constructed nature of claims and identities (e.g., Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993).

In general, a political opportunity perspective leads us to expect increased levels of Europeanization of political communication and mobilization as a result of advancing European integration. However, different from the functionalist perspective, this connection between European integration and patterns of mobilization and communication is not merely a process of adaptation, but depends crucially on the mediating role of political institutions and power configurations. The increased competences of European institutions and reach of European policies implies new opportunities for certain collective actors to gain access to and influence policy decisions relative to others. It potentially transforms the field of policy actors' relationships leading to new opportunities for challengers. Also, from an opportunity structure perspective, it follows that a collective actor's perceptions of whether s/he is likely to 'win' or 'lose' from advancing European integration decisions, issues or policies, will shape the evaluations and positions that s/he politically mobilizes (Koopmans 2007).

### **Design and Data Retrieval**

For data retrieval, we applied claims-making analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999, 2010), a standard method for retrieving systematic and reliable data on the contents of public debates from newspaper sources. This takes individual instances of claim making by public actors as the unit of analysis. The approach differs from conventional newspaper content analyses, which take the article as the unit of analysis to investigate how journalists frame the news. However, conventional approaches tell us little about the relations between actors, their roles in public debates, or the positions they advocate with regard to policy issues.

A claims-making act (shorthand: a claim) consists of a purposive and public articulation of political demands, including calls to action, proposals, and criticisms, which, actually or potentially, affect the interests or integrity of the claimants and/or other collective actors. For each claim, we code variables on: the actor who makes it; the addressee on whom it is made; the European integration issue that it raises; how it evaluates integration (position: supportive +1, critical -1, neutral 0); and how it frames the issue within a broader legitimating discourse. This provides the information about 'claims' that can be analyzed to answer our questions.

We include claims in our sample regardless of who makes them and where they are made, which means the data include claims by a wide range of different types of collective actor. For the Constitution study we retrieved a sample of claims over European integration issues from the national public spheres in France, Germany and Britain, by searching specific time periods within two newspapers per country. Electronic databases (LEXIS-NEXIS, FACTIVE and Newspaper Archives on CD) were used for retrieving the samples of articles with claims for specific periods within three time-phases of Constitution-making: Pre-Constitution (before); Drafting (late 2001 to mid 2004); and Ratification (from mid 2004 to 2005). To relativize the impact of a possible selection and reporting bias, articles were coded from two leading quality newspapers in each country, one centre-right, one centre-left: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)*; *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*; *The Guardian* and *The Times*. Trained coders coded the claims into a database using a highly detailed standardised coding scheme applying the claims-making method. The resultant data set includes several thousand individual claims. More detailed systematic information on methods, approach and codebooks is available (Author reference).

### **Political Contestation in Public Debates over the Constitution: Findings**

First, we look for some basic evidence for general trends of increasing EU politicization, over the three time-phases of Constitution-making: pre-Constitution; Drafting; and Ratification. Politicization requires a greater participation of a wider range of collective actors in public debates over decision-making than just executive actors and a more critical debate. To assess this, we examined the degree to which non-executive actors were able to increase their shares relative to executive actors, and the evaluation of European integration changes in claims-making over the three successive time-phases. Prior to the Ratification phase, we found virtually no evidence for politicization. The Drafting phase witnessed a public debate that was excessively dominated by executive actors, whose claims accounted for 63% of all claims, an even higher share than beforehand (59%).<sup>2</sup> When we aggregated the mean positions of all claims (coded: +1 for supportive of integration; -1 for critical; 0 for neutral/ambivalent), overall the Drafting debate was clearly in favour of integration (+0.22). At this stage there was a lack of politicization: it seems that executives actors from the EU and member states were able to swamp public debates with ‘good news’ favouring the Constitution. The public debate was visible but flat: it carried insufficient political mobilization by parties, and from civil society, to generate a critical narrative about the proposed institutional changes. It lacked public contestation and was relatively de-politicized.

However, facing the specific opportunity structure in the Ratification phase, when national governments tried to pass the Treaty, domestically, by parliamentary vote or referendum, the public debates over Europe transformed significantly. We found that public debates became more inclusive of non-executive voices: legislative, party, and civil society actors accounted for 45% of claims, compared to 31% by executive actors. Also, the debates became significantly

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<sup>2</sup> Figures weighted by country of public sphere.

more critical in their evaluations of integration issues in Ratification (+0.06) compared to Drafting (+0.22), but not to a degree where negative evaluations outweighed positive ones. These general findings support the idea of some limited degree of EU politicization occurring in response to the opportunities when decision-making over the Constitution's passage shifted to national political domains in Ratification.

When we examined cross-national variations in the Ratification phase, it became clear that most evidence for increasing contestation came from mobilization by French actors whose claims addressed French institutions. This is demonstrated by looking at the patterns of communication built by targeted claims-making acts, where a claim-maker makes a political demand on an institutional addressee. Half (52%) the claims reported in the French public sphere indicated acts of national domestic contestation, where French actors made demands over integration that targeted French institutions. By contrast, four-tenths of claims reported in German (41%) and British (40%) public spheres were contained entirely between actors and institutions from an external EU member state (of which, most were located in France). Here we see the geo-spatial impact on claims-making of the French President's decision to ratify the Constitution by a public referendum. The referendum provided an exceptionally open political opportunity for challenging political entrepreneurs because it shifted decision-making from the institutional arena to the public domain and heightened mass media attention for the event. In response, the Ratification debates in France witnessed a high degree of national contestation. By contrast public debates in Germany, which followed a Parliamentary ratification path, and in Britain, which procrastinated over ratification decisions, largely observed French domestic contestation as 'bystanders'. German and British debates remained largely 'de-politicized', which means that

our primary evidence for EU politicization comes in the form of French domestic contestation over the referendum.

Zooming in on French Ratification, another important finding was that politicization was carried much more by political party contestation than by mobilization by actors from civil society.

Considering only French actors within the French public sphere, two thirds (67%) of French claim-makers had a French political party identity, more than three times the number from all actors from civil society (21%). This demonstrates that politicization carried by public debates was driven first and foremost by domestic political party competition.

It shows that civil society actors seem to face significant barriers in making their voice heard publicly over Europe, even when there are uniquely open opportunities to do so. Even when we looked at the type of civil society organizations who actually made claims, most were experts, researchers, professional groups, business representatives and trade unions. We found relatively very few independent NGOs and social movements with a slight exception being pro- and anti-European protest organizations. Overall, however, we found relatively little evidence for a *critical voice* over European integration emerging from civil society. This supports previous findings that identify a lack of inclusiveness of European public debates, and their limited plurality, to be problematic from the perspective of democratic legitimacy (Koopmans 2007).

As most of our evidence for increasing contestation was from French political party competition over the referendum, we examined this in more detail. Also debates over party political conflict lines over Europe have been central to theories of EU politicization (Hooghe and Marks 2009; Kriesi et al 2008).

In 2005, the governing conservative-liberal coalition was led by the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP), with support from a junior partner, Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF). Formally, the main governing UMP and UDF parties and opposition centre-left Parti Socialiste (PS) had adopted programmatic stances supporting a ‘yes-vote’ for the Constitution. However, turning to how they presented themselves in public debates, Table 1 shows the French parties’ shares in claims and their mean positions over European integration (ranging from -1 critical, to +1 supportive).

-Table 1-

First, we see the governing coalition (conservative UMP 36% and liberal UDF 6%) and socialist opposition (PS 41%) accounted for similar shares, and together more than four-fifths (83%) of party debate. Of course, mainstream government and opposition parties have greater resources for claims-making and are more routinely reported by the media than smaller parties. However, we see here the extent to which these parties were the chief suppliers of mediated cues to voters. Among the smaller parties, the radical left (6%) and radical right (6%) each accounted for about a twentieth of party debate. Regarding their positions, we see the conservative-liberal coalition was strongly Eurosupportive (UDF +0.58; UMP +0.44), while the radical left (-0.59) and especially the radical right (-0.89) were strongly Eurocritical, with the greens (+0.17) and socialists (-0.14) between.

However, the striking finding is that facing an open set of political opportunities, resulting from the referendum and high media attention, a substantial faction of the Socialist party found incentives to mobilize a challenge against the Treaty – this PS faction became a ‘political entrepreneur’. PS actors challenged the pro-integrationist stance of their own party leader to a

degree that they were successful in making their critique the party's dominant line in the public discourse, and that produced an overall negative evaluation of the Constitution (-0.14). Our data shows a significant discursive distance in the positions between the UMP/UDF and the PS, indicating polarization and public contestation. In Drafting, the PS remained decisively on the Eurosupportive side of the axis (+0.22), with the result that an inverted 'U' pattern of pro-European core centre parties against small anti-European parties from the periphery held. However, the political opportunity presented by the referendum meant that this longstanding consensus between the centre parties for supporting Europe was torn apart by the ensuing discursive struggle played out on the public stage. We found evidence for an increased degree of contestation and polarization between the stances of the two main parties.

In addition, to party actors' competing public stances over an issue, it is important to know 'how' and on what basis they justify and *frame* their positions in the public debate (Helbling et al 2009). Frames provide cognitive cues that define what an issue is about, how it should be understood, and what actors should do about it. When a frame is successfully mobilized, it renders events meaningful by organizing experiences and guiding action (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993: 118). To be successful, an actor's framing needs to make their claim appear to be more legitimate, reasonable and appealing as an interpretation of the issue than alternative framings. Also, framing cross-cuts a claim's position: so that actors can use similar types of frames to advocate different positions, and different framings to support the same position.

Table 2 shows the *justification frames* in claims-making by the UMP and PS. These are frames that elaborate European integration issues by drawing on external legitimating discourses. Claims with justification frames make a significant effort to convince a broad constituency over which stance to adopt, by saying 'why' it should be adopted. When actors mobilize justification

frames they purposively attempt to shape the way that issues are publicly understood and influence political outcomes. Justification frames are important because they communicate a legitimating basis for taking up a specific stance and so can contribute to the politicization of an issue. We identified four fields of legitimating discourses that justifications could draw from to add meaning to a stance over Europe: social, economic, political and cultural. First, a position (either for or against) could be justified by referring to its perceived benefits for *social* welfare and wellbeing. Second a claim could frame its stance in terms of the perceived effects (good or bad) on *economic* prospects. Third, an actor's stance could be justified on the basis of its perceived impact on *political* rights, or democratic performance, or strength of the polity. And fourth, claims could be justified by appeals to *cultural* identities and values, referring to peoples' sense of belonging to a community.

-Table 2-

A striking difference is that while half the PS's justification frames constructing Eurocritical positions were economic (29% out of 60%), six-tenths of UMP's justification frames making Eurosupportive stances were culturally based (40% out of 65%). This indicates that the PS' challenger frame was launched largely on economic justifications, while the UMP defended its 'yes' orthodoxy largely on a cultural basis. We see that the parties' competitive framing over Europe did not take place as a discursive struggle over common ideational ground.

The principal thrust of the PS's challenge was based on arguments that criticized the substance of the economic model that would result from this step of integration. Their challenger frame depicted the adoption of the Constitutional Treaty as an irreversible step that would impose the EU's free-market model and make a social model for Europe impossible. There were several

Eurocritical claims using this type of economic justification. Manuel Valls argues for a no vote because the Treaty ‘institutionalizes neoliberalism’, while in other cases, deputies oppose the Constitution ‘because it is neo-liberal’. Henri Emmanuelli puts forward a similar position when he argues that the Treaty needs changing so that Europe ‘is not a free-trade zone under NATO domination’. Deputy leader Laurent Fabius points towards ‘a drift of liberal Europe’ and in another claim argues that a no vote is necessary ‘in order to preserve social Europe’. Another PS member puts it in class terms, claiming that ‘the European bourgeoisie is attacking the social model of Europe’ while in yet another claim Daniel Vaillant explains that the weakening of citizens’ support for the Constitution is “because people are frustrated due to the labour market policies.” Finally, this negative critique is given policy substance by deputy leader Laurent Fabius and by Lionel Jospin whose claims directly criticise the Treaty’s Service Directive.<sup>3</sup>

Turning to the UMP, it tried to defend its ‘yes’ stance by making claims that appealed to the people’s cultural identity, values and community. The party asked French people to recognize the value of their nation’s historical role in constructing Europe. This cultural appeal was prominent in the UMP’s justification framing supporting the Constitution (40%). The basic idea was that being French means being in favour of Europe. As President Chirac bluntly puts it ‘one cannot say that one is European and vote no’. In other cases, Chirac promises he will ‘do a lot to explain to the French people why the Treaty is a chance for France and for Europe’, he demands that French people vote *oui* ‘because it is a historic choice and will make Europe more just’ and it is an ‘historical decision concerning everyone in France, because the treaty represents the basis of values in Europe.’ In similar vein, Nicolas Sarkozy wants a yes ‘because of France’s historic role in the European integration process’, while Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin calls upon a

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<sup>3</sup> All quotations direct translations taken from coded claims. Note that ‘Social Model for Europe’ was coded *economic* when referring to the economic system and *social* when referring to welfare/social consequences.

‘generous France’ to give ‘a yes from the heart’ and proposes a programme ‘to lead France in Europe and towards a reconciliation of the French with European construction regardless of the referendum outcome.’ However, Table 2 shows that UMP members also used cultural justifications in claims criticizing the Constitution (21%). Mostly these opposed integration that would include the future accession of Turkey. This was a single-issue opposition that did not challenge the integral bonding of the French people and Europe, on the contrary, opposition to Turkish accession reaffirmed this, because, as Dupont-Aignan puts it, ‘Europe should be really European’.

From these examples, we see that the PS’s economic justifications for opposing the Constitution constructed a vision of Europeanization as an importer of neo-liberalism, against which they counter-posed the alternative of a ‘Social Europe’. Also their ‘anti-neoliberal Europe’ challenger frame was not nationalist, but demanded a transformation towards a social model of regulated capitalism and welfare provision. Against this, the UMP’s main line of defence for the Constitution was by framing ‘France within Europe’ as an indivisible identity and community to which the French people belong. This emotive appeal to the historic role of Frenchness within the construction of Europe tried to define opposition to the Constitution as unpatriotic. Nationalism was invoked as a form of Europeanism.

Interestingly, both parties justified their stances as Europeanist: the UMP advocated ‘France within Europe’ as a cultural identity and the PS advocated ‘Social Europe’ as an alternative economic pathway. Also the UMP’s defence of the Constitution did not engage directly with the Socialist’s challenge, because the PS were not opposing ‘France within Europe’ but demanding a ‘more social France within Europe’. So voters who found the socialist challenger framing

convincing, actually heard little from the UMP to dissuade them. Finally, it is worth noting that the critical claims of the UMP and PS were not substantively Eurosceptic and against integration.

### **Lessons on forms and mechanisms of politicization**

Our study follows a research agenda to study politicization through competitive representative claims-making in the public sphere (De Wilde 2011). To conclude, we summarize key findings to draw lessons on how EU politicization processes seem to work.

First, we found limited evidence for politicization. The field of public claims remained dominated by executive actors prior to, and throughout drafting, and significantly supportive of European integration, across the countries. This indicates a low degree of politicization: executive actors were able to push their preferences and faced relatively few mobilized criticisms. We found evidence for a transformation of public debates that constituted some degree of politicization only in response to the specific political opportunities provided, when institutional decision-making shifted towards national polities for ratification. Even in ratification, however, we found little evidence for a flowering of civil society mobilization that many academics had predicted. Instead, to the extent that it occurred, political parties mobilized the public challenge. This finding suggests that critiques over Europe are more likely to grow from political actors within national institutional polities, i.e. political parties, at least in the first instance. It supports those authors who focus on party political competition as the most likely source and structural location for political contestation over Europe (e.g., Kriesi et al 2008, Hooghe and Marks 2009).

A second related point concerns the limited degree and form of transnationalization of political public spheres. Ratification did not produce a genuinely transnational field of public claims-

making, but distinct nationally segmented fields, that stayed more within national boundaries, than serving to build transnational linkages between actors. The overall degree and forms of political contestation that we found in the German, French, and British public debates were shaped by the institutional decisions over ratification procedures taken by their respective national executives. Here the specific ‘open’ opportunity structure provided by the French referendum, contrasted to the ‘closed’ German vote in the Bundestag and the British wait-and-see policy. In response, we saw an increased mobilization by French political actors targeting French institutions over integration characterizing the French public sphere, while watching this internal French contestation constituted a significant feature of the German and British public spheres. Again, within our primary evidence for politicization –heightened national contestation stimulated by the French referendum– we found political party actors were more than three times more likely to be claim-makers than civil society actors. Civil society actors, and NGOs and social movements in particular, seem to face difficulties in mobilizing within the European multi-level system of politics, at least compared to their relative achievements at the national level. Hence our study of politicization became an analysis of party competition.

Third, we can unpack some EU politicization mechanisms at work from this French referendum case: First, an *institutional opportunity structure* opened when President Chirac announced a referendum that allowed opponents to see a chance to successfully challenge the government over Europe. Second, the referendum’s political relevance generated *high media attention*. These conditions, relatively open institutional opportunities for influencing the decision, combined with high media attention due to a need for the media to inform the public, produced a potential for politicization. The referendum forced political actors to address the public and increased the influence of mass-mediated debates in shaping the outcome. It temporarily shifted decision-

making to the public arena and opened new *discursive opportunities* for claims-making. Such conditions also created a potential for *elite divisions* among the French political class that was crucial for generating public contestation. Divisions between elites within a national polity are a condition that provides opportunities for challengers to perceive enhanced chances of success (Kriesi et al 1995). Facing these opportunities, a *political entrepreneur* took the decision to break ranks and mobilize publicly against the dominant elite stance. The Socialist Party faction not only perceived an opportunity to challenge the government's (and their own leadership's) authority, but had sufficient organizational *resources* and access to media debates to mobilize a public critique, unlike the radical left and right. Their challenge necessitated that the government—who had expected a centre-party consensus to hold—respond by mobilizing *justifications* publicly for its own stance. This transformed political competition from an institutional-level game into a public *discursive struggle*. Through their competition, party actors transformed the field of public claims-making carried by mass media into a primary locus for contestation. Overall, the result was a *critical thematization* of European integration in the French public domain. Importantly, the Socialist faction's critique was a 'successful' *framing* because it gave a meaningful interpretation to the Constitution event that was sufficiently convincing to *resonate* and shape the understandings of a significant number of voters. It translated the hitherto abstract and distant issue of a European Constitution into a set of real and understandable consequences for the French general public. The Socialists' critique advocated 'Social Europe' as a preferable alternative to a 'neo-liberal Constitution'. This framing worked by telling the French people 'who would get what' (combining *identity* and *interests*) and who would be the constituency of 'losers' from this Constitution. By contrast, the French government's appeal to a unitary French-European cultural identity proved to be an insufficiently convincing narrative.

Fourth, for understanding politicization, it is important to have an adequate conceptualization of ‘publics’ as actors. The discursive struggle translated party competition over Europe into options that were recognisable and understandable for the people. It made Europe ‘normal’ politics. This shows that political parties and media debates have an important role to play in translating European decisions into the everyday language that people are familiar with in domestic politics. This contributes to the input side of democracy, because it makes Europe more of a tangible psychological reality for ordinary people. When we speak of general or mass publics, the potential for collective learning processes is structurally located mostly within national public spheres. This means that the politicization of Europe must occur through a nationally-filtered language of claims and critical narratives that resonate with national political understandings.

Fifth, our findings have research implications. Although like Hooghe/Marks (2009) our study located politicization within national political party competition, some of our other findings do not fit their model well. They argue that populist parties from the radical poles who oppose integration by mobilizing exclusive national identities have made competition over Europe about *identity*, ‘who we are’, rather than *interests*, ‘who gets what’. First, however, our findings showed that significant critiques were mobilized by mainstream parties competing at the political system’s core. Second, the Socialists’ challenge to the Constitution was based primarily on *interests* (who gets what), while the governing UMP party based its support of integration on *identity* (who we are). This demonstrates national identity is not always mobilized as a form of Euroscepticism over integration. Also governments are capable of populism. In this case, Chirac and the French government thought (incorrectly) that they could advance their own position by ‘going public’ in a referendum advancing a ‘French-Europeanist’ identity. Their PS challengers were not opposed to Europe, but proposed ‘a different kind of Europe’. The Socialists’ advocacy

of ‘Social Europe’ depicted a constituency of French ordinary people as ‘losers’ of advancing market-driven integration. It combined ‘who gets what’ with ‘who you are’. We think that ‘who you are’ is strongly related to ‘what you get’, both factually, and discursively. Of course, in Hooghe/Marks’ defence, one could argue the referendum was an exceptional event where normal party behaviour was suspended. However, our criticism is conceptual and methodological. We think it is important, as do others (e.g., Kriesi et al 2008), to include mediated public debates in a theoretical model for EU politicization –and as a source of data– even when talking about strategic party competition as its primary form. We do not think that politicization can be reduced to the outcome of strategic interactions between party leaders, it also requires the contextual presence of a public –which occurs primarily through mass-mediated debates– because this is the gallery to whom party actors play, to which they adapt their behaviour, and to whom they have to appeal, when they mobilize in the attempt to win votes. Finally, we think a research programme on emergent EU politicization requires grounded studies of actual cases, which will allow general theorizations to benefit from contextual understanding.

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**Table 1: French Political Party Claims-making in Ratification Debate:  
Shares (%) and Mean Positions**

	<b>Share of All Parties' Claims (%)</b>	<b>Mean position score (-1 critical to +1 supportive)</b>
<b>Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF)</b>	6.4	+0.58
<b>Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP)</b>	36.4	+0.44
<b>Les Verts</b>	4.0	+0.17
<b>All Parties</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>+0.06</b>
<b>Parti Socialiste (PS)</b>	40.8	-0.14
<b>Radical Left</b>	6.4	-0.59
<b>Radical Right</b>	6.0	-0.89
<b>N</b>	297	297

Radical Right: Front national; Mouvement pour la France; Rassemblement pour la France et l'Indépendance de l'Europe; Chasse Peche Nature et Traditions

Radical Left: Parti Communiste Français; Ligue communiste révolutionnaire; Lutte ouvrière; Parti Radical de Gauche; Mouvement républicain et citoyen

**Table 2: Share (%) of Justification Frames (by type) in UMP's and PS' Claims-making in Ratification Debate**

(%)	Parti Socialiste Main Opposition Party			UMP Main Government Party		
	Eurocritical claims	Eurosupportive claims	All	Eurocritical claims	Eurosupportive claims	All
<b>Percent of Claims with Justification Frames</b>	<b>40%</b>			<b>49%</b>		
<b>Of which</b>						
'social' justification frames	13%	13%	26%	2%	6%	8%
'economic' justification frames	29%	5%	34%	3%	13%	16%
'political' justification frames	14%	13%	27%	9%	6%	15%
'cultural' justification frames	4%	9%	13%	21%	40%	61%
<b>All</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>121</b>			<b>108</b>		