# Fairy Tale or Trojan Horse: Candidates and voters' preferences for a more or less (differentiated) integration

Samuel Defacqz*, Jérémy Dodeigne**, Ferdinand Teuber*** and Virginie Van Ingelgom***

\* Sciences Po Grenoble, PACTE
\*\* UNamur
\*\*\* UCLouvain, ISPOLE

**Abstract**

Following the current debate (and political propositions) about the opportunity to push forward a differentiated integration, this paper addresses the mass-elites (in)congruence in terms of preferences regarding European integration and in particular policy-making preferences. We propose in this paper to address the mass-elites gap by investigate how EU integration is perceived by political elites and citizens in times of crisis. Adopting a qualitative approach, this paper analyses candidates and voters preferences towards European integration (the Belgian Candidate Survey and Belgian Voter Survey 2014). Based on the qualitative analysis of an open question on EU integration, the paper concludes to the need to introduce public policy preferences as an additional determinant of candidates' and voters' attitudes towards European integration in particular in a context where the future of differentiated integration is largely debated. Our results show that while Belgian elites are committed to further integration in terms of policy transfer to the European level most Belgian citizens are not because of the negative policy effects this could generate.

**Introduction**

The European Union (EU) has been and is currently experiencing several transnational crises: a deep democratic crisis, an economic and financial crisis and an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. These events place the EU under pressure as they went along with the rise of Eurosceptic parties across the continent from both the left and the right side of the political spectrum (Fagerholm, 2019). On top of that, the EU is facing governance problems and the ongoing saga of Brexit is raising the specter of disintegration. In front of these challenges, political leaders have to reinvent the future EU project. One of the solution put on the table, by both political leaders and academics, is the development of a differentiated integration that would lead to "*one Europe with an organizational and Member State core but with a level of centralization and territorial extension that vary by function*" (Leuffen, Rittberger, & Schimmelfennig, 2012, p. 10). This differentiated integration might thus constitute a solution for the legitimacy issue of the EU integration by developing "*a 'soft-core,' multi-clustered Europe of overlapping policy communities*" (Schmidt, 2019). However, a differentiated integration also raises the questions about citizens' and political elites' preferences about the EU's future and in particular which policies to integrate further and those to not, in order to remedy the democratic deficit of the EU. This paper tackles this question.

If this so-called democratic deficit of the European Union (EU) is probably older than the academic debate about it, the current situation of the EU facing multiple crises underlines the necessity to shed new light on the issue and understand the well-established gap between the opinions of the public and the political elites about the European integration. If this gap has indeed been highlighted, it has however rarely been addressed as such by European studies ( Steenbergen, Edwards & De Vries, 2007; Arnold & De Vries, 2011). We propose in this paper to address this gap by investigate how EU integration is perceived by political elites and citizens in times of crisis. Moreover, following the current debate (and political propositions) about the opportunity to push forward a differentiated integration, we precisely address the mass-elites (in)congruence in terms of policy-making preferences.

Understanding the (absence of) alignment between elites and citizens on EU integration is indeed crucial in order to assess the potential paths to adopt for the future of the European project. If we consider that EU institutions are moving towards an "ever closer Union" as stated in the Treaty of Rome, the opinions of voters matter in terms of democratic legitimacy of this integration. The democratic legitimacy of future integration efforts depends on the maintenance of an effective linkage between political elites and voters. Therefore, we strive in this paper to

identify through which prisms – in terms of policy-making preferences and in terms of output and input legitimacy – both groups assess the EU (differentiated) integration.

On the one hand, if EU institutions move forward in a headlong rush by pushing for more integration in all policy fields while less and less citizens endorse the European project, the legitimacy issue of the EU will soon become untenable. What is more, large parts of citizens who do not support this "ever closer Union" are not against the EU integration. Many Europeans are ambivalent or satisfied regarding the current situation, when others are indifferent regarding the European issue (Duchesne, Frazer, Haegel, & Van Ingelgom, 2013; Stoeckel, 2013; Van Ingelgom, 2012, 2014). These two elements highlight the necessity to have also a closer look at the rationales behind the preferences of voters.

On the other hand, a careful analysis of preferences of voters and elites towards EU integration is also crucial if we consider the option of continuing and pushing further the (differentiated) integration. The necessity of this differentiated integration and the fact that it has already been initiated were both acknowledged by the leaders of the 27 EU Member-States in the 'Rome declaration' of March 25, 2017 (Schmidt, 2019). Indeed, the deepening and widening of the European Union has gone hand in hand with policy differentiation. In the perspective of this differentiated integration, the rationales behind the attitudes of citizens and elites becomes particularly critical to investigate, especially as regards to preferences about policy areas that should (not) be further integrated. Moreover, elites' and citizens' issue-specific preferences have an impact on their overall attitudes towards European integration (van der Veen, 2016). Disaggregate the rationales behind the different attitudes and preferences towards EU integration is thus crucial to get a fine-grained understanding of the (in)congruence between mass and elites (Defacqz, Dodeigne, Teuber, & Van Ingelgom, 2018).

In order to shed new light on this (in)congruence between political elites and citizens, this paper proposes to analyses how elites and citizens frame their positions and justify their preferences towards European integration through a qualitative analysis (content analysis). This analysis is even more pertinent since very few studies have analyzed the (in)congruence between voters and political elites on the EU integration. In their conclusions on an analysis of the connection between national party elites and their supporters, Steenbergen, Edwards and De Vries (2007) point the need for analyses considering party elites and voters in order to draw conclusions on the politics of European integration that are more comprehensive. This paper investigate the (in)congruence between Belgian voters and candidates in order to understand how the

preferences of candidates and voters on European integration process are (in)congruent. This question is tackled by an analysis of preferences towards EU integration in terms of policy-making preferences and in input and output legitimacy.

This paper is organized as follows. The first section presents our theoretical framework focusing on legitimacy beliefs in order to study citizens' and elites' preferences regarding European integration and more precisely in a context of renewed debates on the future of differentiated integration. The second section presents our dependent variable that aims to capture preferences of candidates and citizens towards European integration on the basis of a 0–10 scale, recording the degree to which respondents believe that European integration has gone too far, should be pushed further or stay as it is. This section demonstrates the empirical importance of taking into account voters who want to maintain the status quo when considering attitudes towards European integration as well those who want less or more integration. The third section offers a qualitative analysis of an open question that was present in both surveys – candidates and voters – in order to shed a new light on the preferences towards European integration. In particular, this qualitative analysis concludes to the need to introduce public policy preferences as an additional determinant of candidates and voters attitudes towards European integration – in particular in a context of discussing the future of differentiated integration.

**Theoretical Framework**

*Input and output legitimacy of the EU*

To study citizen reasoning on European Union membership legitimacy, this paper takes the empirical perspective of the social scientific investigation of political legitimacy as a collective belief – rather than an object of philosophical debate or a defined attitude. Given that Weber's conceptualization of legitimate domination provides the basis of more discussions on political legitimacy, we start our discussion from his definition. Breaking with the political philosophers who regarded a system as legitimate if it was established in agreement with certain rules, Weber instead conceptualized legitimacy as a social fact: '*legitimacy is the phenomenon by which people are willing to accept domination on normative grounds, regardless of the specific beliefs this acceptance is based on*' (Weber, 1968, pp. 215–216). Overall, Weber defined legitimacy as 'beliefs in legitimacy' and approached it as an empirical—rather than normative—matter. The paper focuses on social legitimacy beliefs and the understandings and constructions embedding them, building on Beetham's notion that something is legitimate not '*because*

*people believe in its legitimacy*' but to the extent that it can be '*justified in terms of their beliefs*' (1991). Following this theoretical framework, our analysis builds on the work of Weber in that it investigates political legitimacy among citizens as a social fact and engages in empirical analysis by focusing on the forms of beliefs and reasoning citizens use to justify or reject power (Beetham, 1991; Beetham & Lord, 1998; Van Ingelgom, 2014; Weber, 1968).

Analytically, we frame the legitimacy issue starting from the dichotomy established by Scharpf (1999) who distinguished output and input legitimacy. This dichotomy allows classifying the different normative criteria by which to evaluate the legitimacy of political systems or institutions. This legitimacy dichotomization is notably based on the system theory of Easton (1965, cited in Schmidt, 2013) defining input into the political system as citizens' demands and support and output as government decisions and actions.

When it comes to the EU, preferences for more or less integration – or in favor of the status quo – can be driven by different perceptions of what works or not in the EU integration dynamic whether it concerns the effectiveness of EU policies (output legitimacy) or the political responsiveness and the quality of decision-making procedures (input legitimacy). Both types of legitimacy express public assent of the worth of European integration. Input legitimacy is primarily a matter of participation while output legitimacy first concerns EU's performance.

Input legitimacy concerns the functioning and machinery of the EU. It refers to the participatory quality of the decision-making process leading to the establishment of laws and rules, based notably on the electoral representation. Input legitimacy refers more generally to normative criteria concerning the evaluation of conditions in which, and characteristics of procedures by which, decisions are made. It tackles notions of representation but also participation or transparency. Input legitimacy concerns thus the foundations on which EU decisions rest on or depend on, such as the effective representation of citizens. In the words of Schmidt (2013, p. 2), the input democratic legitimation of the EU refers to the judgements "*in terms of the EU's responsiveness to citizen concerns as a result of participation* by *the people*".

Output legitimacy relates to the assessment of the relevance and quality of institutions' outcomes. In other words, it refers to the problem-solving capacity of the laws and rules produced by institutions. EU output legitimation is thus based on the public satisfaction with policy outcomes of the EU. The foundations on which EU decisions rest on are thus not at stake here. Output legitimacy only focuses on the beneficial performance of the policies designed by the EU and implemented in all Members-States. Schmidt (2013, p. 2) describes the output

democratic legitimation of the EU as judgements "*in terms of the effectiveness of the EU's policy outcomes* for *the people*".

### *The legitimacy of differentiated EU integration*

Differentiated integration benefits from a renewed interest, both from political leaders and academics (Schmidt, 2019; Trein, Thomann, & Maggetti, 2019). In 2017, the EU leaders stated in the Rome declaration that they "*will act together, at different paces and intensity where necessary, while moving in the same direction, as* [they] *have done in the past, in line with the Treaties and keeping the door open to those who want to join later*". Differentiated integration is thus describing the past EU integration dynamic and in the same time identified as a possible response to the current challenges the EU is facing. In this respect, on the one hand, "*the EU now appears to be a consolidated system of differentiated integration, a polity whose policies vary with regard to both their level of centralization and their territorial extension*" (Schimmelfennig, Leuffen, & Rittberger, 2015, p. 779).

From a general point of view, differentiated integration is a matter of functional differentiation that denotes the process of functional policy specialization characterizing a specific multi-level system (Trein et al., 2019). The most emblematic examples of this differentiate integration are the establishment of the border-free Schengen area that excludes some EU Member States yet includes several non EU Member States and the Eurozone which also concerns only a specific group of Member States (while the internal market extends to third countries, part of the European Economic Area).

Schimmelfennig and Winzen (2014) identifies two types of differentiation, which differ in origin[1]. On the one hand, 'instrumental differentiation' originates from the widening of the EU (enlargements) and is motivated by efficiency and distributional concerns. *Old Member States exclude new ones temporarily from policy areas if they are concerned about economic or budget competition from the new Member States or about their ability to meet the policy requirements.* Instrumental differentiation is transitional and affects primarily the EU's internal market and expenditure policies, and involves the poorer new Member States.

---

[1] Another categorization of differentiation is provided by Schimmelfennig et al. (2015) who distinguish vertical and horizontal differentiation: "*vertical differentiation means that policy areas have been integrated at different speeds and reached different levels of centralization over time. Horizontal differentiation relates to the territorial dimension and refers to the fact that many integrated policies are neither uniformly nor exclusively valid in the EU's member states. Whereas many member states do not participate in all EU policies (internal horizontal differentiation), some non-members participate in selected EU policies (external horizontal differentiation)*".

On the other hand, 'constitutional differentiation' has its origins in the deepening of the EU, which transfer additional competences to the EU by treaty revisions among existing Member States, and is motivated by concerns about national sovereignty and identity. *It is driven by comparatively Eurosceptic countries that are opposed ideologically, or fear popular resistance, to supranational centralization. Constitutional differentiations have a tendency to last for a long time and even remain in place permanently. They occur mostly in policy areas, which centralize core state powers supranationally and predominantly concern the northern Member States: Britain, Denmark, Ireland and Sweden.*

Thus, the differentiated integration process underlines the necessity to reconsider both the input and output legitimacy beliefs in European integration. More specifically, they call into questions the policy domains that have to be more or less integrated. They also underline the dynamic dimension of European integration process. The distinction by policy area and the dynamic perspective open new avenues of research regarding legitimacy beliefs. In particular, the option advocated by Schmidt (2019) of a soft-core multi-clustered Europe of overlapping policy communities questions the EU's future legitimacy. Schmidt advocates that:

> "*It is possible to think about the EU's future organization in terms of a softcore Europe. This is a Europe made up of overlapping clusters of member-states participating in the EU's many different policy communities, all administered by a single set of EU institutions, with most member-states being involved in most areas (beyond the Single Market, to which all belong by definition), even if some will have more limited involvement. Within this soft-core Europe, some policy areas still require deeper integration, such as security and defense policy as well as migration and refugee policy, while others arguably require less. The Eurozone, I argue below, demands greater deconcentration and decentralization, to give back to the member-states control over their economic policies, which alone could combat the deteriorating politics 'at the bottom' in which citizens vote for populists out of frustration for their lack of voice and choice. Thinking of the future of the EU in this way is best adapted to the already high level of EU differentiation. It is also perhaps the only way to improve the EU's problems with regard to democratic legitimacy while dealing with the EU's many faceted politicizations.*"

Taking stock of the current normative debates on the future of differentiated integration, this paper proposes to address this question empirically by looking at elites and citizens' legitimacy

beliefs regarding the future of European integration, in particular in terms of a differentiated integration.

## Case and data collection

This paper selects the Belgian case in order to study the preferences of elites and voters when it comes to the future of (differentiated) European integration. The availability of data both for candidates and for voters allows for the necessary perspective on the (in)congruence in elites' and citizens' preferences. Moreover, the questionnaires include an open question that offers new insights for understanding legitimacy beliefs.

### *Belgium as a case*

Historically, the small open economy of Belgium has benefited from the free movement of goods, capitals and services within the EU Internal Market. As other small member states, the country has also profited from a favourable balance of power within EU institutions. The opinions stating a positive attitude towards the EU are in Belgium above the European averages (Crespy, 2011; Deschouwer, 2012, pp. 233-237). Euroscepticism being traditionally an epiphenomenon in Belgium, the support for the EU has always been high. Within the public opinion, the low saliency of the EU integration issues facilitated the maintenance of this pro-European attitude. Belgian political elites are also supportive for the EU integration and this on the entire linguistically segmented political spectrum. Thus, following Schmidt's advocated option of a 'soft-core' multi-clustered Europe of overlapping policy communities (2019), Belgium comes as a usual suspect for being a possible partner for more differentiation and more integration.

There is however a gap between the opinions of the public and the elites. If this gap is well established, it has however rarely been addressed as such by European studies (Duchesne & Van Ingelgom, 2015). The dearth of empirical studies is mostly due to a scarcity of data, especially on elites' preferences about EU policymaking. Some studies deal with the linkage between citizens and elites, but they usually focus only on political parties – so to say the meso level – relying moreover on questions with different wordings (see among others: Arnold & de Vries, 2011; De Winter, Swyngedouw, & Goeminne, 2009; Hug & König, 2002). This gap offers interesting avenue to study elites and citizens' (in)congruence.

*Data and dependent variable*

Thanks to Belgian Candidate Survey[2] and PartiRep 2014 datasets[3], this paper relies on questions with identical wordings to examine preferences of candidates and citizens and understand thus their attitudes. The dependent variable of our analysis is the degree to which respondents believe that European integration has gone too far, should be pushed further or stay as it is:

> *"Some say European integration should be pushed further. Others say it has already gone too far. What is your opinion? Where would you locate yourself on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means that for you, European integration has already gone too far, and 10 that this integration should instead be pushed further? The value 5 means that you are satisfied with the situation as it is."*

The wording of the question in both surveys provides the possibility to measure the support for European integration in a dynamic perspective allowing grasping the possibility of a less or more highly (differentiated) integration. This dynamic perspective is different from the static one usually mobilised, with the classical question of EU membership "*Generally speaking, do you think that your country's membership of the EU is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?*". Indeed, these two different types of question do not measure the same opinion of respondents as noted by Rose and Borz (2015). The question of EU membership is used to assess the evaluation of the European Union as it is.

On the opposite, the questions used for this paper address the evaluation of the European Union as it should be and in which direction the further integration has to be pursued – in order words it permits to assess if and how Belgian candidates and voters understand the EU's future in terms of differentiated integration. For the purpose of our analysis, values from 0 to 4 correspond to 'less integration', values from 6 to 10 refer to the 'more integration' and value 5 constitutes the status quo option. The value 5 was explicitly referring to the status quo option since it was labelled on the scale as following: "the current situation is satisfactory". The aim of this division of the dependent variable into three parts is to capture more finely the attitudes

---

[2] The Belgian Candidate Survey (CCS project) gathers about 2000 candidates belonging to 15 parties represented in Parliament and running for the 2014 federal and regional elections in Belgium (Vandeleene, De Winter, Baudewyns, 2019).

[3] The Voter Survey (PartiRep 2014; Deschouwer, 2017) was conducted on a representative sample of 2019 Walloon and Flemish voters (PartiRep II). More information on the protocole of the survey: http://www.partirep.eu/project. EOS RepResent project is currently collecting data with a 2019 voter survey.

of candidates and voters regarding the future of the European Union in terms of less or more differentiated integration.

*Descriptive statistics*

First, a closer look on the distribution of respondents on the 0-10 scale shows that the point 5 gets a much higher score (20.8% of respondents of the candidate survey and 25.6% in the voter survey, see figures 1a and 1b) than any of the 10 other points. This indicates that this value represents a particular situation deserving an appropriate interpretation and cannot be integrated in one of the two other categories. Thus, the respondents choosing the intermediate location cannot be described as either in favour or against integration since they have rejected both of these options. On the one hand, this tri-modal configuration of attitudes towards European integration differentiates respondents who are in favour of a change and those who are satisfied with the current degree of integration of the EU. On the other hand, it differentiates the pro-change respondents regarding the opposing directions of the change they desire.

Figures 1a and 1b show descriptive statistics for candidates and voters. As one could expect, candidates tend to favour more integration whereas citizens are more inclined to declare that European integration has gone too far. Indeed, 20.7% of candidate respondents are satisfied with the EU as it is, 54.5% favour further integration, 24.7% think integration has gone too far. For voters, these percentages are respectively of 25.6%, 31.4% and 42.9%.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics for Dutch-speaking and francophone candidates and voters in 2014. The table also reports standard deviations, which are similar across BCS and Voter survey. The difference between the mean of preference towards European integration for Dutch-speaking and French-speaking candidates is not significant, as well as for both samples of voters. Note also that both communities do not differ significantly from each other in terms of standard deviations.

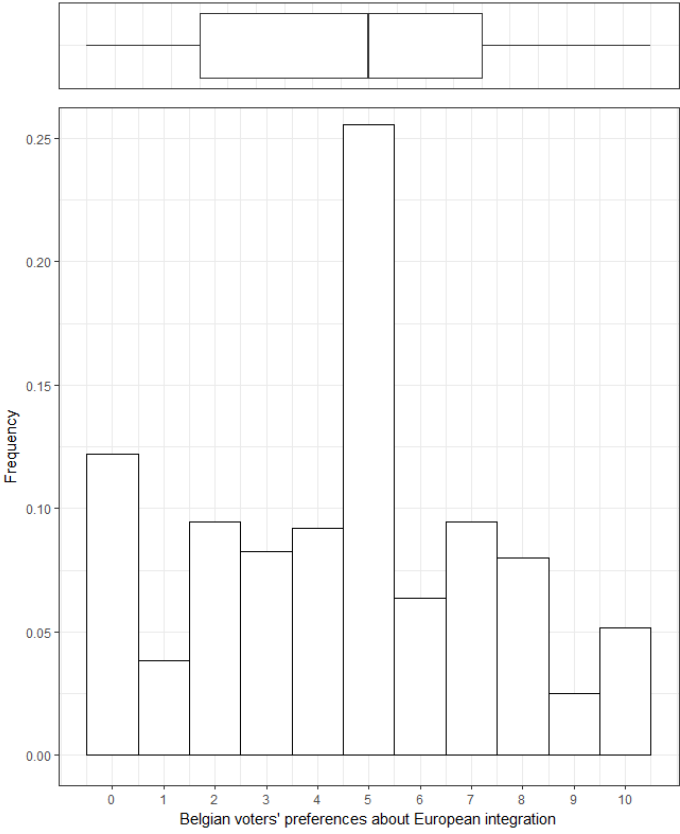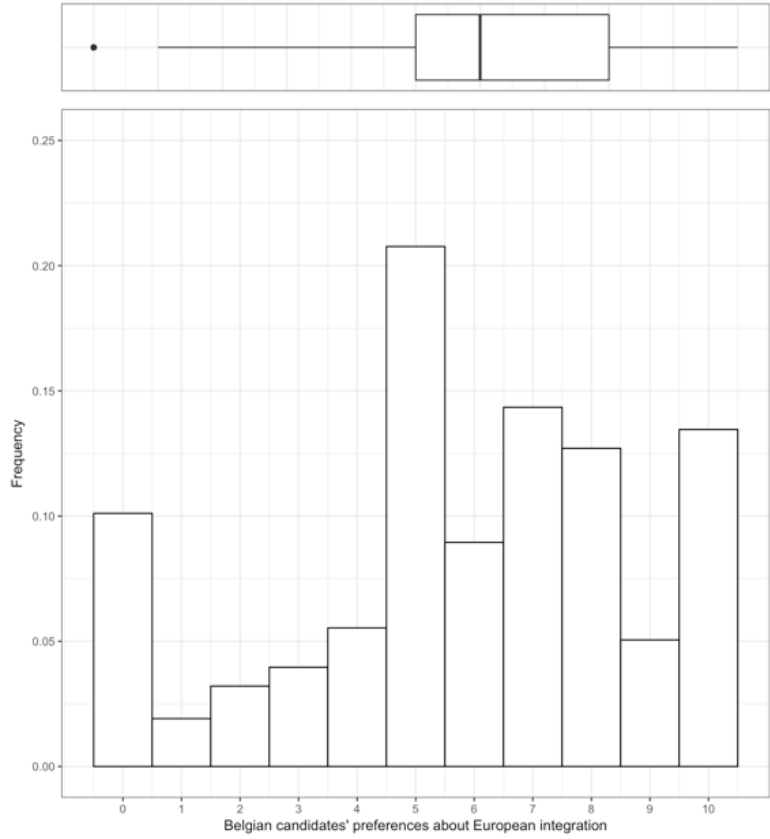*Figures 1a and 1b* – Distribution of dependent variable, candidates (left) and voters (right)

*Table 1* – Preferences towards European integration, descriptive statistics

| Communities | Belgian candidate survey 2014 | | | Belgian voter survey 2014 | | | t-test Candidates Voters |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Std | N | Mean | Std | N | |
| Dutch-speakers | 5.9 | 2.8 | 757 | 5.2 | 2.7 | 986 | p<0.0000 |
| Francophones | 5.8 | 3.1 | 667 | 4.7 | 2.9 | 990 | p<0.0000 |
| All | 5.8 | 2.9 | 1464 | 4.9 | 2.8 | 1976 | |

Regarding the (in)congruence aspect, one wishes to understand this gap between elites and citizens. There is indeed an important gap between the public and elites that has been largely underlined by conventional wisdom but rarely explained. Moreover, how can we explain that candidates favour more integration than citizens, in particular when considering that the analysis does not include candidates at the European level but at the federal and regional levels? The puzzle is even more interesting as we consider that in fact, in Belgium and in 2014, the same gap does not exist when considering the question of European identity where the gap between elites and the general public dissolves. On a 0–10 scale ("not at all"–"much") following the question "Can you, for each of the identities below, indicate to what extent she applies to you?", candidates record a 6.2 mean score (standard deviation 2.7) and voters a 6.4 mean score (Standard deviation 2.5). Therefore, the incongruence between the attitudes of elites and citizens towards European integration cannot be explained by a different attachment to the European identity.

In order to understand the preferences of elites and citizens of EU's future and to account for the gap between candidates and voters, we propose in the next section an exploratory qualitative analysis.

## Content analysis: How have Belgian candidates and voters justified their preferences?

In order to understand how the preferences of candidates and voters on European integration process' future are (in)congruent, we analyse how Belgian candidates and voters have justified in their own words their preferences towards European integration. In other words, what are the reasons put forward by candidates and voters in order to legitimate their preferences regarding the future of Europe? Is differentiated integration a (spontaneous) option in their views?

In order to answer those questions, we analyse an open question that was present in two surveys conducted among Belgian voters and among Belgian candidates for the 2014 elections (open question following the scale: "Could you explain why you have chosen this option?").

*Method: Computer assisted content analysis*

In order to proceed with our analysis, we will use IRaMuTeQ, an R-based software package allowing researchers to analyse the content of textual data. One of the package's main features is an implementation of an unsupervised text-classification algorithm originally developed by Max Reinert (Reinert 1983, 1990) during the 1980s and equally used by the proprietary Alceste software package. The method yields a non-predefined number of "classes" which reflect co-occurring sets of words whose meaning has to be interpreted by the researchers in the post-analysis phase.

Very briefly, a descendant hierarchical classification technique is performed on a dichotomous document-term matrix indicating the absence or presence of a term in a document. "Documents" correspond in our case to voters' and candidates' responses to the open question, "terms" to words in their lemmatized form. Using correspondence analyses, the matrix is iteratively divided into two sub-partitions at a time so as to maximize the inter-class inertia between sub-partitions. The objective is to obtain homogeneous classes that are as different as possible between them.

To gauge the substantial meaning of classes, characteristic lemmas as well as the degree of association of contextual variables, such as a candidate's party affiliation (see below), are computed via the use of chi-squared values for each class. Finally, in the same vein, a correspondence analysis is run to uncover the (spatial) relationships between classes, used lemmas, and / or contextual variables.

The method has enjoyed some popularity in various political science applications (Bailey and Schonhardt-Bailey 2008; Brugidou 2000; Duchesne and Van Ingelgom 2008; Ratinaud and Marchand 2015; Sanders, Lisi, and Schonhardt-Bailey 2017; Weale, Bicquelet, and Bara 2012).

*A top-down hierarchical classification of candidates and voters' preferences*

The IRaMuTeQ analysis provide a spatial image (distribution of words by class) of justification of preferences towards EU integration for candidates and voters. To this regard, the way to conduct this kind of analysis is located halfway between induction and deduction and thus proceeds in two steps. First, the analysis provides the classification and the number of classes

necessary to classify the corpus (figure 2). Second, the list of all words frequencies, generated by IRaMuTeQ is used to make sense of these classes (figure 3 presents this with word clouds). At this second stage, we thus need to produce a substantive interpretation of the various classes.

*Figure 2* – IRaMuTeQ's top-down hierarchical classification
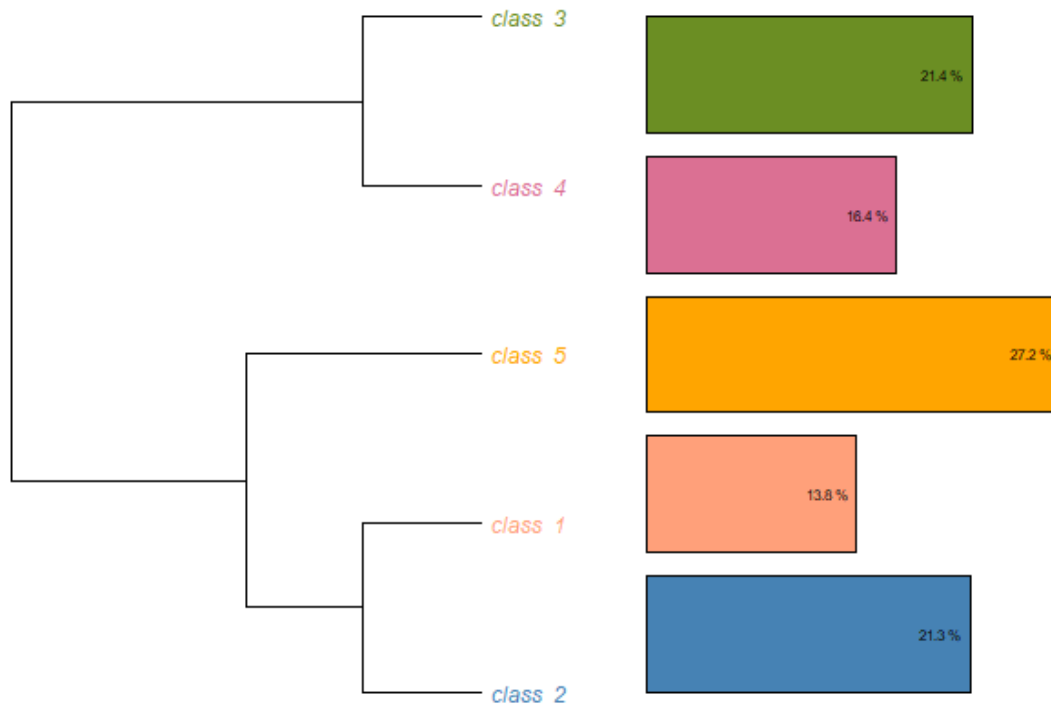


In our case, the software has taken account of 95.8% of the corpus that gathers 2287 text sequences in order to create five semantic universes (class 1 [orange] = 13.8%; class 2 [blue] = 21.3.%; class 3 [green] = 21.4%, class 4 [pink] = 16.4% and class 5 [yellow] = 27.2%). The first hierarchical (top-down) dichotomisation computed by IRaMuTeQ differentiates two groups of semantic fields. These two groups consist of different sets of related words to symbolise different conceptions of the European integration process. The main division opposes classes 3 and 4 to classes 1, 2 and 5 whereas the second factor structures the opposition between classes 1 and 2 and class 5 on the one hand and between classes 3 and 4 on the other hand. The IRaMuTeQ analysis generates distinct classes determined by co-occurrences and supplies a "description" of these classes in the form of a list of strongly associated words and units of analysis. Table 2 and Figure 2 illustrate this by presenting a factorial space including the list of all words through word clouds that contribute significantly to the construction of the five classes generated by the analysis.

*Table 2:* IRaMuTeQ's top-down hierarchical classification

|  | Words | Variables |
|---|---|---|
| Class 1 (13.78%) [orange] | World, strong, power, scale, interest, nation, globalised, weight, influence, great, small, position, Europe, deal, face, defend, sufficient, major, war, global, international | * Not far enough (chi² 91.53)<br>* Candidate not far enough (chi² 42.02)<br>* Voter not far enough (chi² 21.31)<br>* Candidate (chi² 16.49) |
| Class 2 (21.27%) [blue] | European, Union, member, state, rule, citizen, democratic, institution … parliament, commission, democracy | * Candidate already too far (chi² 31.7)<br>* Candidate status quo (chi² 12.23)<br>* Candidate (chi² 11.93) |
| Class 3 (21.36%) [green] | Person, come, foreigner, work, Belgians, open, job, employment, border, language, adapt, home, culture, bad, crime, immigrant, expensive | * Voter already too far (chi² 148.09)<br>* Voter (chi² 132.12)<br>* Already too far (chi² 99.05) |
| Class 4 (16.43%) [pink] | Country, poor, keep, let, difficult, debt, accept, money, Greece, entry, belong, autonomy-, independence, … identity | * Voter (chi² 147.28)<br>* Voter already too far (chi² 98.0)<br>* Voter status quo (chi² 73.13)<br>* Status quo (chi² 37.69) |
| Class 5 (27.16%) [yellow] | Social, economic, tax, policy, environmental, competition, integration, dump, security, level, wage, harmoniz-, taxation, fiscal, minimum, area, socio, defence | * Candidate not far enough (chi² 233.68)<br>* Candidate (chi² 206.78)<br>* Not far enough (chi² 154.34) |

*Figures 2 and 3* – IRaMuTeQ's correspondence analyses – Word clouds per class and variable
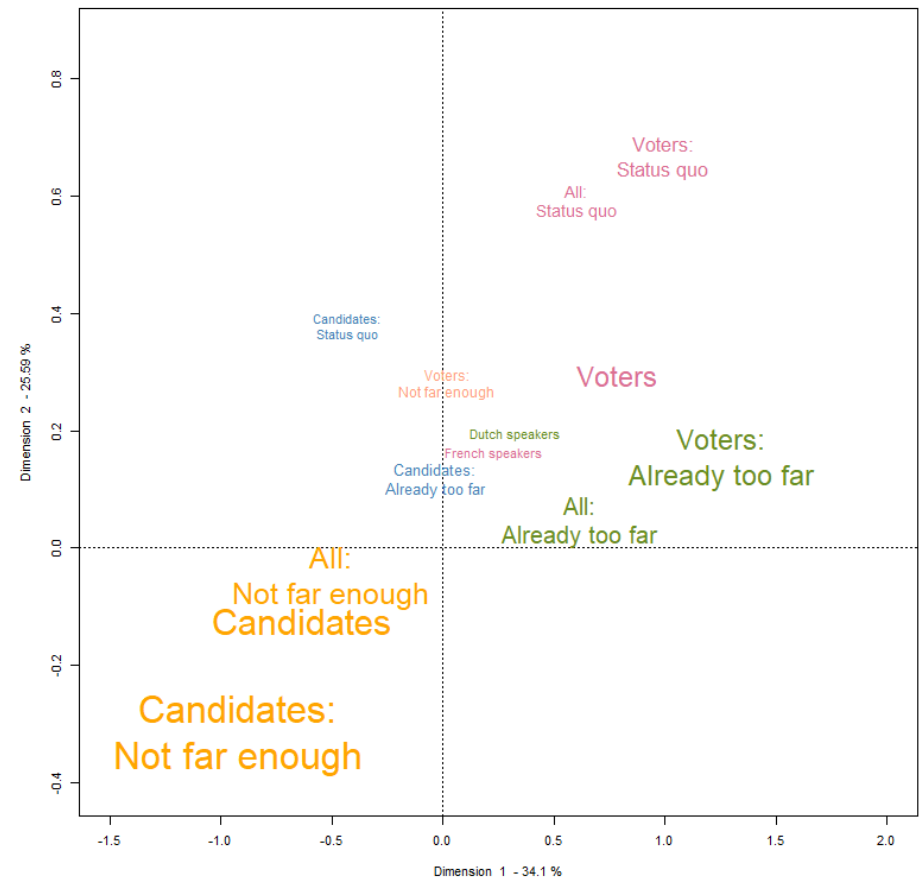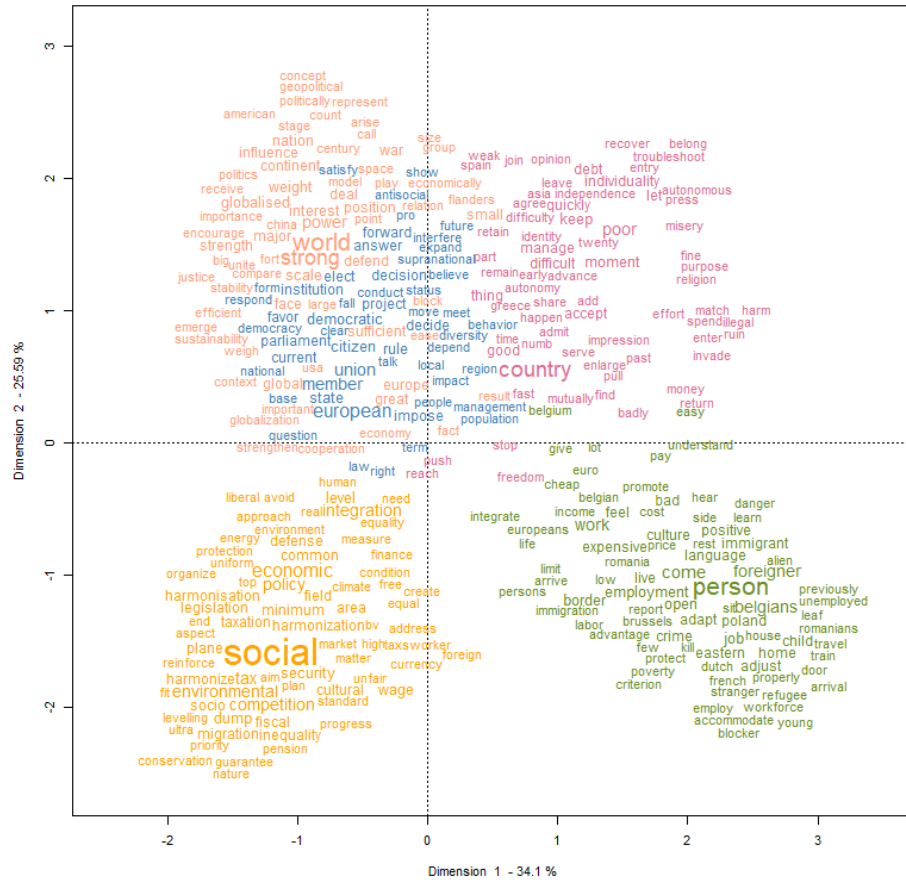


*Note:* Both corpus have been translated into English in order to be analysed together here. The results are stable when compared to the original corpus in French and Dutch.

As a final step to this discursive analysis, variables are located in factorial space, in order to assess to what extent they contribute to the formation of the different semantic universes. We put into the factorial space the following variables: candidates/voters and the position on our dependent variable (gone too far / status quo / not far enough) for each of these two groups, and the overall preferences for both groups considered together. In order to do so, IRaMuTeQ supplies information about the contribution of various groups or individuals to the formation of these 'semantic universes'. Figure 3 illustrates this procedure and the resulting analysis.

A first general overview on Figures 2 and 3 contributes to assess the differences between candidates and voters in the way in which they justify their positions. Indeed, very distinctly, the opposition between elites, on the left, and voters, on the right constructs factor 1. The content analysis of the answers given by the respondents to justify their position on the 0–10 scale clearly shows a difference between candidates and voters. Factor 1 is also defined by the opposition between those who think that European integration has not gone far enough, in particular candidates, and those who think that European integration has gone too far or that the current situation is satisfactory, in particular voters.

Indeed, as illustrated by Figures 2 and 3, the first semantic field (classes 3 - Green and 4 - Pink) is mainly mobilised by voters declaring that European integration has already gone too far. This semantic field puts the emphasis on the issues that Europe is facing and is composed by a vocabulary referring to two different semantic universes. The words "person", "unemployed", "employment", "poor", "foreigner", "job" characterise class 3. The tone is highly negative: "difficult", "weak", "invade", "expensive", "kill", "bad". Class 4 is characterised by the following vocabulary: "country", "independent", "autonomy" and "remain". This class is anchored in a vocabulary of national sovereignty. These two different semantic universes demonstrate the content of the "gone too far" option characterising voters and in particular those who favour less integration and the status quo.

The second semantic field (classes 1 - Orange, 2 - Blue and 5 - Yellow) is mobilised by candidates whatever are their opinions concerning the future of the EU and voters who favour a more integrated EU. Class 1 - Orange is defending a supranational position in the sense that in a globalised world one needs Europe in order to be strong. It is mobilising a discourse of interdependence between countries and the fact that states are too small. Class 2 - Blue defines a semantic universe constituted by an input legitimacy (Scharpf, 1999) in terms of institutional design and democracy. Finally, class 5 - Yellow is strongly anchored in a discourse of furthering

integration in terms of competencies that should be transferred to the European level such as social and fiscal policies, environmental and migration policies and defence. It is also interesting to highlight that policy domains that belong to the EU competences ("environmental", "competition", "economic") as well as competences that are still managed by the member states as security and defence but more importantly social policies compose this semantic field. These three classes refer to European integration as a tool to emerging solutions: "competition", "tax", "policy", "harmonisation", "democratic" and "cooperation". This shows the content of the option desired by candidates and voters who favour further integration. These classes define the content of a more (differentiated) integration in terms of policy-making.

**Results and interpretation**

Out of this exploratory discursive analysis, four important results emerge. First, candidates and voters have very different types of discourses in order to justify their preferences. An opposition between elites and citizens clearly structures the semantic universes. In other words, when justifying their preferences towards European integration – whatever their positions are – candidates and voters do not mobilise the same kinds of arguments. If candidates are more positive in their preferences than voters are, when comparing the semantic universes associated with the three categories of our dependent variable for each group, they are not situated in the same classes.

Second, our analysis contributes to the argument recently put forward by the literature that the status quo position should be assimilated neither to a pro-European position nor to an anti-European position when wanting to understand ordinary citizens' positions (Duchesne et al., 2013; Rose & Borz, 2015; Stoeckel, 2013; Van Ingelgom, 2012, 2014). The status quo attitude of voters is belonging to an independent semantic universe whereas this is not the case for candidates whom status quo position is closely linked to the idea that European integration has already gone too far. This must be interpreted in the light of the overall tendency of candidates to favour more integration than voters do. In voters' discourses, the status quo attitude and the negative attitude structure the opposition between two different semantic universes, classes 3 - Green and 4 - Pink. Class 4 - Pink is characterised by what we could call a "sovereigntist" discourse. Class 3 - Green is structured around a discourse anchored in their personal everyday life difficulties around the themes of unemployment and economic difficulties.

Third, it is evident that if the preferences are different – candidates tending to favour more integration than voters – it is mainly because the content of what should be integrated is radically different. In the case of candidates, two classes contribute to the attitudes of furthering integration (class 1 - Orange and class 5 - Yellow). Class 1 - Orange is referring to the necessity of supranational organisation in a globalised world is shared by candidates and voters who wish for more integration. However, class 5 - Yellow referring to transfer of competencies to the EU is strongly and only associated with candidates who wish more integration, not with voters. Thus, candidates' preferences for more integration differs from voters' as elites perceived furthering integration by a transfer of competencies (social, fiscal, environmental and defence) towards the European level. This result should be understood in line with the fact that voters who wish less integration or are satisfied by the status quo are also mobilising economy and employment to justify their preferences towards less integration. This results supports, from a social perspective of legitimacy, the framework of a differentiate integration.

Fourth, when it comes to candidates'preferences for less integration or the statu quo, these positions are justified by referring to arguments related to democracy and input legitimacy (class 2 - Blue). The classical democratic deficit argument is strongly and only associated with candidates who wish less integration or the status quo. Voters are not referring to democratic arguments to justify their position towards the European integration process.

Overall, preferences seem to be determined by the content of integration that are provided by the examination of word clouds. The analysis of the justifications of preferences towards the European integration leads us to focus on different elements to explain the different oppositions between classes (structuring the factors): for factor 1, on policymaking preferences, and for factor 2 on national sovereignty and input legitimacy. Indeed, the results of our qualitative analysis state that in order to understand the preferences of candidates and citizens towards the European integration process, one first needs to disaggregate by policy sectors by taking into account that there is a division between economic and employment policies and sovereignty policies, and second, one needs to consider the functioning of EU democracy. Issue-specific preferences would thus, have an impact on the overall preferences towards European integration (van der Veen, 2016) – as thus the preferences regarding the future of differentiated integration.

**Conclusion**

The European Union and its member states have faced several crises over the last decade: the Eurozone and the refugees' crisis went along with a rise of populist and Eurosceptic parties. In front of these events, citizens and their political representatives are confronted to a legitimacy alternative within the European multilevel system: do they want more or less (differentiated) integration. If the crisis faced by the EU and the European countries have led to a fall in trust by European citizens towards their political elites, the gap between the opinions of citizens and elites is still largely unexplored. Consequently, the aim of this paper was to analyse the (in)congruence between the positions of Belgian candidates and the positions of voters on European integration process. In fact, Belgian elites tend to favour more European integration whereas voters are more inclined to declare that the European integration has gone too far.

The discursive analysis shows that candidates and voters do not mobilize the same kinds of argument to justify their preferences towards European integration. The main insights from this analysis using qualitative methods on an original datasets is that voters and candidates do not assess the integration of the EU through the same lenses. While both groups are concerned by the same challenges (unemployment, refugees crisis…), their representation of the European integration are distinct. On the one hand, candidates conceive EU integration as a toolbox, as a solution to tackle these challenges. On the other hand, voters perceive the EU integration as part of the problem. This shows why it is crucial to unravel the justifications of attitudes towards the European integration in order to explain the (in)congruence between the positions of elites and the positions of citizens on the subject.

The disaggregation of candidates' and voters' preferences by policy sectors as well as the elites' preferences regarding the functioning of the EU democracy are important to consider in order to understand elites and citizens attitudes towards European integration. Altogether, while Belgian candidates are committed to further integration in terms of policy transfer to the European level – in particular regarding social and welfare policies as well as environment and immigration – most Belgian citizens are not.

Moreover, the results stress the significance of taking into account a particular attitude towards European integration, namely the status quo option, for both elites and citizens, as already pointed out in previous research (Van Ingelgom 2014). This reveals that the debate about the

future of the EU should not been reduced to a binary choice between 'more Europe' or 'less Europe'.

In conclusion, this paper focuses on the gap between candidates and voters. In this respect, this paper contributes to our understanding of the well-known gap between elites and voters. It demonstrates that candidates and voters do not speak the same language when it comes to European integration. If they do not speak the same language, they do not share the same compass either, in terms of both direction and content to be given to the European differentiated integration process.

# References

Arnold, C. U., & de Vries, C. (2011). Making the Polity: Exploring the Link between Public Opinion and European Elites Preferences for European Union Public Policy. In D. Fuchs & H. D. Klingemann (Eds.), *Cultural Diversity, European Identity and the Legitimacy of the EU* (pp. 201 - 219). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bailey, A., and Schonhardt-Bailey, C. (2008) 'Does Deliberation Matter in FOMC Monetary Policymaking? The Volcker Revolution of 1979'. *Political Analysis* 16(4): 404–27.

Beetham, D. (1991). The Legitimation of Power. London: Macmillan Education UK. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-21599-7

Beetham, D., & Lord, C. (1998). Legitimacy and the EU (1. publ). London: Longman.

Brugidou, M. 2000. 'Les discours de la revendication et de l'action dans les éditoriaux de la presse syndicale (1996-1998)'. *Revue française de science politique* 50(50): 967–92.

Crespy, A. (2011). Europe and Euroscepticism: "Non-issues" in Belgian Politics. In R. Harmsen & J. Schild (Eds.), *Debating Europe. The 2009 European Parliament Elections and Beyond* (pp. 17-32). Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.

De Winter, L., Swyngedouw, M., & Goeminne, B. (2009). The Level of Decision Making: The Preferences of the Citizens after Enlargement. In J. Thomassen (Ed.), *The Legitimacy of the European Union after Enlargement* (pp. 117-141): Oxford University Press.

Defacqz, S., Dodeigne, J., Teuber, F., & Van Ingelgom, V. (2018). From More or Less Integration to Status Quo? Explaining Candidates' and Citizens' Attitudes Towards European Integration. In A. Vandeleene, L. De Winter, & P. Baudewyns (Eds.), *Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy* (pp. 273-310). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Deschouwer, K. (2012). *The politics of Belgium: Governing a divided society* (2nd ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Duchesne, S., & Van Ingelgom, V. (2008). 'L'indifférence des français et des belges (francophones) pour leurs voisins européens : une pièce de plus au dossier de l'absence de communauté politique européenne ?' *Politique européenne* (26): 143–64.

Duchesne, S., Frazer, E., Haegel, F., & Van Ingelgom, V. (2013). *Citizens' reactions to European integration compared: overlooking Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Duchesne, S., & Van Ingelgom, V. (2015). Is there a European legitimacy? In B. Rihoux, V. Van Ingelgom, & S. Defacqz (Eds.), *La légitimité de la science politique. Construire une discipline, au-delà des clivages.* (pp. 51-70). Louvain-la-Neuve: Presses Universitaires de Louvain.

Easton, D. (1965). *A Systems Analysis of Political Life*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Ejrnæs, A., & Jensen, M. D. (2019). Divided but united: explaining nested public support for European integration. *West European Politics*, 1-30.

Fagerholm, A. (2019). United in diversity: examining the diverging attitudes towards the European Union on the ideological fringes. *Acta Politica, 54*(2), 177-195.

Hug, S., & König, T. (2002). In view of ratification: Governmental preferences and domestic constraints at the Amsterdam Intergovernmental Conference. *International Organization, 56*(02), 447-476.

Leuffen, D., Rittberger, B., & Schimmelfennig, F. (2012). *Differentiated integration: Explaining variation in the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ratinaud, P., & Marchand, P. (2015). 'Des mondes lexicaux aux représentations sociales. Une première approche des thématiques dans les débats à l'Assemblée nationale (1998-2014)'. *Mots. Les langages du politique* n° 108(2): 57–77.

Reinert, M. (1983) 'Une méthode de classification descendante hiérarchique : application à l'analyse lexicale par contexte'. *Cahiers de l'analyse des données* 8(2): 187–98.

———. (1990). 'Alceste Une Méthodologie d'analyse Des Données Textuelles et Une Application: Aurelia De Gerard De Nerval'. *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology/Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique* 26(1): 24–54.

Rose, R., & Borz, G. (2015). Static and Dynamic Views of European Integration. *Journal of Common Market Studies*.

Sanders, J., Giulio L., & Schonhardt-Bailey C. (2017). 'Themes and Topics in Parliamentary Oversight Hearings: A New Direction in Textual Data Analysis'. *Statistics, Politics and Policy* 8(2): 153–194.

Scharpf, F. W. (1999). *Governing in Europe: effective and democratic?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schimmelfennig, F., Leuffen, D., & Rittberger, B. (2015). The European Union as a system of differentiated integration: interdependence, politicization and differentiation. *Journal of European Public Policy, 22*(6), 764-782.

Schimmelfennig, F., & Winzen, T. (2014). Instrumental and Constitutional Differentiation in the European Union. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies, 52*(2), 354-370.

Schmidt, V. A. (2013). Democracy and legitimacy in the European Union revisited: Input, output and 'throughput'. *Political studies, 61*(1), 2-22.

Schmidt, V. A. (2019). The future of differentiated integration: a 'soft-core,' multi-clustered Europe of overlapping policy communities. *Comparative European Politics, 17*(2), 294-315.

Steenbergen, M. R., Edwards, E. E., & De Vries, C. E. (2007). Who's cueing whom? Mass-elite linkages and the future of European integration. *European Union Politics, 8*(1), 13-35.

Stoeckel, F. (2013). Ambivalent or indifferent? Reconsidering the structure of EU public opinion. *European Union Politics, 14*(1), 23-45.

Trein, P., Thomann, E., & Maggetti, M. (2019). Integration, functional differentiation and problem-solving in multilevel governance. *Public Administration, 0*(0).

van der Veen, M. (2016). Fifty Years of Public (Dis)Satisfaction with European Governance: Preferences, Europeanization and Support for the EU. *Journal of Contemporary European Research, 12*(1), 566-590.

Van Ingelgom, V. (2012). Mesurer l'indifférence. Intégration européenne et attitudes des citoyens. *Sociologie, 3*(1), 1-20.

Van Ingelgom, V. (2014). *Integrating Indifference: A Comparative, Qualitative and Quantitative Approach to the Legitimacy of European Integration*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Weale, A., Bicquelet, A. & Bara, J. (2012). 'Debating Abortion, Deliberative Reciprocity and Parliamentary Advocacy'. *Political Studies* 60(3): 643–67.

Weber, M. (1968). Economy and society; an outline of interpretive sociology. New York: Bedminster Press.