An Inter-Arena Approach to Studying the Politicization of the EU: Irish Citizens and the Media During the Euro Crisis

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This is a very first draft based on selected data from my doctoral dissertation. Feedback and comments are both welcome and appreciated.

The study of politicization in EU studies has spanned as wide a variety of manifestations as sources of data that have been used empirically measure it. Scholars have located politicization in public opinion, electoral results, and protest politics, often identifying it in Euroscepticism or euro critical attitudes (Hooghe and Marks 2009), and in parliamentary debates (Wendler 2013) party manifestos and electoral campaigns (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002; Kriesi et al. 2008). Lay citizens, who unlike political elites and the media do not have a professional interest in politics, are the least thoroughly empirically studied source of politicization discourse. Several qualitative studies have focused on measuring public opinion and explaining citizen attitudes about the EU (ex. Gaxie, Hube and Rowell 2011; Duchesne et al. 2013; Van Ingelgom 2014). There have been few studies of citizen discourse specific to politicization. Those who have, identify existing but lower levels of politicization in the citizen arena than from other sources, in data collected from focus groups (see Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016; Hurrelmann, Gora and Wagner 2015) and from citizen discourse on social media (Barisione and Michailidou 2017; De Wilde, Michailidou, and Trenz 2014).

News media, most often through newspaper content analysis, has provided data on different actors or arenas of politicization. First, media has been treated as a setting or a stage for politicization (ex. de Wilde and Zürn 2012; Statham and Trenz 2015) and as a mechanism for promoting the politicization of the EU in the wider public sphere (Koopmans 2007, 2010; Statham and Trenz 2013). It has also been used as a source of data on politicization more generally, among actors and political spheres beyond the media, and political activity in other arenas. For example, it has been used to study political party competition in national election campaigns (Hutter and Grande 2014; Hutter and Kerscher 2014), EU-related protests (Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016; Hutter, Grande and Kriesi 2016) and elite debates (ex. Leupold 2015). These different arenas of politicization have for the most part been studied independently, and the relationship between public debates and politicization among citizens has been strongly implied (Hooghe and Marks 2009), particularly by democratically normative literature relating to the public sphere (see Habermas 2001, 2006; Risse 2010, 2015), and studies of the politicization of the EU in the news media (ex. Statham and Trenz 2013). Most empirical media studies assess politicization of institutional executive actors within a generalized 'public sphere' with the implication that observed levels and trends in politicization apply also to regular citizens, an approach that Hurrelmann (2017, 69) and de Wilde, Leupold and Schmidke (2016, 7) deem problematic. This article explores the relationship between citizens in Ireland and the intermediary actors (i.e. media) that link them to policymakers and other institutional actors, during parallel time periods and through an empirically comparable analytical framework.

Research into politicization in the citizen arena has been limited. Existing focus group (Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016) and social media-based research (Ademmer, Leupold, and Stöhr 2018) has

found that politicization of the EU in relation to the euro crisis or migration respectively, does not take on comparable degrees of intensity as have been observed in media, political party, and elite discourses. However, this relationship between observed politicization in the media and actual citizen discourse has not been explored in a directly comparable way. A study comparing the salience of the EU between citizens and the media by Beyers, Dür and Wonka, which also identified a disconnect between the two, is an exception (Beyers, Dür, and Wonka 2017). However, their analysis concentrated on salience alone and did not examine politicization more holistically. It also depended on pre-existing survey data on citizen attitudes rather than an analysis of citizen discourse. Beyers and his co-authors invite further research offering a 'systematic synchronic comparison of the salience attached to a policy by different types of actors' at different points in time which they suggest is best suited to qualitative case study research (Beyers, Dür, and Wonka 2017, 1733-1735). This contribution complements and builds on these efforts in the broader context of politicization through a case study of public and citizen discourse in Ireland over four years of the Irish debt crisis (2010 – 2013). Rather than identifying *whether* or *to what degree* the EU is politicized for citizens, this paper aims to describe the character of the politicization that does occur in relation to concurrent media debates.

Despite the EU lacking the same intensity of politicization as has been reported in the media, the citizen arena has displayed an ability to have significant effects on European integration, most recently witnessed with the Brexit referendum but also in a recent turn towards the election of populist leaders and a questioning of the EU's core democratic values. If the character of politicization of the EU in media discourse is not reflected in citizen debates, then this puts into question underlying assumptions that politicization among citizens follows that of political parties, elites and especially the media who act as a communicative link between them. This could mean that an intensification of politicization in public and elite debates is not necessarily the driving force behind the 'constraining dissensus' (Hooghe and Marks 2009) that has been observed through election and referendum results. To better understand this link, we need to look at how the EU is politicized for citizens in relation to other arenas, particularly the media.

The longstanding tradition of media effects, particularly agenda-setting and framing research in communication studies points to a relationship between the mass media and, at the least, which issues gain salience with the public (McCombs 2014). Media-based studies of EU public opinion and contestation, which dominate politicization research, have either used the media as a data source for elite discourses (ex. Leupold 2016) or have taken the media's effects on citizen attitudes as a given (ex. Statham and Trenz 2013). However, recent studies observe that despite the media's informational role for EU citizens, the politicization and especially the saliency of issues may in fact vary between these two arenas (Beyers, Dür, and Wonka 2017, Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016). In a focus group-

based study of citizens in four EU member states, Baglioni and Hurrelmann warn researchers that even when politicization is actively observed in other arenas, it cannot immediately be assumed to occur on the citizen arena also (Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016, 121).

The media, citizens and politicization

This study operationalizes politicization using the three-dimensional understanding which is now the standard in most media-based research: (1) the increasing *salience* of European integration, (2) the *expansion* of actors and audiences interested in and involved in debate about European integration, and (3) the *polarization* of opinion on European integration (see de Wilde and Zurn 2014; de Wilde, Leupold, and Schmidke 2016; Hutter and Grande 2014; Hutter and Kerscher 2014; Grande and Hutter 2016, 8-10). However, as Zürn (2016, 166-168) rightly points out, these three dimensions are highly specific to media content analysis. He proposes expanding our operational components of politicization to include: (1) public awareness and interest in issues, (1) social mobilization aimed at influencing political decision-making and related negotiations and, (3) public debates expressing conflicting views of the common good. Public awareness and interest in issues is comparable with issue salience in the media. Conflicting views of the common good are comparable to polarization in media debates. Finally, social mobilization may be directly compared against the expansion of actors active in media debates. This analysis is specifically interested in the extent that media and citizen discourse, as measured through newspaper debated and focus groups align, it will concentrate on a descriptive analysis of salience (awareness and interest) and polarization (debates and conflicting views) only. While focus groups offer a snapshot of how discourse on political debates develops, they are not effective indicators for citizen mobilization. Using an analysis of media discourse in newspaper reporting and citizen discourse in focus group conversation this paper pursues a comparison of how these two indicators differed between these two arenas in Ireland.

Issue salience, the first of the three-part conceptualization of politicization, is also the central focus of the agenda-setting hypothesis as applied both in communications studies (see McCombs 2014) and policy analysis (see Baumgartner and Jones 1993, Jones and Baumgartner 2012; True, Jones and Baumgartner 2007). General understandings of agenda setting begin with the premise that people are exposed to "saliences from the news media, incorporating similar sets of weights into their own agendas" (McCombs and Reynolds 2002: 4, see also McCombs 2014). However, it is now also widely acknowledged that media effects are conditional and neither the salience of an issue nor attitudes are directly transferred from media to individuals (De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2016, 240, see also McLeod). De Vreese and Boomgaarden have found that the tone (ie. negative or positive) of continuous flows of news about an issue have a weaker effect on public opinion than punctuated boosts in media attention (De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2016, 255). Others have found that positive

media coverage of the EU only reinforces attitudes of individuals who already have high institutional trust, but negative coverage is less likely to make citizens use institutional trust of other political levels as a proxy for the EU (Brosius, van Elsas, and de Vreese 2019, 69).

It is now generally accepted that public opinion is not directly transferred to citizens by the media, but that its effects are filtered through external factors. Some have explored the significance of economic and socio-cultural explanations of EU attitudes (see Gabel 1998, Hooghe and Marks 2005). Others have pointed to the influence of ideological factors, such as materialist versus post-materialist world views (Valenzuela 2011). That said, public opinion does not exist in a vacuum. To have an opinion, people need to be first aware of an issue and relevant details relating to it and the news media is widely accepted as a source of information about political issues either directly, or through peers who may act as opinion leaders (Price and Feldman 2009). How the media portrays different issues may very well speak to some demographics or world views, more than others. When pro-European, Euro-sceptic and Euro-critical sentiments are seen in light of politicization, which is concerned not only with a change in attitudes, but with an intensification of the salience of EU policy and its contestation, examining citizen discourse about the EU in relation to the news media, a central source of information about the EU for lay-people, is both logical and necessary. While the literature on the effects of media is often referenced by EU politicization research, media and citizen discourses have seldom been studied comparatively. Effects of the media are often taken for granted or disputed in works that exclusively study citizens.

The Case for Newspapers

It is now widely accepted that social and digital media have transformed the traditional media landscape, particularly by introducing a live-time element to news production and opening up news dialogue to participation beyond professional journalists. Despite this, traditional news media retain privileged and oftentimes exclusive access to the institutional arena of politics and the policy-making process. New media, particularly during the period studied here, remain largely dependent on traditional news sources, whether television, radio, or print and their digital versions, for information on the 'top-down' end of politics which takes place in the institutional arena. This is reflected in earlier research which shows that Twitter discourse about the 2015 'Grexit' referendum was dominated largely by news organizations and journalists, ultimately reproducing the discourse of mainstream media (Michailidou 2017, 254). Studying social media's influence on political discourse during electoral campaigns, Harder and his co-authors find that despite it being rare for traditional media to be first in reporting on major events, its coverage still has a stronger impact because a news article reaches a wider audience than, for example, the average individual tweet. It is, therefore, able to effectively influence subsequent coverage across social media (Harder, Sevenans, and Van Aelst 2017,

288). Others find that despite the undeniable role of social media in mainstream political discourse, citizens continue to receive information about politics primarily through traditional news media. Print media, in particular, has the strongest influence over citizen behaviour (Powell et. al. 2018a, Powell et. al. 2018b). There is a strong case for the continued relevance of newspapers as a source of data on media discourse, particularly when examined in relation to political discourse among the greater population.

However, with existing research pointing to rather different observations of politicization within the citizen arena, we cannot take the influence of the media, newspaper or otherwise, for granted. Taking this as a point of departure, this paper explores the character of citizen discourse about the EU during the Euro crisis in relation to concurrent debates in the media using established indicators of politicization. I expect that these discourses will not mirror one another, and instead ask in which ways, specifically, do they differ and what are the implications of such difference for the politicization of the EU more generally.
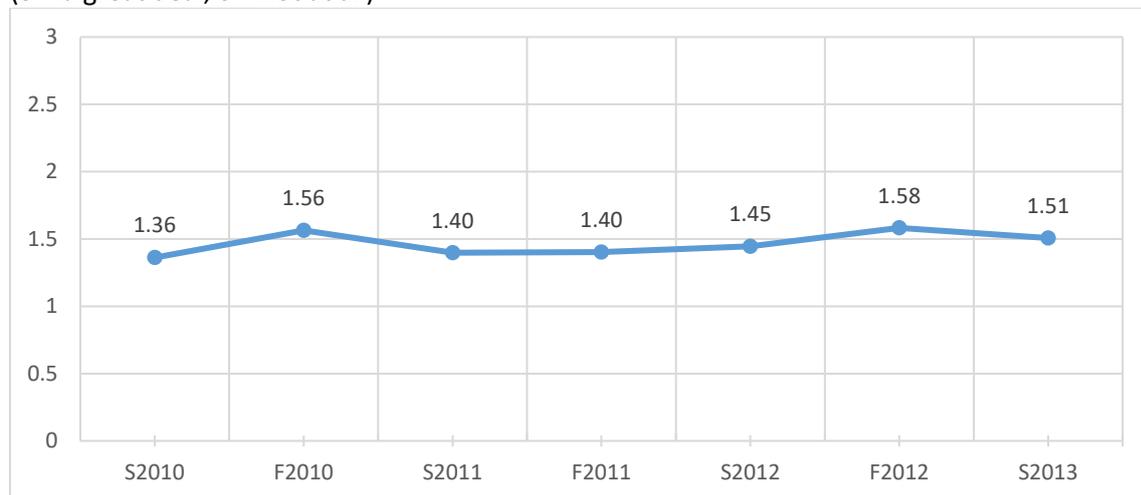
Case Selection and Research Design

The politicization of the EU during the Euro crisis has been widely studied resulting in more-or-less a consensus that this period saw an 'unprecedented' politicization of European integration (Schimmelfennig 2014, 322; see also Hutter and Kerscher 2014; Kriesi and Grande 2016; Statham and Trenze 2013, 2015), at least in elite and media discourses. In his book on European public spheres arguing that 'politics is back' as a result of the crisis, Thomas Risse Sensationally calls it the "most profound crisis in the history of European Integration" (Risse 2015, 1). Therefore, if politicization trends in the media are reflected in public discourse in any way, the euro crisis offers a best-case scenario to observe them.

Ireland, having experienced the crisis directly as a debtor state dependent on assistance from its EU peers and the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and the IMF) provides a case in which the crisis was controversial in the media and directly felt by citizens. Additionally, the Irish population is generally perceived to be well informed and interested in politics (Coakley 2018, 57; Mair 2010, 1) and has self-reported newspaper readership levels higher than what might be expected considering general trends in print media readership. Despite most people spending just one hour or less a day on reading a newspaper, according to the European Social Survey, nearly eighty-two percent of Irish respondents between 2008 and 2014 reported that they read a newspaper daily. In fact, the proportion of respondents who indicate they never read the newspaper has declined over that same period.

Previous research has shown that newspaper readership, to a greater degree than other news sources, is positively correlated with the likelihood of an individual's engagement in political conversation, even when accounting for the influence of political interest (Kim, Wyatt, Katz 1999, 368). Average political interest in Ireland remained more-or-less stable over the course of the crisis, sitting midway between low and moderate levels (See figure 1). Eurobarometer data indicates that from spring 2010 to spring 2013 over half of those surveyed reported a medium or strong interest in politics, signifying that the majority of those who read newspapers likely consume some degree of political news coverage daily. Just an average of one-quarter of respondents reported absolutely no interest in politics. Thus, we can expect that at least three-quarters of Irish citizens are to some extent cognitively engaged with political issues. As such, Irish public opinion and political conversations during the Euro crisis offer a most likely scenario to observe a politicization of the European Union.

Figure 1: Average Political Interest: To what extent would you say you are interested in politics? (3 = a great deal, 0 = not at all)

Source: Spring (S) and Fall (F) Standard Eurobarometer versions 73.4, 74.2, 75.3, 76.3, 77.3, 78.1, 79.1.

Methodology

Politicization in the media is analyzed through a content and claims analysis of two Irish dailies: the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent*. Despite a growing number of foreign media products, particularly British newspapers and tabloids (O'Regan 2010, 447), they remain the country's two main national quality dailies. The *Irish Independent* is Ireland's bestselling national newspaper with a circulation of 117,361 by the end of 2013 and estimated daily readership levels, of both print and digital editions at 666 thousand. The *Irish Times*, Ireland's oldest national newspaper, is considered the country's leading quality daily (Treutschler 2007, 34) and "national newspaper of reference" (Brady 2005, 63). By the end of 2013, it had a daily print circulation of 82,058 and an estimated daily readership, of both print and digital editions of 385,000. A 2015 study of Irish media's coverage of the

euro crisis identified these newspapers, alongside their corresponding Sunday editions, as inter-media agenda-setters in Ireland reinforcing their value to this project: "they shape to a great extent what other news outlets cover in print and on radio and television, and thus play an important role in determining the nature of public debate," in Ireland (Mercille 2015, 3).

Articles were sampled during one-week periods, twice annually from 2010 to 2013. The dates corresponded with the fieldwork for the regular Eurobarometer surveys. Articles were selected based on a search of the terms "eu OR europ* OR eurozone" and then filtered manually to keep only those which contained an explicit EU reference in the headline or article lede. The analysis first coded all EU-related articles to investigate overall levels of the salience of the EU and the scope of salient issues irrespective of whether they were contested or not. A total of 629 individual EU-related articles were coded at the article level for the *overall topic* of the article distinguishing between crisis-related issues (ie. Eurozone crisis, Irish financial crisis) and non-crisis related issues (ie. Irish domestic politics related to the EU, domestic politics of other member states, and EU internal politics, external politics, constitutional issues, membership and enlargement, structural and institutional issues). Next, a claims analysis was conducted for those articles the earlier analysis that contained political claims to investigate the contestation and polarization of the EU in the Irish press. The claims analysis was roughly based on the method of political claims analysis developed in the Europub project (see Koopmans 1999) and Hurrelmann et.al.'s. "The Politicization of European Integration. Codebook for the Analysis of Political Claims in the News Media" (Hurrelmann et.al. 2016). Political claims are understood as purposeful expressions of political opinion, which at a minimum consist of an individual making a claim (claimant), issue, and issue position (an evaluation or demand). Of the 629 EU-related articles coded between 2010 and 2013, 399 articles contained a political claim. Because one article can contain more than one claim, 495 political claims were coded overall. For this study, the following variables were analyzed: issue, issue evaluation, and demand.

The analysis of citizen discourse in this article draws on data collected for the projects "Multilevel Legitimacy in the European Union" and "The Eurozone Crisis and the Politicization of European Integration", supported by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Principal Investigator Achim Hurrelmann).[1] It consists of eight focus groups, conducted in 2010 and 2013 in Dublin, Ireland. Participants were recruited by a local public opinion research firm. To be effective, focus groups need to establish a comfortable environment where participants do not feel inhibited from freely expressing themselves as well as one where they can understand, and be

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[1] For previously published analysis using the 2010 data see Hurrelmann, Gora and Wagner 2015, and the 2013 data see Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016.

understood by others. Therefore, as in the CITAE project by Duchesne and her co-authors (2013) participants were grouped with others who were not "too far removed from each other socially" and might share similar "social or cultural references" (Van Ingelgom 214, 93). Each set, 2010 and 2013, consisted of two focus groups composed of eight to ten Irish citizens who had completed some level of post-secondary education and two groups composed of those who had not (Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016, 113; Hurrelmann et. al. 2015, 48). As it is not possible to account for all social or cultural variation in society in the focus groups, other demographic qualities, such as gender and age, were evenly spread across the participants. Selected individuals had all participated in focus groups before and were familiar with the setting. However, it was ensured that none of the participants had experience in focus groups on similar topics (Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016, 113; Hurrelmann, Gora and Wagner 2015, 47-8). The first set of four groups took place in December 2010, just two weeks after the fall 2010 sample for the media analysis. The second set of focus groups took place in December 2013, one month following the fall 2013 media sample and just one day after Ireland officially exited the bailout programme on December 15th. The moderator first asked participants to describe the recent political events that had most excited them, allowing for an assessment of the degree to which EU-related issues spontaneously arise in political discussions. This was followed by questions explicitly asking respondents about the EU, its policies and its institutions.

The content of focus group discussions in relation to these questions was analyzed using both quantitative and interpretive methods, an approach also followed by Duchesne and her co-authors (2013) for the CITAE project. The analysis coded the contributions of individual speakers, alongside a qualitative analysis of the group dynamics. The quantitative analysis coded speakers' contributions based roughly on the same categories used in the media analysis, which were inductively adapted and adjusted to the content and context of the discussions. The coding of the responses focused on the following three main qualitative categories which give insight into the salience, scope and level of contestation of the EU in citizen discourse: *Claims* (distinguished between evaluative statements, demands for change or the status quo, and ambivalent statements where respondents express both positive and negative evaluative sentiments together), EU References (tracked references to the EU as such, specific EU institutions, or EU actors), *Issue* (tracked the topic or overall aspect of EU related politics relevant to each contribution). While quantitative analysis of focus group data is not statistically representative, it offers two main benefits. First, objectively coding and quantifying the percentage of discussion dedicated to various topics or themes reduces the risk of research bias where passages are selectively chosen to best fit researcher expectations (Duchesne et. al. 2013, 193). Second, it offers data in a format that is easily comparable with the results of the media analysis.
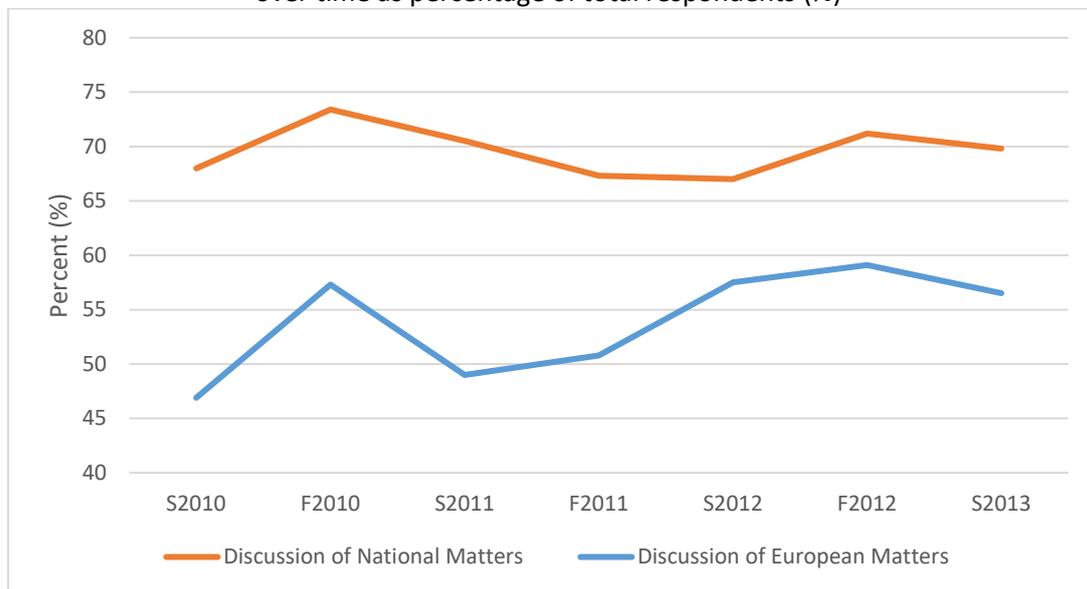
Empirical Results

Salience

While a detailed or in-depth knowledge of an issue is not necessary for it to become salient in citizen discourse, we can expect citizens to be familiarized with it to the extent that they can generate conversation about EU-related topics unprompted and unfacilitated. The first question posed to group participants in both 2010 and 2013 asked them to report on which recent political issues have captured their interest. This question facilitates an assessment of the degree to which EU related politics appear in general political discussion in relation to other topics when the conversation flows freely. As reported by Hurrelmann and his co-authors the EU took a backseat to state-level politics in political debates during the 2010 focus groups (Hurrelmann, Gora, Wagner 2015). Taking place just weeks after Ireland received an EU-IMF bailout, it is unsurprising that the financial crisis and Ireland's austerity budget dominated the discussion. However, just 4.3 percent of participant contributions had some connection to EU issues and politics and could be considered 'Europeanized.' At nearly one quarter of all contributions, the 2013 focus groups show a noticeable increase in the salience of EU politics from 2010. Of these, over sixty percent were about domestic politics of other EU member states (particularly Greece and Spain in relation to the euro crisis), just over thirty were related to EU membership or questions of enlargement, and the remainder discussed the euro crisis in a common European (versus domestic) context. However, the bulk of the discussion still centred on the Irish sovereign debt crisis and bailout which continued to be understood through a nearly entirely domestic framework.

The Eurobarometer question on how often respondents discuss European issues in political conversation offers a comparable measure over time showing whether the increase in the salience of the EU in the focus groups was continuous or characterized by punctuated moments of heightened interest (see figure 2).[2] Consistent with the focus groups, levels of political discussion of the EU, as reported by the Eurobarometer, show an increase in the second half of the crisis starting in Spring 2011. Since Spring 2012 the proportion of respondents who either occasionally or frequently discuss European matters with friends or family consistently remains above fifty-six percent. While the proportion of respondents who discuss of national matters is both higher more steady than European issues over time, the gap grows marginally smaller as discussion of EU matters increases and is still strikingly stable over the course of the crisis. Therefore, citizen's discursive engagement with European matters is possibly more susceptible than national matters to the influence of factors

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[2] This question was not asked in the fall 2013 Eurobarometer.

beyond a general political interest, which remained stable in Ireland during this period. This is especially evident when contrasted against the fluctuations in media reporting (figure 3).

Figure 2: Irish respondents who discuss European and National Matters frequently or occasionally, over time as percentage of total respondents (%)[3]

Source: Spring (S) and Fall (F) Standard Eurobarometer versions 73.4, 74.2, 75.3, 76.3, 77.3, 78.1, 79.1.

Discussion of European matters among citizens is noticeably more stable than the frequency of news dedicated to EU matters in the Irish press and remained above fifty-five per cent of respondents even after media attention to the EU dropped off.[4] Figure 3 illustrates the total number of EU related articles in the *Irish* Times and the *Irish Independent* over time, compared to a benchmark of articles on Irish government.[5] EU-related coverage displayed significantly greater variance in frequency of reporting than coverage of Ireland's national government. This suggests that the media is more sensitive to political events or controversy when reporting on European politics than on the

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[3] When you get together with friends or relatives, would you say you discuss frequently, occasionally or never about...? 1) European political matters; 2) National political matters.
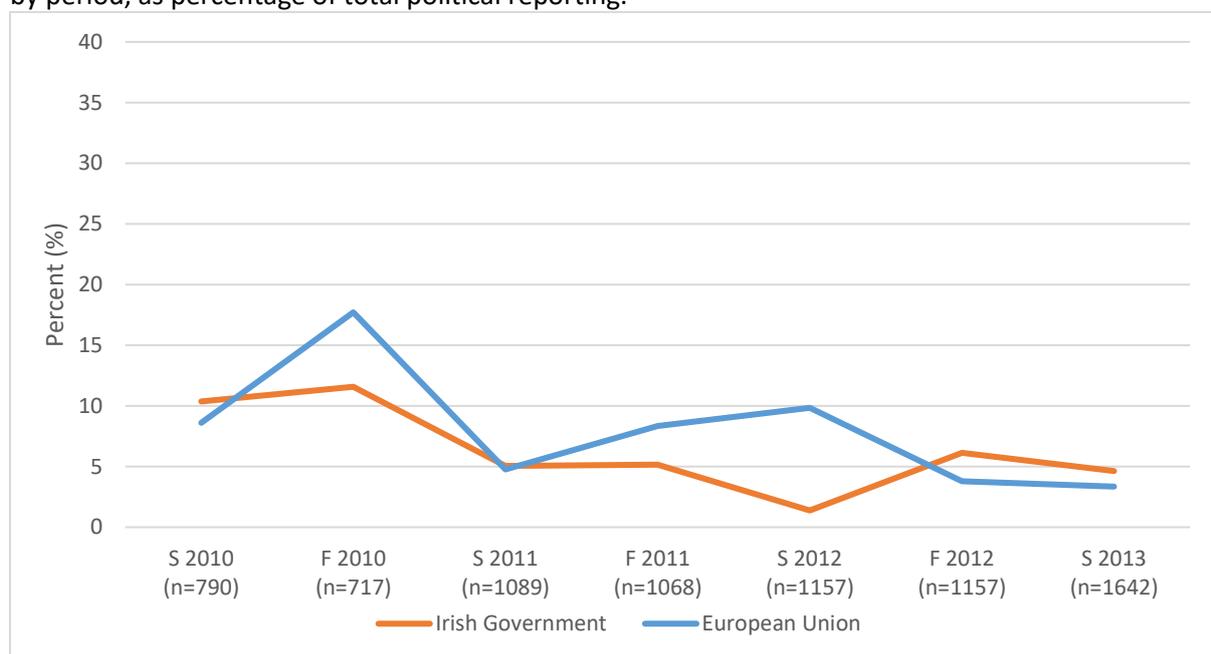
[4] Figure 3 shows newspaper coverage of the EU and Irish government as a percentage all political articles in the *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* for that period to facilitate comparison with the trends in Figure 2. However, because the volume of reporting on politics in general increased with each year of the crisis, this graph underrepresents the visibility of the EU during its peek moments and the over degree of fluctuation in volume. If looking at frequency of articles, 114 articles about the EU in S2012 is just below the 127-article peak in F2010.

[5] 'EU-related articles' refers to all articles with an EU reference in the headline or lede: EU institutions or institutional figures, EU Treaties, EU policies and the EU as such. 'Irish government-related articles' refers to all articles with a reference to Tánaiste, Seanad, Dáil, Taoiseach, or Oireachtas in the headline or lede.

This captures those articles where the EU or Irish government are a central to the focus of a news story leaving out those where they are referenced in passing later in the article. Therefore, this provides a somewhat conservative measure of its salience.

issues related to the Irish government. Considering the overall proximity of the Irish political system and its decisions to Ireland (compared to EU politics) this observation is not surprising. Regardless, EU politics hold a surprisingly consistent level of salience among the Irish, despite the more significant fluctuation in levels of media attention. However, the dominance of domestic issues in the focus groups and discussion of national issues as measured by the Eurobarometer indicate that if EU issues have penetrated individuals' consciousness, they generally take a backseat to domestic politics in people's assessments of important political issues, even at those times when the media prioritizes the coverage of EU politics.

Figure 3: EU-related versus Irish government-related articles in the *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent*, by period, as percentage of total political reporting.

The same time periods that display spikes in frequency of EU-related reporting with the addition of November 2013, are also the periods where the number of EU-related articles exceeds those related to Irish government. These time periods reflect news interest that falls into two overall thematic frames: (1) major economic events and developments related to the Irish bailout and Euro crisis, and (2) contested domestic political developments, with a connection to the European Union, and (3) participatory political processes. The key political developments during these heightened periods of EU-related reporting include the following:

➢ **November 2010:** EU and IMF officials arrive in Ireland the Troika agrees to a three-year rescue package for Ireland.

➢ **November 2011:** The Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) adopts the 'Six Pack' of legislative proposals aimed at strengthening economic governance in the EU and Mario Draghi takes over as president of the ECB.

➤ **May 2012:** The leadup to the Irish referendum on the Fiscal Compact of May 31st and the first news of David Cameron's pledge for a referendum on EU membership.

Although not quite as pronounced as in the media, discussion of European issues among citizens saw a few smaller increases. Displaying some overlap with the media, the heightened incidence of discussion about European matters also occurred during November 2010 and 2012. However, despite being heavily covered by the media, the adoption of the 'Six Pack' did not correspond to heavier citizen discussion of politics. Instead, the highest interest in EU-related politics occurred during fall (November) 2012 which coincidently received the lowest overall volume of EU-related news articles. The most prominent news item at the time involved debates leading up to the release of Ireland's sixth austerity budget on December 5th, just over two weeks following the media analysis and Eurobarometer fieldwork. Media reporting during that time, while smaller in volume, concentrated on the introduction of a new property tax, cuts to child welfare payments and increases to student fees to help meet budgetary targets specified by the EU-IMF rescue programme. November 2011, marked by the adoption of the 'Six Pack' of legislative procedures, garnered the third highest frequency of news articles but had among the lower levels of citizen political discussion on EU matters.

This backs up Hurrelmann and his co-authors' observations that while the EU has reached moderate levels of saliency among citizens, there is still a deficit in awareness of and interest in the day-to-day policy processes of the European Union (Hurrelmann, Gora and Wagner 2015). While this is unsurprising, it is noteworthy that even at times when the discussion of EU matters does see an increase, it still never exceeds or even approaches levels of exclusively national discussion, as we saw in the patterns observed between volume of EU-related and domestic news coverage. This reinforces the notion that the while the media may set the agenda for which issues citizens are exposed to, which issues drive citizen political discourse are influenced by different factors than those that determine media salience. While this observation neither surprising or unexpected, it challenges the heavy reliance on the media as an exclusive source of data on politicization that dominates this field of research.

The development of discussion among focus group participants offers a clearer picture of which issues resonated most with citizens in comparison to concurrent media debates. The general salience of the EU against other political dimensions was best measured by asking participants to discuss politics generally. However, because this generated such limited discussion of the EU, which aspects of the EU resonate the most with citizens is better assessed through conversation that took place after participants were explicitly prompted to discusses the European Union. The following analysis is based on responses the following questions:

➢ How, if at all, has the existence of the European Union affected you personally?

➢ In general, do you think that it is good that many decisions are now made at the European level?

Table 1 presents the five most salient topics of EU-related discourse in the media and focus groups compared. In 2010, the Irish debt crisis dominated focus group conversations, followed by Irish domestic politics. Thus, well over half of the 2010 focus group following a prompt to discuss the EU, was exclusively internalized toward Ireland. The November 2010 period of the media analysis, which saw the highest volume of EU-related articles, was dominated by reporting of the Irish financial crisis which accounted for almost eighty percent of all EU-related reporting. Therefore, the media discourse linked to the EU was also heavily internally focused, but much more so than the focus groups. Participants, while largely pre-occupied with the Irish debt crisis, also engaged with Ireland's domestic politics in relation to the EU. This included discussions of Irish citizens' reluctance to stand up to austerity measures that were imposed in response to the demands of the EU/IMF bailout, and the ability of Irish politicians to stand up to Brussels. Following the domestically oriented topics, the most prominent area of EU policy discussed during both periods was related to EU internal politics. Many of these remarks were connected to migration in the context of EU membership, particularly of labour migrants to Ireland.

Table 1: Five most salient Issues in the media and citizen arenas, compared

	MEDIA			**CITIZENS**	
	%	*Topic*	*%*	*Topic*	
Fall/Winter 2010					
	79.5	Irish debt crisis	41.5	Irish debt crisis	
	5.5	Domestic Politics, Ireland	28.3	Domestic Politics, Ireland	
	4.7	EU External Politics	13.2	EU Internal Politics	
	3.9	Euro Crisis	5.7	Domestic Politics, other EU	
	3.1	EU Internal Politics	3.8	EU Membership-Integration	
Fall/Winter 2013	27.1	Irish debt crisis	22.6	EU Internal Politics	
	24.3	Euro Crisis	19.4	EU Constitutional-Institutional	
	14.3	Domestic Politics, Ireland	12.9	Domestic Politics, Ireland	
	10.0	EU Internal Politics	12.9	EU Membership-Integration	
	10.0	EU External Politics	8.1	Irish Debt Crisis	

In 2013 respondents divided their attention across a more balanced range of EU-related topics than the 2010 groups, and when compared to media reporting during the same period. Additionally, in 2013 the Irish debt crisis no longer dominated the focus groups despite it continuously representing the largest area of EU-related reporting over the four-year period in the two newspapers. Further diverging from the media discourse, participants in the focus groups did not touch on topics connected

to decision-making relating to the euro crisis, which were one of the two most dominant foci of media attention in all time periods but November 2010. When the euro crisis did eventually come up in 2013, albeit minimally[6], participants were more concerned with ruminating over its effects and consequences rather than the decision-making processes and policy proposals which dominated the two newspapers' coverage.

When asked to discuss how the EU has impacted them personally, respondents in both the 2010 and 2013 groups proceeded to discuss and evaluate EU regulations, particularly in relation to Irish fishing rights, agriculture and infrastructure funding. The EU was also linked to improvements in equality in relation to gender, sexual orientation and for foreign nationals, and to some extent albeit more strongly in 2013 than 2010, this led to questions of transparency and legitimacy. Overall, issue salience, at least with respect to the EU's policy effects was not driven exclusively by what is reported about it in the press, but more so by its visibility in everyday life. The following comment from 2010 is typical of the focus group conversations on the personal effects of the European Union:

Nick: *One of my strongest memories from childhood was driving past the roadwork signs and a big EU flag at the bottom. We would have zero in terms of infrastructure if it wasn't for the EU.*

While it was not at the forefront of participants' minds when discussing politics generally, most had some level of interest in the EU, based mostly on personal experiences, and were eager to carry a conversation on related issues when prompted. In addition to the effects of the EU's internal policies, responses to this question in 2013 were also heavily characterized by 'constitutional and institutional issues', especially the Lisbon Treaty referendum. This is despite there being nearly no discussion of the Lisbon Treaty in the media over the entirety of the four-year study period. Overall, EU-related conversation was dominated by those issues to which citizens could personally relate such as visible changes to local infrastructure, and voting in past referenda, rather than EU level decision-making and institutions.

While the Irish crisis, whether discussed through a domestic or European framework, dominated focus group debate in both years, participants in 2013 were more likely to bring up non-crisis issues, such as enlargement, migration, and the double Lisbon referendums. Likewise, news reporting in November 2010, just weeks before the focus groups, exhibited a much stronger dominance of economic articles than did that in November 2013. However, the focus groups exhibited

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[6] Despite there being references to the larger euro crisis in 2013, these comments composed less than 2% of the entire debate.

less change than did the news media, where in November 2010 leading up to the signing of the bailout agreement economic reporting dominated by a significant margin (see table 1).

Contestation

An increase in Euroscepticism or dissensus, as observed by Schimmelfennig (2014) and Hooghe and Marks (2009) while certainly indicating heightened contestation, does not meet the ideal-type of high politicization, unless it is paralleled with a clash of opposing views. While any change in the level or direction of contestation changes the character of politicization, the strongest level of contestation is that which is most polarized. Polarization is highest when opposing sides on an issue advocate their positions strongly and with similar intensity (Grande and Hutter 2016, 26; Hoeglinger 2016, 129). If earlier research on the citizen arena proves correct, the focus groups should not reveal continuously high polarization of the EU across issue areas. This section proceeds to examine whether contestation of the EU through political claims changed over the course of the crisis and whether it took a positive, negative or polarized form. In addition to the previous questions posed to participants, the analysis of contestation in focus group debates includes responses to the following evaluative question:

➢ In general, do you think that it is good that many decisions are now made at the European level?

Overall, the EU was more contentious in the 2013 focus group discussions than in 2010. When asked which recent political issues they found most interesting, in 2010 conversations focused entirely on domestic issues in relation to the crisis and bailout. There were a select few comments on domestic politics in other EU member states that gave some indication of a minimal acknowledgement of a shared political community. However, none of these contained an EU-related claim. In 2013, fifty-two percent of all contributions contained a political claim, with nearly two thirds of those connected to the European Union. In contrast, just a quarter of the total contributions (i.e. both those that did and did not contain claims) could be classified as Europeanized. All these claims took the form of negative evaluations and were related either to the EU's economic situation being unable to support further enlargements (presumably but not explicitly driven by knowledge of Croatia's accession earlier that year), and Greece being permitted to accede to the EU despite its economic troubles. The following 2013 exchange is illustrative of this:

> Helen: *The whole breakdown with Greece as well. The fact that Greece was let into the EU when they knew that there were so many problems and people that were self-employed and like just didn't pay taxes and nobody bothered to question that. They knew what was there before it blew-up.*

<div style="padding-left: 2em;">

Dave: *It was bad financially. Certain countries were allowed to get in, like Portugal included, as well as Greece, as well as ourselves. Um, it's very worrying as part of a community. As a whole community.*

Ken: *Like Spain, a country that size getting itself into financial troubles. It's worrying when we see where we are. Like we are also in the periphery of Europe, and we're a lot smaller.*

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Such exchanges, particularly their growth in 2013, indicate an understanding among participants of their participation in a wider political community and to some extent, its significance for Ireland. While the EU was more heavily contested in 2013 overall, it is important to note that these conversations occurred in only half of the focus groups, with the other half being entirely domestically-framed.

By 2013, the EU was more heavily contested than it was salient in the general conversation about politics. EU-related issues were discussed infrequently when compared to domestic issues, but when participants did mention the EU, it was more likely than not contested. When participants contested EU-related issues in these conversations where the topics were participant-driven, they were exclusively discussed in a eurocritical manner. However, this should not immediately be taken as a sign of growing discontent or Euroscepticism. Domestic claims made during these same conversations also all contained either negative evaluations of domestic actors, policies and institutions, or were self-critical of the Irish people themselves. Like the media, which favours bad news, drama and conflict in its coverage (McIntyre 2016; Shoemaker and Reese 1996), people are also often drawn to bad news and crises in conversation. A growing body of research on 'negativity bias' in human behaviour has observed that "individuals may have a propensity to weight negative information more heavily than positive information" despite claiming otherwise (Trussler and Soroka 2014, 363; see also van der Pligt and Eiser 1980; Vonk 1996).

A better idea of the extent to which the EU is either positively or critically evaluated or polarized can be gained by looking at how conversations develop when respondents are specifically asked to speak about the European Union, and in particular to evaluate it. Once the moderator prompted participants to speak about EU membership and policies, both the volume and the diversity of political claims increased. Despite EU-related contestation playing a minor role in generic political discussions, once prompted to speak about it, citizens were quick to voice opinions, even when not explicitly asked an evaluative question. Nearly sixty percent of all focus group contributions in December 2010 (compared to 77.9 percent of news reporting a month earlier) and nearly eighty-three percent in 2013 (compared to 65.7 of news reporting a month before that) included an EU-related claim. However, while the intensification of EU-related contestation increased in citizen discourse in 2013, in the news media it decreased both in density (i.e. as percent of total EU-related articles) and in total number of claims, and the EU's domestic politics became less polarized and more negatively

contested. Despite experiencing spikes and dips in claims-making from 2010 to 2013, news reporting in May and November 2013 reflects the lowest density of EU-related political claims across all eight periods.

This discrepancy may be explained by the news media's predisposition to report on the contestation of political *decisions* and *processes* as they are happening. In contrast, Irish citizens' contestation of the EU in the focus groups developed retrospectively in relation to observations and experiences of the *consequences* of these processes and decisions. Thus, contestation that is closely linked to *input legitimacy* is of higher saliency to the news media than to citizens who are more concerned with *output legitimacy* of the European Union.[7] In particular, evaluative statements have in both years focused on the long-term effects of EU membership on Ireland, in terms of positive effects such as EU funds resulting in improved infrastructure as well as adverse effects on the national fishing industry, as one example. Only in relation to the recently signed bailout package did participants in the 2010 group engage in contestation of the negotiating process (input), in the context of the Irish government's competence in representing Irish interests at negotiations and overall feelings of being pushed around by "the bigger countries" and the EU. During the 2013 focus groups, statements of input legitimation also appear in relation to the second Lisbon referendum despite the referendum being largely out of the media spotlight for the entire four-year period. This was observed in 2010 as well but to a lesser degree. Voting on the treaty for a second time has left most participants with a sense of democratic disenfranchisement that was also reported by Hurrelmann and his co-authors in 2010 (Hurrelmann et. al. 2015, 57). Previous research has shown that referendums have the highest impact, of all EU-related policy events, on the visibility of the EU in news reporting (Boomgaarden et. al. 2010). This is consistent with observations of the Lisbon referendums having such a lasting salience for citizens in Ireland.

However, for the most part, political claims during the 2013 focus group conversations engaged in the contestation of output legitimacy with respect to the EU's overarching effects mostly on national industry, the economy and social change. While the debates leading up to the signing of the bailout package triggered a spike in claims-making in the news media in 2010, citizens contested the EU's argued implication and involvement in the crisis to a much greater degree in 2013, after several years of witnessing the euro crisis in Europe and experiencing austerity measures introduced to satisfy the terms of Ireland's bailout programme. Over time, people experience the *impact* of the crisis and EU policies and decisions more strongly. Additionally, the lived experience of an EU-level

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[7] That is not to say that news media ignore questions of output legitimacy, or citizens entirely ignore questions of input legitimacy.

policy or decision has greater *proximity* to any one individual, then the decision-making processes at the EU level from which it stems. Consequently, periods of intensification of contestation did not necessarily align between the news media and citizens.

The higher growth in the density of EU-related contestation in the focus groups, in contrast to news media, is also connected to the generally higher salience of bad news and controversy for citizens, over neutral or positive news. While the media analysis exhibited no relationship between periods of higher salience of EU-related issues and a greater intensification of contestation, the 2013 focus groups saw an increase of both contestation and intensification of EU politics. Bad news and controversial topics are more likely to trigger expressions of opinion than neutral or positive news items. Despite the November 2010 period containing a greater volume of EU-related news articles and political claims, in November 2013, the newspaper analysis revealed fewer claims and a higher proportion of negative evaluations. Therefore, assuming bad news is more heavily salient in the citizen arena, salience is correlated with contestation to a degree that was not observed in the news media.

Despite a growing level of contestation of the EU, its scope, as described in the previous section, was limited. In both 2010 and 2013, conversation about EU-related processes and policies was vague, and evaluations of its democratic quality emerged from a sense of political disenfranchisement, rather than explicit justification based on constitutional or institutional terms of reference (Hurrelmann et. al. 2015, 56-7). Similar to issue salience, the distribution and variety of contested topics increased between 2010 and 2013. Generally, while political claims in 2010 largely concentrated on Irish internal politics or the Irish debt crisis, by 2013 these debates were exceeded by participants' interest in evaluating constitutional issues, particularly the Lisbon Treaty's ratification process, and membership and integration issues, especially with respect to migration, and further EU enlargement. In general, these topics were more heavily contested during the focus groups than in EU-related media reporting, especially in 2013.

In short, the focus groups discussions indicate that the Irish citizen arena did experience some growth in both the intensity and scope of EU-related contestation in relation assessments of the EU's policy output and to a lesser degree, input legitimacy. Thus, most heavily contested topics roughly paralleled the most heavily salient subjects, to a much greater degree than in the news media. Finally, focus group participants' interest in political issues was shown to be more heavily driven by the controversiality of an issue than what was observed in newspaper reporting. Thus, while EU related politics experienced only a subtle increase in salience, there was a much more noticeable increase in their political contestation, as opposed to neutral conversation.

Table 2: The distribution and polarization of political claims in the media, and focus groups compared (+1 = completely positive, -1 = completely negative).

		MEDIA			CITIZENS	
	%		*Topic*	*%*		*Topic*
Fall/Winter 2010	56.1	-0.47	Domestic, Ireland	33.3	0.50	EU Internal Politics
	27.6	0.00	EU Internal Politics	33.3	-	Irish Debt Crisis
	6.1	-0.60	EU Inst.-Constitutional	16.7	0.00	Domestic, Ireland
	5.1	1.00	Domestic, other EU	8.3	-1.00	EU Membership-Integr.
	4.1	-1.00	EU Membership-Integr.	4.2	1.00	EU Const-Institutional
Fall/Winter 2013	46.8	-0.38	EU Internal Politics	29.5	0.33	EU Internal Politics
	31.9	-0.56	Domestic, Ireland	20.5	-1.00	EU Const.-Institutional
	8.5	1.00	Domestic, other EU	15.9	-1.00	EU Memb.-Integration
	6.4	1.00	EU Const.-Institutional	6.8	-	Eurozone Crisis
	4.3	-	EU External Politics	6.8	-	Irish Debt Crisis
					-0.40	Domestic, Ireland[8]

Both the news media and the focus groups saw an increase in negative evaluations between 2010 and 2013, although the focus group debates exhibited an even higher proportion of negative statements on politics connected to the EU, than did the media. In fact, when specifically prompted to provide an assessment of the EU, negative evaluations exceeded half of all claims in 2013. Interestingly, the degree of ambivalence towards EU-related topics also increases between 2010 and 2013 in conversations relating to effects of Ireland's EU membership, but noticeably drops in when participants are specifically asked to evaluate if they agree with the EU's level of influence over domestic policy.

In 2013, nearly three quarters of political claims about exclusively national Irish politics were negative. This is up about ten percentage points from 2010, at the expense of ambivalent contributions. The declining ambivalence in relation to assessments of the EU's legitimate level of domestic input (input legitimacy) corresponds with declining national input legitimacy. As the above dialogue illustrates, this is characterized by an increased disenchantment with the Fine Gael-Labour coalition's ability to effectively govern. Political claims relating to EU membership's effects on Ireland (output legitimacy), on the other hand, were more removed from domestic politics and saw a growth in ambivalence between 2010 and 2013, as did overall levels of ambivalence in the focus groups. When participants made ambivalent comments relating to membership, uncertainty in taking a unipolar position was often due to conflicting evaluations that attributed Ireland's past economic and social

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[8] While Irish domestic EU-related politics were not heavily contested in 2013, they were the most polarized issue. The EU-related issues that inspired evaluative claims, were unpolarized and evaluated entirely negatively. The polical claims about the Irish and euro crisis contained demads only, and no evaluative statements.

development to EU membership yet held critical views of the EU in the present. This is a pattern that Hurrelmann and his co-authors also observed in 2010 (Hurrelmann et. al. 2015, 51). The following excerpts from two different 2013 groups provide an illustration of this tension between past and present evaluations of the EU:

Brian: *I'd be very positive about it in the sense that it's driven a lot of social change you know stuff that wouldn't have happened here, or would have happened here eventually, has come accelerated … as well as the economic injection that has it produced, but you know it's kind of like an elephant and it's now starting to impinge on people's lives in way they might not like, you know.*

Caitlyn: *We shouldn't have ever joined it. All the countries that joined it are worse off than they ever were*

Michael: *Well, in fairness when we went into it originally...*

Jane: *We all loved it.*

Michael: *Because they were turning money over... construction and railways and roads and it was great then I suppose, but now...*

Jane: *We're paying for it.*

These excerpts illustrate how conflicting assessments of the EU's past benefits and present-day effects existed not only in individual ambivalent contributions but also as a degree of indecisiveness in dialogue between multiple participants who evaluate the EU membership generally negatively. In contrast when participants were asked to evaluate the degree of influence the EU should have, they were more inclined to answer in relation to the present, and therefore critically. Accounting for the link between considerably high levels of uncertainty in assessing the EU and a tension between past and present evaluations, ambivalent individuals are a potential source of any significant changes in levels of pro-European or Eurosceptic sentiment that may develop in the future, especially if dissatisfaction with Ireland's membership grows.

Levels of polarization in the citizen arena were measured on a scale between +1 representing entirely positive claims-making and -1 indicating entirely critical claims. The higher the disagreement between speakers in the focus groups, or claimants in the media analysis, the closer the value on the scale is to 0. Evidence of intensification in the degree of contestation of a given issue contributes to a politicization of it. However, the most persuasive evidence of contestation in support of a politicization of the EU is a polarization of the debate around it. Like in the previous chapter, scores from 0.00 to +/-0.33 are treated as high polarization, from +/-0.34 to +/-0.66 as moderate, and from +/-0.67 to +/-1.00 as low polarization.

Table 3: Overall polarization of EU-related objects in focus group discussions, by question and year

	2010		2013	
	Position of Evaluative Claim-Making *(-1 to +1)*	*Share of Evaluative Claims* *(%)*	*Position of Evaluative Claim-Making* *(-1 to +1)*	*Share of Evaluative Claims* *(%)*
	Q: Do you think it is good that many decisions are being made at the EU level?			
Domestic, Ireland	0.00	35.0	0.20	33.3
EU Internal Politics	0.50	50.0	0.00	13.3
Membership-Integration	-1.00	12.5	-1.00	13.3
Constit.-Institutional	1.00	12.5	-1.00	40.0
	Q: How, if at all has the EU impacted you personally?			
Domestic Affairs Ireland	-0.40	45.5		
EU Internal Politics	0.33	26.0	-0.71	29.2
Membership-Integration	-1.00	8.7	-0.50	16.7
Constit.-Institutional	-1.00	4.3	-1.00	33.3

As illustrated in table 3, evaluations of EU-related constitutional and institutional issues were not only more frequently contested in 2013 but are also evaluated exclusively negatively with a score of -1 indicating no polarization of these debates.

Interestingly, the media analysis covering the periods just before the focus groups took place did not include any evaluative claims in relation to these issues. However, when evaluations of institutional or constitutional issues relating to the EU did come up during other periods in the media, it was either entirely critically or moderately polarized with a higher frequency of negative evaluations. Thus, when conversing on the topic of the EU's degree of influence over domestic politics, citizens' (political input) evaluations reveal some correlation to the direction of polarization of these issues in the media. In 2010 the topic category 'EU internal politics' dominates debates in response to this question with a moderate degree of polarization that leans towards more positive evaluations. By 2013, domestic politics are evaluated increasingly more negatively, which shifts this category to the position of most heavily polarized object category during that period. The trend in the polarization of the EU's internal politics is visible even more strongly in the focus group conversations stemming from the non-evaluative conversational prompt to discuss the effects of EU membership (political output). Here, as seen in table 4, it shifts from moderate levels of contestation that lean toward a higher frequency of positive evaluative contributions in 2010 to a domination of negative evaluations in 2013.

Therefore, when asked for their opinion, participants' conversations in 2013 became more heavily polarized over the EU's internal politics, due to a growth of eurocritical assessments of the degree to which the EU is involved in Irish politics. However, when evaluations of the EU's internal

politics occurred spontaneously during a discussion of the effects of EU membership, participants were much less polarized and more heavily Eurocritical. The EU's internal politics, thus, became less heavily contested but more intensely polarized in 2013, when respondents were asked to evaluate the EU. Both the intensity of contestation and level of eurocritical responses increased when respondents evaluated its internal politics unprompted. This increased volume of eurocritical conversation coincides with an increase in ambivalent statements. Thus, when asked to make an evaluation relating to the EU's input legitimacy, participants were more heavily polarized, thus more likely to take a unipolar position, than in conversation with unprompted evaluations of the EU's output legitimacy. Here citizens were more likely to be uncertain and those who did take a position were critical of the EU's effects on Ireland.

The focus group conversations indicate a progressive move to more critical discourse about the EU, rather than greater polarization. A growth in negative claims in EU-related conversation, both with and without evaluative prompts, is symptomatic of more widespread changes in attitudes. These attitudinal changes over time did not correspond to trends observed in the media analysis.

Conclusions

This paper demonstrates that politicization within citizen discourse is complex and multifaceted and thus one should be careful in generalizing patterns and observations. The topics on which citizens choose to engage and the ways in which they engage them are as much situation- and context-specific as they are influenced by news media consumption and media effects, the scope of knowledge, political interest and the overall salience of the issues to them. As an agenda-setter, while the news media defines the basket of issues that citizens are exposed to, it has less influence over which of those will resonate most strongly with individuals and how. Conversational prompts and triggers may affect citizens' recall of issues and how and if they contest them. While the salience of various topics and the scope of their representation in citizen discourse did not neatly align with the news media, there is some correlation limited between media and citizen patterns of evaluation.

This analysis has also revealed that while the EU did exhibit increasing polarization over time in the citizen arena, this was only the case when the topic related to the European Union had already been raised. However, one can imagine that major participatory events, albeit ones removed from the national electoral context such as EU referendums, may offer the same type of opportunity structures for citizens to actively engage the EU, as do EU-related prompts and triggers in conversation with friends or colleagues. Emerging from four years under the EU-IMF bailout programme the Irish were more likely to form negative opinions or express ambivalence on questions of EU legitimacy when presented with an opportunity to do so. However, EU politics were still not prioritized among

individuals' political concerns. Overall, within the citizen arena in Ireland, politicization was week to moderately salient, moderately polarized and slowly expanding to include a wider range of issues and progressing in deeper euro-critical direction. Politicization of the EU in the Irish news media, on the other hand, was characterized as a moderately salient, moderately euro-critical polarization that is becoming somewhat broader in scope over time with no consistent trend in either the salience or contestation of EU politics.

As the lingering controversiality of the Lisbon Referendums in focus group discussions, for example, has shown, the salience of certain political issues, events, decisions and controversies sticks with people over time. News media, in contrast, are more closely tied to certain events as they happen with less retrospection. Therefore, I conclude with a hypothesis that an increasing contestation or controversiality of EU politics would not necessarily be slowed down, stopped or reversed by a change in the tone of media reporting, and that politicization od the EU in the media is therefore not necessarily an accurate indicator for politicizations in the citizen arena. The lingering salience of certain issues for citizens can be exacerbated by new grievances and through conversation and debate with others whether in person or through the growing power of social media.

I propose that a congruence between being able to take a position on an issue and perceiving that issue to be significant are central to stimulating an expansion of actors from the citizen arena involved in mobilizing around contestation of that issue, and thus politicization. An intensification of knowledge and information exposure through media alone does not necessarily guarantee salience, even though it may facilitate taking a position. We should be hesitant to equate changing public opinion alone with politicization, even if there is evidence of politicization in other arenas. Awareness of an issue from increased media coverage, does not necessarily correspond to a growing salience for citizens. Likewise, issues that were most polarized for citizens were not necessarily those that received the greatest amount of media attention, but rather ones that they could more easily relate to or have experienced themselves.

However, examples of 'constraining dissensus', such as the rejection of the Nice Treaty and first Lisbon Treaty show that under the right conditions a politicization in other arenas has the potential for significant effects even if issues are not politicized to the same extent for citizens. This opens important avenues for further research that can explore why certain issues that are politicized among political elites (the institutional arena) and in the media (intermediary arena) mobilize concern and debate among citizens, while others fail to do so. This contribution has offered some insights, but these will need to be tested. Representative Claims Analysis (de Wilde 2013) offers one interesting possibility to explore if claims by certain actors over others might affect the importance placed on an

issue by citizens, particularly if and when they are made in their interests. Perhaps social media's decisions to highlight certain parts of traditional media debates heightens their perceived importance for people. Alternatively, Social media trends might be displaying an image of existing citizen saliences. Finally, experimental design built into focus group interviews offers possibilities to test the effects of certain types of media messages against their salience and levels of polarization.

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