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Democratically deficient, yet responsive? How politicization facilitates responsiveness in the European Union

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Abstract. This article examines the responsiveness of EU public policy. It inquires into the conditions under which EU policy decisions are responsive to wavering public demands for policy change and how European citizens in turn respond to policy change. The main argument holds that the *politicization* of EU policy processes facilitates both public and policy responsiveness. My expectations are tested based on a novel database containing information on 15 EU policy issues (2010-2016). The analyses draw from panel data based on Eurobarometer polls and a large-scale content analysis of 5,887 media statements in eight European news outlets. The results demonstrate that under politicized conditions, the adoption of EU policy decisions is preceded by increased public support and followed by decreased public support for EU policy change. The facilitating role of politicization is primarily triggered by the mobilization of civil society groups, while media salience and polarization are less consequential for responsiveness.

Keywords. European Union politics, politicization, responsiveness, representation

I. Introduction

This article asks whether and under what circumstances European Union (EU) public policy is responsive to changes in European public opinion and vice versa. This work thus seeks to clarify thermostatic responsiveness in the context of EU public policy. Addressing thermostatic responsiveness in the EU context is important, as it helps clarify the quality of representation and the severity of the EU's alleged democratic deficit (Follesdal and Hix, 2006; Dahl, 1973). Indeed, the accountability of EU public policy is questionable because of its complex decision-making procedures and its low salience among European citizens (Boomgaarden et al., 2013). Moreover, European election results are largely an artifact of national electoral battles (Lefevere and Van Aelst, 2012; Moravcsik, 2013), and the same 'grand coalition' has been in office since the dawn of the European Economic Community. All of these considerations could lead to the conclusion that the European public cannot adequately perform its thermostatic function (Soroka and Wlezien 2009: 176; Toshkov, 2011).

The perspective of a democratically deficient EU contrasts with recent observations that EU public policy is considerably congruent with the issues that citizens prioritize and the policy positions that they endorse (Alexandrova et al., 2016; Toshkov, 2011; Bølstad, 2015; Hagemann et al., 2017; Franklin and Wlezien, 1997; Schneider, 2018, Wratil, 2017). Despite its obvious deficiencies in accountability, the EU system is thus – under some circumstances – capable of incorporating and transposing public pressures into policy outputs. This study addresses this puzzle by asking whether and under what conditions EU public policy is subject to changes in European public opinion and vice versa. In other words, which conditions facilitate or depress the thermostatic responsiveness of EU public policy?

This article addresses this question by pointing at the role of *politicization*. Its central argument is that the politicization of EU policy processes facilitates thermostatic responsiveness. While politicization is widely considered a key tenant of contemporary EU politics, its consequences are more contested (Zürn, 2016; De Wilde et al., 2016). On the one hand, EU politicization can make citizens more vigilant and acquainted with the decisions being made at the EU level, thus enhancing democratic responsiveness and control (Follesdal and Hix, 2006; Rauh, 2018). On the other hand, politicization creates a momentum for vocal minorities, Euroskeptics and special interests to influence public opinion and policy elites.

The empirical analysis is based on 15 policy issues in diverse policy areas that were repeated subjects in Eurobarometer surveys between January 1, 2010, and December 31, 2016, across 28 EU member states. The analysis draws from a large-scale content analysis of 5,887 media statements articulated by political elites. The empirical results support the expectation that the European public functions as a thermostat in EU policy processes: under more politicized conditions, the adoption of EU policy decisions is *preceded* by increasing public support and *followed* by decreasing support for policy change. The facilitating role of politicization is mostly triggered by the mobilization of civil society groups, while polarization and salience have a negligible impact on responsiveness.

II. Politicization and Thermostatic Responsiveness

The classic model of thermostatic responsiveness holds that public preferences for more policy are a function of the public's preferred level and the actual level of policy (Wlezien, 1995). When the actual policy "temperature" differs from the preferred policy temperature, public demands to adjust policy increase. Once the actual policy temperature is adjusted so that it is equal to the preferred position, public demands to adjust policy decline (Wlezien, 1995; Jennings, 2009: 850). Under

conditions of thermostatic responsiveness, governments seek to minimize discrepancies between actual and desired levels of policy to avoid legitimacy loss, protest and electoral retribution. Thermostatic responsiveness thus implies that an increase in policy output is preceded by a relative *increase* in public demands for more policy (i.e., policy responsiveness) and followed by a relative *decrease* in public demands for more policy (i.e., public responsiveness). Hence, *changes* in public support for policy action are key for responsiveness as they expose policymakers to increasing political pressures.

The prevalence of thermostatic responsiveness has been demonstrated in several national contexts (Jennings, 2009; Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2005; Wlezien, 1995), but some researchers have been doubtful about whether it holds true in EU policymaking (Follesdal and Hix, 2006; Soroka and Wlezien 2009: 176). Although the EU can be considered a *least likely case* for finding thermostatic responsiveness, several studies empirically demonstrated a robust and significant linkage between opinion and policy in the EU context. Franklin and Wlezien (1997) showed that public support for European unification and membership are negatively associated with EU legislative output. Similarly, Toshkov (2011) found that the number of EU legislative acts is conditioned by Euroskeptic sentiments among European citizens (see also Bølstad, 2015). More recent studies demonstrate that the positions and priorities adopted by the European Council and its member states are significantly congruent with public preferences (Hagemann et al., 2017; Wrátil, 2017; Alexandrova et al., 2016). This paper links studies of EU responsiveness with the burgeoning literature on EU politicization.

I argue that the *politicization* of EU policy processes conditions thermostatic responsiveness. Politicization is conceived of as a phenomenon linked to specific policy issues that are characterized by three key features: public salience, actor expansion, and political polarization

(Börzel and Risse, 2009; Hutter and Grande, 2014; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; De Wilde et al., 2016). The combined presence of these three elements is believed to condition thermostatic responsiveness. First, a prerequisite for thermostatic responsiveness is that policies are *salient* for European citizens (Franklin and Wlezien, 1997; Soroka and Wlezien 2009: 43). If citizens demand more or less policy output, these demands can be adequately conveyed to elites only when issues receive ample public attention. When the public is unaware of an issue or has not adopted an opinion on it, it is difficult for elites to accurately estimate what the public wants (Page and Shapiro, 1983; Burstein, 2014). Moreover, for policy changes to be noticed by the public, these changes need to receive some basic level of attention in public debates (Soroka and Wlezien 2009: 43; Neuner et al., 2019).

Second, policy responsiveness can prevail only if citizen preferences for more or less policy are articulated in policy debates. However, the extent to which individual citizens can articulate their preferences themselves is limited. In most instances, citizens need to rely on the mobilization of intermediary representatives to signal the level of public support to policymakers (Rasmussen et al., 2014). Moreover, even under salient conditions it is difficult for citizens to notice and make sense of EU policy changes and adjust their preferences accordingly. Civil society groups can facilitate policy responsiveness by monitoring policy processes and communicating relevant changes in the public sphere (Jordan and Maloney, 1997). A high number of civil society groups that mobilize on a policy issue can increase the level and credibility of the information policymakers possess regarding trends in public opinion and, hence, strengthen policy responsiveness (Bevan and Rasmussen, 2018: 2; Gray et al., 2004; Giger and Klüver, 2016). Moreover, civil society groups can also reinforce *public* responsiveness by communicating changes in public policy so that citizens can adjust their demands for policy action accordingly

(Pierson, 1993). Thus, a second criterion for thermostatic responsiveness is actor expansion or the mobilization of civil society groups who articulate citizens' preferences.

Third, thermostatic responsiveness implies the presence of political *controversy*. "Citizens form their views about which policy options they prefer through the processes of deliberation and party contestation that are essential elements of all democracies" (Follesdal and Hix, 2006: 548). Issues should provide momentum for strategic political actors to gain a competitive advantage over others, where some struggle emerges over competing policy alternatives (Wlezien, 1995; Wlezien, 2004; Jennings, 2009). The more politically polarizing a policy issue becomes, the more likely it will be addressed in the policy arena. Contentious issues that eventually make it to the policy arena are expected to turn out to the advantage of the political camp that is bolstered by prevailing trends in public opinion. In the absence of political struggles, elites face a less pervasive strategic momentum and are therefore less inclined to address an issue in policymaking, even if trends in public opinion are on their side. Once new policy outputs are produced, in turn, political elites will again spark political conflict by publicly confronting their adversaries in an effort to appease or rally their voter base. Political contestation differs from (but may coincide with) *public* polarization, which may hamper or halt the progress of policy processes. Indeed, a divided public helps sustain controversy rather than enabling one political camp to overcome the other.

In sum, when policy change is contested politically, it will more likely structure party support and candidate evaluation and hence meaningfully impact the ebb and flow of public support for policy (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; Soroka and Wlezien 2009: 43). Alternatively, it is also conceivable that polarization coincides with deeply engrained controversy or public polarization, which could constrain political compromise and inhibit responsiveness, even when it is part of a broader politicization process (De Bruycker, 2017: 613). Consequently, we need to

carefully assess the effect of polarization on responsiveness both within the broader politicization phenomenon *and* separately from other components of politicization. Thus, a third potentially stimulating dynamic for thermostatic responsiveness is the degree to which policy issues are politically polarized.

Figure 1. Thermostatic changes in public opinion and politicization

As mentioned above, thermostatic responsiveness implies that EU policy decisions are preceded by a relative *increase* in support (policy responsiveness) and followed by a relative *decrease* in support (public responsiveness) for policy change. This dynamic is portrayed in Figure 1 above. The left side of the figure signifies that when issues are politicized, political elites are incentivized to actively follow and promote increasing public demands for policy change (H1). The right side indicates that through politicization processes, citizens and stakeholders are informed about the policy decisions being made, which may lead to a relative decrease in public demands for more policy (H2). The three components of politicization (salience, conflict and actor expansion) are each seen as invaluable catalyzers for both public and policy responsiveness. Issues may be salient in media debates but may not attract either political contestation or intermediary actors articulating popular demands. Similarly, issues can be very contentious and attract ample

mobilization by civil society, but this will be of little consequence if the issue is not salient in the public sphere. The elements of politicization are not expected to exercise an effect only if the others are present. Rather, the three elements are considered as mutually reinforcing.

H1: EU policy decisions are more likely to be *preceded* by increasing demands for more policy the more politicized an issue becomes.

H2: EU policy decisions are more likely to be *followed* by decreasing demands for more policy the more politicized an issue becomes.

As depicted in Figure 1, the theoretical model presumes a particular causal sequence of events. First, politicization will make *preceding* public demands for policy change more visible and consequential in policy debates, eliciting *subsequent* policy action (policy responsiveness). Second, politicization will make citizens better acquainted with *preceding* policy changes, eliciting citizens to *subsequently* adjust their opinions accordingly. The theoretical model does not account for alternative causal structures that might be at play. Nonetheless, previous studies conceived of the relationship among politicization, public opinion and policymaking as reciprocal and self-reinforcing (Steenbergen et al., 2007: 18; De Bruycker, 2017: 606). We should consequently consider alternative causal routes among these three phenomena. Indeed, civil society organizations, politicians or journalists may *elicit*, rather than only address, changes in public opinion, making them a first mover rather than a facilitator. Moreover, EU policy elites may intentionally politicize policies through subsidizing or activating civil society, generating media attention and promoting political contestation (Sanchez Salgado, 2014). Hence, we should at least empirically consider the possibility that politicization precedes rising public demands for EU policy change.

IV. Research Design

The starting point for the project is a sample of 15 issues that were repeatedly examined in Eurobarometer polls for which the fieldwork was conducted between January 1, 2012, and December 31, 2014. In this study, an issue is operationalized as a specific policy topic for which the EU is at least partially competent and for which citizens in all EU member states were surveyed. An example of an issue in the dataset is whether or not citizens supported the introduction of an EU financial transaction tax. All the sampled issues were repeatedly surveyed by Eurobarometer across all 28 EU member states with a representative sample of the adult population, and a position in favor or opposed to more policy change could be identified for all of these issues. The research design builds on insights from previous policy-centered research projects that took concrete policy issues for which public opinion polls were conducted as their central starting point (Rasmussen et al., 2018; Wratil, 2019).

The research design enables the mapping of *changes* in public opinion preferences for policy measures before and after a policy response was adopted. The selection of issues shows substantive variation in terms of media salience and the policy areas addressed (see the online annex). Issues were polled three to thirteen times each, which resulted in 121 observations out of 195 (15 x 13) potential issue-time period observations. One entry in the dataset (long) represents a certain point in time at which public opinion was polled on a policy issue. For 112 of the observations, changes in public demands could be determined for three subsequent opinion polls, which represents the *n* in the regression analysis. Time lags between public opinion measures on the same issue are six months. Changes were coded in the same direction so that positive values denote increased support and negative values indicate decreased support for a policy measure. In this paper, I rely on aggregate public opinion measures representative of all EU member states

(weighted by population). The values indicating changes in public opinion are presented in Figure A3 in the appendix. These values show that in most cases public support for more policy decreased, signifying a decline in the overall support for EU policy initiatives. Changes in public support are a key independent variable in the models assessing policy responsiveness (Models 1-3) and the dependent variable in the models explaining public responsiveness (Models 4-6). While studies on thermostatic responsiveness mostly rely on the overall or net support for policy change, *changes* in public support better capture the dynamics of *increasing* and *decreasing* support for policy change that precede and follow policy change, respectively, in the thermostatic model. Nonetheless, overall levels of support are also included in the public responsiveness models and in the policy responsiveness models presented in the annex (Tables A3 and A4).

To capture policy change, I consider whether the EU adopted new policies on an issue during a given time period. To assess whether the EU adopted policies on an issue, extant desk research was conducted by searching the Eurolex database, examining the websites of European institutions and consulting policy experts. On the 15 issues, 28 policy responses were identified for 9 cases within the studied time period, including 15 regulations and 13 directives (see the annex for an overview). For 6 issues, no policy change was registered. All policy responses between 2010 and 2016 were considered. Only treaty changes, binding agreements, directives and regulations were treated as policy responses, as other output, such as official communications, conclusions or recommendations, is non-binding. While previous studies on responsiveness mostly captured policy change in a continuous fashion by looking at the number of legislative acts or the level of spending, this research considers policy change in a given period as binary (see also Monroe, 1998). The binary variable takes on the value ‘1’ when a policy act was adopted and ‘0’ when no formal policy response was adopted. This may result in a less precise but robust estimation and

facilitates comparison across the cases (Monroe, 1998:11-12). Moreover, in contrast to most previous studies on responsiveness, this study does not account for how declining demands for policy action result in less stringent policy or regulation. All the observed incidents of policy change involve some stricter or more encompassing form of policy. Hence, it is presumed that steady or declining demands for policy action result in the absence of a policy response under thermostatic conditions. Policy change is taken as the dependent variable in the models explaining policy responsiveness (Models 1-3), while it constitutes a key independent variable in the models looking at public responsiveness (Models 4-6).

To measure politicization, I relied on a large-scale content analysis of 2,085 media articles in eight European media outlets¹. The relevant media coverage related to the sampled set of cases was assembled manually through detailed keyword searches (see the annex for detailed info and reliability tests). All the archived media articles were coded by identifying the relevant statements made by political elites. Statements are quotes or paraphrases that can be attributed to a specific actor (see De Bruycker and Beyers, 2015). The various statements were coded on the basis of their relevance to the issue and the positions adopted in favor or against a policy measure.² This step resulted in 5,887 media statements. In the analyses, statements were grouped for each period of six months. To measure the three elements constituting politicization, I followed the operationalization of Hutter and Grande (2014) as closely as possible but translated it to the level of policy processes. First, salience was measured by taking the number of articles that covered the issue in eight European media outlets. Second, civil society mobilization was measured by gauging

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¹ These outlets are Aftonbladet, Corriere Della Sera, De Telegraaf, EurActiv, Fakt, Financial Times, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and Le Monde (see appendix for selection criteria).

² The coding was conducted by trained researchers and subsequent inter-coder reliability conducted for our variables revealed satisfactory levels with Krippendorff's alpha scores of 0.7 and higher. Krippendorff's alpha reliability coefficients were calculated based on the double coding of 130 media statements.

the number of statements made by civil society groups (NGOs, social movements, citizen action groups) in the selected media outlets. Third, the political contestation of a policy issue was measured by calculating the degree of polarization in positions adopted in statements made by political elites (see the appendix for more information). Using these three measures, I calculated Hutter and Grande's (2014) politicization index:

$$\text{Politicization} = \text{salience} * (\text{actor expansion} + \text{polarization})$$

In line with previous works, policy and public responsiveness are analyzed in separate models. The lag structure of the variables in the models is composed according to the theoretical model depicted in Figure 1. For policy responsiveness, this means that changing demands for a policy response (t-2) precede politicization (t-1) and policy change (t0). For public responsiveness, this implies that a policy response (t0) precedes politicization (t1) and changing demands for a policy response (t2). This lag structure and is illustrated below in Figure 2. As noted above, alternative causal routes may be applicable, which is why alternative lag structures are also considered and discussed in the article and the online appendix.

Figure 2. Lag structure of the variables in the regression models

The first set of models considers the responsiveness of policy to increasing demands for more policy, with policy change (t0) as the dependent variable. To assess whether politicization

facilitates policy responsiveness to *increasing* demands for policy change (H1), the lagged level of politicization (t-1) is interacted with lagged changes in public support for policy change (t-2). The second set of models takes changes in public opinion (t2) as the dependent variable. To test whether policy change and politicization elicit decreasing demands for policy change (H2), lagged policy change (t0) and lagged levels of politicization (t1) were interacted. The chronological order of the variables is arranged to reflect the presumed relationship and sequence of events, as illustrated in Figure 1.

In addition, I control for Euroskeptic sentiments in public opinion, as this has been an important explanatory factor in previous studies on both EU responsiveness and politicization (Toshkov, 2011; Franklin and Wlezien, 1997). I also include a lagged dependent variable in the models to control for variance caused by previous policy responses or changes in public support. Table A19 in the appendix gives an overview of the different measures used in the analysis. The public responsiveness models include lagged levels of support for policy change in European public opinion. This variable provides an assessment of the overall relative support for policy change on a specific issue (in percentages). Furthermore, I discuss the variables and their measurement in detail, along with a range of additional robustness checks in the appendix. To further clarify the lag structure and interactions in the models, I present the linear equations of the models testing hypothesis 1 and 2 respectively below.

Policy responsiveness model (Model 2):

$$\begin{aligned}
 Y_{policy\ response\ t0} &= A + X_{public\ change\ t-2} + X_{politicization\ t-1} + X_{public\ change\ t-2} * X_{politicization\ t-1} \\
 &+ X_{euroscepticism\ t-2} + X_{policy\ response\ t-1} + X_{time} + \varepsilon_i
 \end{aligned}$$

Public responsiveness model (Model 5):

$$Y_{public\ change\ t2} = A + X_{policy\ change\ t0} + X_{politicization\ t1} + X_{policy\ change\ t0} * X_{politicization\ t1} + X_{euroscepticism\ t0} + X_{public\ support\ t0} + X_{time} + \varepsilon_i$$

V. Results

To assess *policy* responsiveness, policy change is taken as the dependent variable in the first set of regression analyses (Models 1-3). The Hausman test yields insignificant results and the rho indicator of the random effects model is also insignificant. I therefore opted for a generalized estimating equation (GEE) regression with a logit link, which can be used for the estimation of longitudinal models with multiple lagged values. GEE is less sensitive to variance structure specification than mixed models are, as the GEE estimates population-averaged effects (Heagerty and Comstock, 2013). A number of assumptions need to be taken into consideration when relying on GEE estimation. First, GEE assumes that responses to the dependent variable are clustered. Since policy responses are nested in issues, this applies to the data at hand. Second, with GEE, the specified covariance matrix should be reasonably close to the population structure. Since interclass correlation is low (ICC<30), I opted for an independent correlation structure (Zeger et al., 1988). When the covariance matrix is incorrectly specified, GEE should still provide consistent estimates, but standard errors will be incorrect. To account for this as well as the nesting of observations in policy issues, Huber-White “sandwich estimators” for robustness are used.³ Third, with GEE, the observations between clusters should be unrelated. Hence, policy responses across issues are presumed to be independent. To control for this effect, a model including random intercepts for policy areas is presented in the appendix (Table A12).

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³ Mixed-effects regression analyses with random intercepts for issues (Tables A5 and A6) and policy areas (Tables A12 and A13), as well as models including fixed effects for issues (Tables A7 and A8), are presented in the online appendix.

Table 1. Policy responsiveness: Generalized estimating equation regression of whether an EU policy response was adopted during Δt_0

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>						
Intercept	-13.42†	(8.05)	-15.23†	(8.98)	-10.67†	(6.43)
Change in public support t-2 (%)	0.02	(0.18)	-0.13	(0.12)	0.33**	(0.10)
Politicization t-1	0.03	(0.02)	0.08*	(0.04)		
- Media salience (log)					-0.07	(0.58)
- Civil society mobilization					0.34	(0.23)
- Political polarization					1.80	(2.21)
Time trend	-0.09	(0.17)	0.04**	(0.01)	-0.17	(0.11)
Policy change t-1	1.47	(0.77)	1.61†	(0.86)	1.95*	(0.91)
Euroscepticism t-2	0.21	(0.13)	0.23	(0.14)	0.15	(0.11)
<i>Interaction effects</i>						
H1: Politicization x public change t-2			0.04**	(0.01)		
- Media salience t-1 x public change t-2					-0.21	(0.17)
- Civil society mobilization t-1 x public change t-2					0.27**	(0.11)
- Polarization t-1 x public change t-2					-0.37	(0.24)
<i>Model fit</i>						
n	92		92		92	
Prob > chi2	0.23		0.00		0.00	
QIC	63.23		59.13		60.67	

Robust standard errors in parentheses and significance levels indicated by * ≤ 0.05 ** ≤ 0.01

Table 1 presents the GEE regression analysis with “whether or not a new policy was adopted” (t_0) as the dependent variable. The interactions between politicization ($t-1$) and lagged changes in public support ($t-2$) allow me to assess H1. In Table 1, Model 1 presents only the main effects and Model 2 includes the interaction effects between politicization and public opinion change. Model 3 presents the same interaction, but with the different politicization indices set out separately.

To assess *public* responsiveness, change in public support (t_2) is taken as the dependent variable in the second set of regression analyses (Models 4-6). The Hausman test yields insignificant results ($P=.17$), which indicates that a random effects regression is more appropriate than a fixed effects regression. Changes in public opinion are modeled with a random effects

generalized least squares (GLS) regression with robust standard errors. The interactions between lagged politicization (t1) and lagged policy change (t0) allows me to assess H2. In Table 2, Model 4 presents the main effects and Model 5 includes the interaction effects between politicization and policy change. Model 6 presents the interactions between policy change and the constituting elements of politicization separately. Multicollinearity tests for the models are satisfactory (variance inflation factor <5). While the discussed models calculate the theorized instantaneous or short-run effects, fully modified ordinary least squares (FMOLS) models calculating long-run coefficients are presented in the annex as an additional robustness check (Tables A15 and A16).

Table 2. Public responsiveness: Random effects generalized least squares regression of changes in public support for policy during Δt_2

	Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	β	S.E.	β	S.E.	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>						
Intercept	2.18 (2.45)		2.21 (2.47)		1.63 (2.43)	
Public support t0 (%)	0.00 (0.01)		0.00 (0.01)		0.00 (0.01)	
Change in public support t0 (%)	-0.13 (0.09)		-0.13 (0.09)		-0.13 (0.09)	
Politicization t1	0.01 (0.01)		0.01 (0.01)			
- Media salience (log)					0.07 (0.31)	
- Civil society mobilization					0.30 (3.43)	
- Political polarization					-0.70 (0.98)	
Time trend	-0.04 (0.04)		-0.04 (0.04)		-0.04 (0.03)	
Policy change t0	0.19 (0.67)		0.40 (0.70)		-0.50 (0.71)	
Euroskepticism t0	-0.04 (0.05)		-0.05 (0.05)		-0.03 (0.05)	
<i>Interaction effects</i>						
H2: Politicization t1 x policy change t0			-0.05*(0.02)			
- Media salience t1 x policy change t0					0.61 (0.55)	
- Civil society mobilization t1 x policy change t0					-0.29**(0.11)	
- Polarization t1 x policy change t0					0.06 (0.06)	
<i>Model fit</i>						
n	112		112		112	
Prob > chi2	0.00		0.00		0.00	
QIC	867.8		866.3		861.2	

Robust standard errors in parentheses and significance levels indicated by * ≤ 0.05 ** ≤ 0.01

To assess my hypotheses, I tend to Models 2 and 5. First, the interaction effect of politicization and changes in public support (Model 2) shows that, as hypothesized, politicization facilitates policy responsiveness. Policy change is more likely when preceded by politicization *and*

increasing public demand for policy change ($\beta=0.04$; $P<0.01$). This is illustrated by the average marginal effects in Figure 3a. The figure shows that for a one percentage-point increase in support of a policy initiative, the probability of policy change the following year is significantly higher for issues that attract higher levels of politicization. The figure shows that the strengthening effect of politicization increases for lower levels of politicization (<50), while it stagnates for higher levels of politicization. The effect of politicization dampens under extremely high levels of politicization (>90), which could be due to the low number of observations for such cases ($n=3$). Moreover, changes in public support are unrelated to policy change for cases that are not (or are only to a very limited extent) politicized.

Figure 3. Marginal effects of (a) changes in public support and of (b) of policy change on changes in public support for different levels of politicization with 95% CIs (based on Model 2)

Note: (a) Predicted marginal chances of policy change; (b) Predicted marginal changes in public opinion

Second, the interaction in Model 5 shows that policy change is likely to be followed by a diminishing demand for policy change under politicized conditions ($\beta=-0.05$; $P<0.01$). These effects are illustrated by the marginal effects in Figure 3b. For instance, after a policy initiative is adopted the predicted decline in public support is -0.09% (S.E.=0.64) when politicization is absent

(0), while the predicted decline is -2.96% (S.E.=1.06) under highly politicized conditions (70). These results are confirmed in the robustness checks presented in the online appendix.

One case in the dataset illustrating this logic was the highly politicized EU greenhouse gas emissions issue. While support for more stringent emission targets was steadily on the rise since 2010, support for more ambitious targets declined one year after the regulation on the monitoring and reporting of greenhouse gas emissions was adopted in June 2011. Overall, the thermostatic pattern of responsiveness applies to 5 out of the 15 cases. Cases with thermostatic responsiveness are, on average, more politicized ($\mu=7.5$) than are cases where the thermostatic pattern is absent ($\mu=1.8$).

The regression results support the outlined thermostatic mechanism and the facilitating role of politicization (H1 and H2). Under politicized conditions, increasing demands for more policy increase the probability of an EU policy response. Moreover, politicization increases the likelihood that EU policy change will be followed by decreasing support for policy change. Models 3 and 6 look at the interaction effects of the three constituent components of politicization. Media salience and polarization neither significantly strengthen nor significantly weaken policy and public responsiveness. Studies in the U.S. did find a facilitating effect of salience on responsiveness (Neuner et al., 2019; Franklin and Wlezien, 1997; Soroka and Wlezien 2009: 43; Burstein, 2014). Hence, my findings might be due to the specificity of the EU as a least likely case for salience to impact the public-policy linkage.

In contrast to polarization and salience, civil society mobilization produces similar results as the overall politicization index. When civil society organizations mobilize in the media, policy is more responsive to changes in public support (Model 3) and citizens are more likely to adjust their opinion in response to policy change (Model 6). The marginal effects of civil society

mobilization for policy and public responsiveness are presented in Figure A4 in the appendix. The findings are highly similar to the earlier results for politicization. These results resonate with recent studies at the national level, which reveal that civil society mobilization strengthens the public-policy linkage (Bevan and Rasmussen, 2018; Giger and Klüver, 2015).

In sum, the results suggest that the facilitating role of politicization in thermostatic responsiveness is mostly due to civil society mobilization and is not, as expected, a result of the three mutually reinforcing components of politicization combined. This finding differs from studies at the national level, which point to the key role of salience in strengthening responsiveness (Page and Shapiro, 1983; Burstein, 2014; Soroka and Wlezien 2009; Neuner et al., 2019). Media salience alone might not be sufficient in the ‘worst-case scenario’ of EU public policy. Instead, civil society actors who are capable of addressing citizens’ interests to policymakers and informing the public about important policy changes are key to ensuring thermostatic responsiveness in EU public policy (De Bruycker, 2017; Rasmussen et al., 2014; Rauh, 2018).

Regarding the control variables, Euroskepticism has no significant effect on the likelihood of either a change in policy the following year or changes in public support for EU policy. The overall level of support for policy change is unrelated to changes in public support and to subsequent policy change (Tables A3 and A4). Finally, the time trend variable shows no significant increase in the probability of policy change occurring nor is it significantly related to changes in public support.

The results of the regression analyses are confirmed in the many robustness checks presented in the annex, including rare events logistic regression models, FMOLS models considering long-run effects and models including fixed or random effects for issues and policy areas. The results may vary, though, when considering lag structures alternative to those presented

in Figure 2. First, when politicization coincides with changes in public support (both measured at t-1), the results are consistent with the *policy* responsiveness models presented in the paper (see Table A9). Second, when politicization coincides with the measurement of a policy response (both measured at t-1), the results are different from those presented in the *public* responsiveness models (see Table A10). Namely, the interaction between policy change and politicization is positive in this model. It is indeed not surprising that European citizens need some time to receive and process information about EU policy changes. Support for change might have been on the rise for several years before a policy response was adopted, and this effect echoes through after a policy response is ratified. The expected decline in public support after a policy response under politicized conditions only materializes one year after a policy response was enacted.

Third, in Table A11, the interaction between politicization (t-2) and changes in public support (t-1) renders no significant effect on policy change (t0). Hence, politicization will not significantly increase the likelihood of a policy response when it *precedes* rising public demands for policy action. In sum, the hypotheses are confirmed for the causal sequence of events specified in the theoretical model (Figures 1 and 2) but not always for alternative lag specifications.

As shown in Figure A3, most changes in public support are subtle and hence may fall outside the confidence intervals of the public opinion polls. To ensure that my findings are not due to random variation of changes in public opinion, I ran models with only those observations where changes in public support were smaller than the margin of error of the percentages reported in the Eurobarometer polls (see Tables A17 and A18). This step resulted in regression analyses with fewer observations but should constitute more valid observations of changes in public support. The coefficients and P values of the main interaction terms are consistent with the previous models.

VI. Conclusion: A politicization paradox

This paper set out to examine the relationship between thermostatic responsiveness and politicization in the EU. To this end, it explored a novel database of 15 EU policy issues for which European-wide public opinion data across time are available and for which an extensive content analysis of 5,887 news media statements was conducted. Building on previous studies, the paper demonstrated the empirical prevalence of thermostatic responsiveness in the EU (Alexandrova et al., 2016; Toshkov, 2011; Bølstad, 2015; Hagemann et al., 2017; Franklin and Wlezien, 1997). While most studies of EU responsiveness have focused on the relationship between Euroskepticism and legislative output, this study analyzed public opinion and legislative output for specific policy issues. The article's main contribution lies in its empirical demonstration of the facilitating function of politicization for thermostatic responsiveness. EU policy decisions appear to be a function of the degree to which issues are politicized and the degree to which European citizens express increasing demands for new policy initiatives. The European public appears to notice and respond to policy outputs, with declining support for new policy initiatives under politicized conditions. The analyses showed that the facilitating role of politicization is mostly due to the mobilization of civil society groups in the media. Indeed, civil society groups are key in addressing public concerns to policymakers and informing citizens about EU policy changes (Rauh, 2018; Rasmussen et al., 2014; Sanchez Salgado, 2014).

My findings contribute to post-functionalist thought and the burgeoning literature on EU politicization (Rauh, 2016; Hutter and Grande, 2014; De Wilde et al., 2016; Zürn, 2016; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). This study confirmed the earlier observation that politicization makes EU public policies more subject to public scrutiny and strengthens the link between citizens and EU public

policy (Rauh, 2016; 2018; De Bruycker, 2017; De Wilde et al., 2016). In the absence of politicization, EU policy is unresponsive to changes in public support and vice versa.

These findings come with important normative implications for democratic governance in the European Union. First, most scholarly commentators, citizens and opinion leaders seem to agree that the EU suffers from a democratic deficit (Moravcsik, 2004:248; Follesdal and Hix, 2010; Zürn, 2000). The presented findings, however, suggest that EU policies are not isolated from public debate and democratic contestation. The EU's policy outcomes are responsive to European citizens' wavering preferences through pan-European politicization processes rather than matching by 'happy coincidence' (Follesdal and Hix, 2010: 556). At the same time, the overall levels of public support seem to be unrelated to EU policy action. While EU policies are subject to trends in European public opinion, the EU is still far removed from a majoritarian system where citizens' interests prevail. Second, half a century ago, Philip Schmitter (1969) already predicted the emergence and key importance of EU politicization. More recently, post-functionalists have embraced politicization as their common denominator and as the critical juncture that can change the course of European integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; De Wilde et al.; 2016). This study contributes to these debates by empirically demonstrating the necessity of politicization for democratically responsive policies. In light of contemporary political developments, my findings point to what could be termed a 'politicization paradox'. On the one hand, further politicization may derail deeper integration and induce policy deadlock, as exemplified by the politicization surrounding Brexit or the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). On the other hand, politicization is a necessary condition for democratic deliberation and control and for the EU to develop into a responsive and democratically mature political system.

Since EU public policy can in many respects be considered a “least likely case” for studying thermostatic responsiveness, we should be careful about generalizing the implications of the findings. While politicization likely has comparable or even stronger effects in national political systems, the null findings of this study cannot be generalized to national settings or other stages in policymaking without further empirical enquiry. My findings regarding civil society mobilization and politicization are expected to transfer well to the national context (see also Bevan and Rasmussen, 2018; Giger and Klüver, 2015). The findings regarding salience and polarization, in contrast, may not be applicable to systems where citizens are more politically vigilant and the news media’s sway over public opinion and elites is more resilient (see for instance Neuner et al., 2019). Moreover, while this study considered how increasing demands for policy action resulted in actual policy responses, future studies may also want to consider whether a policy response involves deregulatory measures. This study only observed policy responses that involve some stricter or more encompassing form of regulation. Finally, future research on which segments of the public benefit the most from politicization could further clarify the normative implications of my findings by discerning, for instance, between income class and political ideology. Notwithstanding these limitations and pathways for future research, this study indicates the decisive role of politicization in strengthening the link between European citizens and EU public policy.

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Short bio

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Methodological appendix

A Deficient Thermostat? Politicization and Public Responsiveness in the European Union

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1. Sampling strategy of the research project

The starting point for the project is a sample of 41 issues drawn from Eurobarometer polls for which the fieldwork concluded between January 1, 2012, and December 31, 2014. Eurobarometer, a policy tool of the European Commission, comprises a collection of surveys on various topics across the EU member states. The tool keeps track of important dynamics and preferences within the European demos. The standard Eurobarometer survey is repeated biannually, while the Special and Flash Eurobarometer studies are conducted ad hoc and revolve around specific topics or trends.

In this study, an issue is operationalized as a *specific* policy topic for which the EU is at least partially competent and for which citizens in all EU member states were surveyed. First, only questions that were surveyed in *all* EU member states and that dealt with citizens (not companies) were selected. Second, only issues that could be connected to a specific policy were retained. Third, EU policymakers and policies cannot be responsive to issues for which they lack competence. Including these issues would thus bias the results by imposing a selection bias in the main dependent variables of this study. Issues for which the EU has no policy competence were therefore excluded from the sample. Finally, I considered only

questions that pertained to citizens' opinion in terms of agreement or disagreement with a specific policy (see Rasmussen et al., 2017). These issues involve questions about whether or not citizens agree with a specific policy measure or objective, such as the financial transaction tax, the banking union or a free trade agreement between the US and the EU. With this operationalization, less than 1% of the questions raised in Eurobarometer surveys qualified as issues.

The operationalization of issues and the criteria resulting from this operationalization can be summarized by the acronym DISCO:

- **Data availability**: Public opinion data are available on the topic.
- **Inclusive**: Citizens in all EU member states were surveyed.
- **Specific**: The survey question deals with specific policy.
- **Competence**: The topic of the question falls (partially) within the competences of the EU.
- **Opinion**: The question pertains to agreement or disagreement vis-à-vis EU policy.

This case selection resulted in 41 different issues. From these cases, 15 issues were surveyed more than twice, allowing me to study *changes* in public opinion. In the next section, the list of these fifteen issues with their corresponding policy outputs can be consulted. The sample accounts for substantive variation across policy issues on some crucial criteria.

The first key source of variation across policy issues concerns their public salience. We know from former research that public salience matters for public opinion, for representation and for policy responsiveness (Page and Shapiro, 1983; Wlezien, 2004; Beyers et al., 2017). One important concern for studies that rely exclusively on cases for which public opinion surveys were conducted is that they involve only issues that are already salient to the public and media, which therefore biases the sample of cases (Burstein, 2014). To assess this concern, I tracked the media salience of the sampled set of cases in eight European media outlets: Euractiv, Le Monde, Financial Times, Corriere Della Sera, Aftonbladet, De Telegraaf, Fakt and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (see section 5 for more information on the news media

selection). The media salience of issues across the different media outlets is highly correlated, with an average correlation of 0.6. This result indicates that the aggregate measure of media salience (the sum of all articles across media outlets) is a reliable measure of media salience.

The left side of Figure 1 portrays the distribution of media articles that discussed the sampled set of issues across the selected media outlets. The distribution clearly shows that these policy cases varied with regard to their media salience. Some issues, such as the financial transaction tax, received much media attention, while other issues received no media attention at all. The right side of Figure A1 shows the distribution of media attention in the same media outlets devoted to the cases for which European public opinion was polled repeatedly and for which *changes* in public opinion can be calculated. The distribution of the partial sample is comparable to that of the full sample. Both distributions portrayed in Figure 1 are highly skewed and exhibit some degree of variation. These distributions of media attention also resemble the distributions of media attention found in other projects, most notably the INTEREURO project, which relied on a random sample of policy proposals (De Bruycker and Beyers, 2015).

Figure A1. Media salience of the sampled cases

Note: a) full sample; b) partial sample

The sample of issues also strongly varies in terms of the policy areas addressed. Figure A2 illustrates the distribution of the cases across policy areas, operationalized by the directorate generals (DGs) responsible for the policy issue. The sampled issues are thus situated in different policy areas, and the results derived from the analysis are not specific to one policy area. For each of the sampled cases, the principal investigator assessed whether or not some policy change was adopted at the EU level based on desk research and surveys with interest group leaders. A policy response can be a regulation or directive adopted by the European Parliament and the Council. It could also mean that treaty changes were made or that the European Commission made binding agreements. Based on this coding, nine of the fifteen cases of the partial sample showed that some policy change was adopted within the analyzed time frame (2010-2016). This result thus reveals some variation in terms of whether or not issues resulted in policy responses at the EU level. The following section gives an overview of these cases and the policy responses.

Figure A2. Distribution of sampled issues across policy areas

Note: a) full sample; b) partial sample

2. Overview of the sampled cases

Issue ID	Issue Tag	Question	Policy field	Civil society mobilization	Media coverage	Polarization	Policy responses
3	Wages financial sector	Please tell me whether you are in favor of or opposed to the following measures to be taken by the EU: The regulation of wages in the financial sector (i.e. traders' bonuses)	MARKT	0	86	0.46	2
7	Common policy on migration	Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it: A common European policy on migration	HOME	0	64	0.14	2
9	Credit rating agencies	Please tell me whether you are in favor of or opposed to the following measures to be taken by the EU: Tighter rules for credit rating agencies	MARKT	0	17	0.08	1
11	Eurobonds	Please tell me whether you are in favor of or opposed to the following measures to be taken by the EU: The introduction of Eurobonds (European bonds)	MARKT	0	92	0.34	0
13	Taxing banks	Please tell me whether you are in favor of or opposed to the following measures to be taken by the EU: The introduction of a tax on profits made by banks.	TAXUD	1	5	0.04	0
14	Free trade agreement	Please tell me whether you are for or against a free trade and investment agreement between the EU and the USA.	TRADE	125	451	0.51	0
15	Common foreign policy	Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it: A common foreign policy of the 28 Member States of the EU	EEAS	0	26	0.12	0
16	Common defense and security policy	Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it: A common defense and security policy among EU Member States	EEAS	0	73	0.18	0
17	Tax havens	Please tell me whether you are in favor of or opposed to the following measures to be taken by the EU: Tougher rules on tax avoidance and tax havens	TAXUD	28	74	0.14	1
18	Tax on financial transactions	Please tell me whether you are in favor of or opposed to the following measures to be taken by the EU: The introduction of a tax on financial transactions.	TAXUD	25	258	0.59	0

27	Banking union	Could you tell me whether you think the following policy measure would be effective or not? Central supervision of the banking system at EU level (i.e. Banking Union)	MARKT	0	247	0.23	3
38	Government budgets	Could you tell me whether you think the following policy measure would be effective or not? EU approval in advance of EU Member States' governments' budgets	ECFIN	0	15	0.25	2
39	Greenhouse gas	Would you say that it is too ambitious, about right or too modest to reduce EU greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20% by 2020 compared to 1990?	CLIMA	39	68	0.17	3
40	Energy efficiency	Would you say that it is too ambitious, about right or too modest to increase energy efficiency in the EU by 20% by 2020?	ENER	43	65	0.10	2
41	Poverty reduction	Would you say that it is too ambitious, about right or too modest to reduce the number of Europeans living below the poverty line by one-quarter by 2020?	DEVCO	10	12	0.08	1

3. Overview of the examined cases and their policy responses (2010-2016)

Issue ID	Issue name	Policy response
3	Banker bonuses	Directive 2013/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on access to the activity of credit institutions and the prudential supervision of credit institutions and investment firms, amending Directive 2002/87/EC and repealing Directives 2006/48/EC and 2006/49/EC (tid 7) Regulation (EU) No 575/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on prudential requirements for credit institutions and investment firms and amending Regulation (EU) No 648/2012 (tid 7) Directive 2014/91/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 July 2014 amending Directive 2009/65/EC on the coordination of laws, regulations and administrative provisions relating to undertakings for collective investment in transferable securities (UCITS) as regards depositary functions, remuneration policies and sanctions (tid 9)
7	Common policy on migration	Directive 2013/32/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on common procedures for granting and withdrawing international protection (OJ L 180, 29.6.2013, pp. 60–95) (tid 7) Directive 2014/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 February 2014 on the conditions of entry and stay of third-country nationals for the purpose of employment as seasonal workers (tid 8) Directive 2014/66/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals in the framework of an intra-corporate transfer (tid 8)
9	Credit rating agencies	Regulation (EU) No 462/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1060/2009 on credit rating agencies (tid 6)
11	Eurobonds	/
13	Taxing banks	/
14	Free trade agreement	/
15	Common foreign policy	/
16	Common defense and security policy	/

17	Tax havens	Directive (EU) 2015/121 of 27 January 2015 amending Directive 2011/96/EU on the common system of taxation applicable in the case of parent companies and subsidiaries of different Member States Directive (EU) 2015/849 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2015 on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purposes of money laundering or terrorist financing, amending Regulation (EU) No 648/2012 of the European Parliament and of the Council, and repealing Directive 2005/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Commission Directive 2006/70/EC Directive (EU) 2016/1164 of 12 July 2016 laying down rules against tax avoidance practices that directly affect the functioning of the internal market (tid 13)
18	Tax on financial transactions	/
27	Banking union	Regulation (EU) No 575/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on prudential requirements for credit institutions and investment firms and amending Regulation (EU) No 648/2012 (tid 7) Directive 2013/36/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on access to the activity of credit institutions and the prudential supervision of credit institutions and investment firms, amending Directive 2002/87/EC and repealing Directives 2006/48/EC and 2006/49/EC (tid 7) Regulation (EU) No 1024/2013 of 15 October 2013 conferring specific tasks on the European Central Bank concerning policies relating to the prudential supervision of credit institutions (tid 7) Regulation (EU) No 1022/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 October 2013 amending Regulation (EU) No 1093/2010 establishing a European Supervisory Authority (European Banking Authority) as regards the conferral of specific tasks on the European Central Bank pursuant to Council Regulation (EU) No 1024/2013 (tid 7) Directive 2014/49/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on deposit guarantee schemes (tid 8)

		Directive 2014/59/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 May 2014 establishing a framework for the recovery and resolution of credit institutions and investment firms and amending Council Directive 82/891/EEC, and Directives 2001/24/EC, 2002/47/EC, 2004/25/EC, 2005/56/EC, 2007/36/EC, 2011/35/EU, 2012/30/EU and 2013/36/EU, and Regulations (EU) No 1093/2010 and (EU) No 648/2012, of the European Parliament and of the Council (tid 8) Regulation (EU) No 806/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 July 2014 establishing uniform rules and a uniform procedure for the resolution of credit institutions and certain investment firms in the framework of a Single Resolution Mechanism and a Single Resolution Fund and amending Regulation (EU) No 1093/2010 (tid 9)
38	Government budgets	Regulation (EU) No 472/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2013 on the strengthening of economic and budgetary surveillance of Member States in the euro area experiencing or threatened with serious difficulties with respect to their financial stability (tid 6) Regulation (EU) No 473/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2013 on common provisions for monitoring and assessing draft budgetary plans and ensuring the correction of excessive deficit of the Member States in the euro area (tid 6)
39	Greenhouse gas	Regulation (EU) No 601/2012 of 21 June 2012 on the monitoring and reporting of greenhouse gas emissions pursuant to Directive 2003/87/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council (tid 5) Regulation (EU) No 525/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 May 2013 on a mechanism for monitoring and reporting greenhouse gas emissions and for reporting other information at national and Union level relevant to climate change and repealing Decision No 280/2004/EC (tid 6) Regulation (EU) No 517/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 16 April 2014 on fluorinated greenhouse gases and repealing Regulation (EC) No 842/2006 (tid 8)
40	Energy efficiency	Directive 2010/31/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 May 2010 on the energy performance of buildings

		Directive 2012/27/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 on energy efficiency, amending Directives 2009/125/EC and 2010/30/EU and repealing Directives 2004/8/EC and 2006/32/EC (tid 5) Regulation (EU) No 811/2013 of 18 February 2013 supplementing Directive 2010/30/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council with regard to the energy labelling of space heaters, combination heaters, packages of space heater, temperature control and solar device and packages of combination heater, temperature control and solar device (tid 6)
41	Poverty reduction	Regulation (EU) No 1304/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 on the European Social Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1081/2006 Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 Regulation (EU) No 223/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 on the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived

5. Selection of media sources

For the selection of news media outlets, a ‘most different case selection design’ was applied to maximize the possible sources of relevant extraneous variance. I selected media outlets from different countries geographically located in different parts of Europe, with different journalistic styles that vary in format and have diverse political orientations. Because of the central research objectives of the project to study the links between elites and the public, I prioritized news outlets with a wide circulation to ensure that their coverage had the potential to reach a wide range of European citizens. To ensure that I would have a substantive corpus of statements from political elites and stakeholders on the sampled set of issues, I selected four news outlets that were studied in previous research projects on EU representation (most notably the DEU and INTEREURO projects) and that extensively covered EU-related topics.

Table A1. Overview of eighth selected media outlets

News outlet	Country	Format	Journalistic Style	Political orientation	Studied in former large projects on EU representation	Daily paid circulation in 2016	Number of articles identified
1. Aftonbladet	Sweden	Tabloid	Sensational	Left wing, populist	No	154,900 (2014)	99
2. Corriere Della Sera	Italy	Broadsheet	Quality press	Centrist, liberal	No	310,437	262
3. De Telegraaf	Netherlands	Tabloid	Sensational	Right wing, populist	No	382,000	185
4. EurActiv	Europe-wide	Online	Quality press	Centrist, Europhile	Yes	794,992 (free)	628
5. Fakt	Poland	Tabloid	Sensational	Centrist, populist	No	270,331	40
6. Financial Times	United Kingdom	Broadsheet	Quality press	Liberal-conservative	Yes	193,211	413
7. Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	Germany	Nordisch	Quality press	Center-right, liberal-conservative	Yes	256,188	279
8. Le Monde	France	Berliner	Quality press	Center-left	Yes	267,897	207

6. Content analysis of media statements and quality controls

The relevant media coverage related to the sampled set of cases was assembled manually by the principal investigator and two student-assistants involved in the project. To increase the quality of the media searches, researchers focused on media outlets from their own country. The search in media archives was based on keywords that were carefully selected based on the name of the issue, the corresponding Eurobarometer question and extensive desk research. For newspapers in a language non-native to the research team, external experts were consulted. All the keywords used are documented and will be published on the project's website. Importantly, not all articles that resulted from keyword searches were retained. Each article was screened by the researcher in question for its relevance. Only articles that were directly related to the sampled cases were used. Articles that only vaguely or indirectly related to the issue were omitted. Keyword searches were finalized only when an information saturation point was met, namely, when the addition of new keyword searches did not result in additional articles. The results were centralized and stored by the principal investigator, who conducted an additional consistency check.

Based on extensive keyword searches, 2,085 articles were identified. Additional recall tests were performed when the media salience for certain issues strongly varied across media sources. For these issues, recall tests varied from 77% to 89% overlap (with an average overlap of 83%). For the other issues, recall tests were performed randomly and gave satisfactory results (more than 90% overlap). Furthermore, an extensive precision test was conducted by hand coding all the collected articles and their constituting statements. Namely, each article was coded for its relevance to the sampled case. This approach resulted in a precision of 97% for articles and 93% for statements. Non-relevant articles were excluded from further analyses. From all the assembled statements, 7% were not directly connected to the sampled issues and were therefore also excluded from further analyses.

Table A2. Distribution of statements for different actor types

Actor type	Freq.	Percent
Council and member states	1,914	34%
European Commission	852	12%
European Members of Parliament	608	11%
National Member of Parliament	368	6%
Interest organizations	1,715	30%
Regulatory agencies and central banks	259	5%
International organizations	70	1%
Other (individual citizens, journalists, etc.)	101	2%

Once articles were mapped, the statements made by political actors in these articles were archived and coded. A statement is a quote or paraphrase in the news that can be connected to a specific actor. Overall, 5,887 statements were identified from various political actors. An overview of the different actor types and their prominence is provided in Table A2. The statements of these actors were coded for the positions adopted for or against policy change and the various arguments articulated. The coding was conducted by two student-assistants. Intercoder reliability checks (based on 130 double coded statements) proved satisfactory with Krippendorff's alpha ranging from 0.7 to 0.9. Both the number of statements and the number of articles identified for an issue during a time period of six months are used as indicators of politicization.

7. Measurement of polarization

To measure political polarization, which is a third indicator of politicization, I relied on a measure that captures the dispersion of political positions vis-à-vis policy change for a specific issue. Each media statement made by one of the political actors described above (Table A2) was coded for whether it (1) supported policy change on the issue, (2) was against policy change, or (3) represented an unclear position. The category ‘unclear’ was excluded since it is irrelevant for measuring the polarization of political conflict. Based on the other categories, a dispersion index was computed. The formula of this index is indicated below.

$$Polarization\ measure = \left| \left| \sum_{i=1}^{k-1} \left(F_i^* - \frac{1}{2} \right) \right| - \frac{1}{2} \right| * 2$$

In this index, k represents the number of categories (k=2). This index, which ranges from 0 to 1, indicates whether all actors making statements about an issue shared a similar position (value 0) or whether the positions were completely polarized (value 1). Complete polarization would mean that 50% of all political actors are supportive of policy change while the other 50% seek to maintain the status quo. The average value of the measure is 0.23 (S.D.=0.33).

8. Robustness checks of the regression analyses

A. Policy responsiveness model with level of support as a control variable

To assess whether the results of Models 1-3 in the paper hold when controlling for overall levels of support, I present models in Table A3 including this variable as a control. Table A4 presents models where levels of public support are taken as a substitute for changes in public support. The inclusion of this variable does not change the previously presented results, nor would it change the robustness checks presented below. I also ran a model calculating a three-way interaction among levels of support, changes in support and politicization. These interactions are not significant and have no significant bearing on the other results. In sum, levels of support are not significantly related to changes in support, levels of politicization or policy change.

Table A3. Policy responsiveness: Generalized estimating equation regression of whether an EU policy response was adopted during Δt_0 with levels of public support as a control

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	-15.19	(9.06)
Public support t-2 (%)	-0.01	(0.01)
Change in public support t-2 (%)	-0.13	(0.13)
Politicization t-1	0.08*	(0.04)
Time trend	-0.03	(0.14)
Policy change t-1	1.46	(0.92)
Euroskepticism t-2	0.23	(0.15)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H1: Politicization t-1 x public change t-2	0.04*	(0.02)
<i>Model fit</i>		
n	92	
Wald Chi 2	54.56	
Prob > chi2	0.00	
QIC	59.13	

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by * <0.05 , ** <0.01

Table A4. Policy responsiveness: Generalized estimating equation regression of whether an EU policy response was adopted during Δt_0 with levels of public support as a substitute for changes in public support

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	-12.14 [†]	(6.46)
Public support t-2 (%)	-0.02	(0.02)
Politicization t-1	-0.02	(0.11)
Time trend	-0.10	(0.13)
Policy change t-1	1.33 [†]	(0.78)
Euroskepticism t-2	0.20 [†]	(0.10)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H1: Politicization t-1 x public support t-2	0.00	(0.00)
<i>Model fit</i>		
n	92	
Wald Chi 2	44.75	
Prob > chi2	0	

C. Mixed-effects logistic regression with random intercepts for issues

To assess whether the results hold when controlling for the non-independence of observations on the same issue, the models below include random intercepts for issues. The earlier results presented in the paper hold true in these models. I did not present mixed-effects models in the paper because lagged explanatory variables may bias the results of a mixed-effects model (Heagerty and Comstock, 2013).

Table A5. Mixed-effects logistic regression of whether a policy response was adopted during Δt_0 with random intercepts for issues

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	-15.23	(8.98)
Change in public support t-2 (%)	-0.13	(0.12)
Politicization t-1	0.08*	(0.04)
Time trend	-0.04	(0.14)
Policy change t-1	1.61	(0.86)
Euroskepticism t-2	0.23	(0.14)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H1: Politicization x public change t-2	0.04**	(0.02)
<i>Random intercept</i>		
Issues	0.00	(0.00)
<i>Model fit</i>		
n	92	
Wald Chi 2	54.57	
Prob > chi2	0	
AIC	65.29	

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by * <0.05 , ** <0.01

Table A6. Mixed-effects ordinary least squares regression of changes in public support during Δt_2 with random intercepts for issues

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	2.25	(2.39)
Public support t0 (%)	0.00	(0.01)
Change in public support t0 (%)	-0.13	(0.09)
Politicization t1	0.01	(0.01)
Time trend	-0.04	(0.03)
Policy change t0	0.41	(0.68)
Euroskepticism t0	-0.05	(0.05)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H2: Politicization x policy change t-2	-0.05*	(0.02)
<i>Random intercept</i>		
Issues	0.04	(0.53)
<i>Model fit</i>		
n	112	
Wald Chi 2	49.24	
Prob > chi2	0.00	
AIC	565.95	

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by * <0.05 , ** <0.01

C. Models with fixed effects for issues

To assess whether the results hold when controlling for the non-independence of observations on the same issue, the models below include fixed effects for issues. Neither the GEE model for policy responsiveness nor any other type of binary logit model converged when including issue fixed effects due to perfect prediction for some issues. Therefore, a random-effects linear probability model was employed instead. Please note that the size of coefficients in this model cannot be compared with that of the initial GEE model with a logit link presented in the paper.

Table A7. Random-effects linear probability model of whether a policy response was adopted during Δt_0 with fixed effects for issues (n=92)

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	-0.46	(0.46)
Change in public support t-2 (%)	-0.01	(0.01)
Politicization t-1	0.01	(0.01)
Time trend	-0.01	(0.01)
Policy change t-1	-0.02	(0.16)
Euroscepticism t-2	0.01	(0.01)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H1: Politicization x public change t-2	0.01**	(0.00)
<i>Issue fixed effects</i>		
Issue 3 (ref.)		
Issue 7	-0.14*	(0.06)
Issue 9	0.31**	(0.06)
Issue 11	-0.14**	(0.05)
Issue 13	-0.20**	(0.08)
Issue 14	-0.39	(0.72)
Issue 15	-0.14**	(0.05)
Issue 16	-0.15**	(0.05)
Issue 17	-0.14**	(0.05)
Issue 18	-0.26**	(0.05)
Issue 27	0.85**	(0.11)
Issue 39	0.07*	(0.03)
Issue 40	-0.07	(0.04)
Issue 41	-0.06	(0.04)

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by * <0.05 , ** <0.01

Table A8. Ordinary least squares regression of changes in public support during Δt_2 with fixed effects for issues (n=112)

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	10.49*	(4.68)
Change in public support t0 (%)	-0.13	(0.10)
Public support t0 (%)	-0.12**	(0.04)
Politicization t1	0.04	(0.04)
Time trend	-0.09†	(0.05)
Policy change t0	0.70	(0.87)
Euroscepticism t0	-0.06	(0.05)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H2: Politicization t1 x policy change t0	-0.09†	(0.05)
<i>Issue fixed effects</i>		
Issue 3 (ref.)		
Issue 7	2.49**	(0.35)
Issue 9	5.03**	(0.35)
Issue 11	-2.40	(1.46)
Issue 13	3.22**	(0.15)
Issue 14	-2.52	(2.80)
Issue 15	2.04**	(0.59)
Issue 16	3.08**	(0.30)
Issue 17	3.87**	(0.39)
Issue 18	-1.20	(0.83)
Issue 27	3.55**	(0.75)
Issue 38	-0.48	(0.92)
Issue 39	-4.95*	(2.53)
Issue 40	-5.26*	(2.62)
Issue 41	-4.21†	(2.21)

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by †<0.10, *<0.05, **<0.01

D. Models with different time lags and presumed causal structures

The lag structure of the variables in the models is composed according to the theoretical model depicted in Figures 1 and 3. However, alternative causal routes may be applicable, which is why alternative lag structures are also considered here. First, I present models where politicization and changes in public support were measured during the same time period (Tables A9 and A10). This approach yields similar effects for policy responsiveness (H1) but not for public responsiveness (H2). This is probably because citizens are not yet aware and do not experience the impact of policy change only six months after the adoption of a new policy. Second, I present a policy responsiveness model with the components of politicization measured at t-2, change in public support measured at t-1 and policy change at t0 (Table A11). This approach allows the assessment of the alternative causal route discussed in the paper, where politicization strengthens public support for policy change and the subsequent likelihood of a policy response. The interaction between politicization (t-2) and changes in public support (t-1) renders no significant effect on policy change (t0). Hence, politicization will not significantly increase the likelihood of a policy response when it *precedes* rising public demands for policy action. In sum, the hypotheses are confirmed for the causal sequence of events specified in the theoretical model (Figures 1 and 3) but not always for alternative lag specifications.

Table A9. GEE regression (with logit link) of whether an EU policy response was adopted during Δt_0 with a smaller time lag between change in public support and policy change

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	-17.01*	(6.94)
Change in public support t-1 (%)	-0.17†	(0.09)
Politicization t-1	0.07*	(0.03)
Time trend	-0.04	(0.16)
Policy change t-1	1.89*	(0.82)
Euroskepticism t-1	0.25*	(0.11)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H1: Politicization x public change t-1	0.03†	(0.01)
<i>Model fit</i>		
n	92	
Wald Chi 2	22.90	
Prob > chi2	0.00	
QIC	65.44	

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by †<0.10, *<0.05, **<0.01

Table A10. Random-effects generalized least squares regression of changes in public support for policy during Δt_2 with a smaller time lag between policy change and changes in public support

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	0.80	(2.99)
Public support t0 (%)	-0.01	(0.01)
Change in public support t0 (%)	-0.30**	(0.06)
Politicization t1	-0.03*	(0.01)
Time trend	0.00	(0.04)
Policy change t1	-1.65	(0.95)
Euroscepticism t0	-0.01	(0.06)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H2: Politicization t1 x policy change t1	0.14**	(0.04)
<i>Model fit</i>		
n	117	
Wald Chi 2	67.88	
Prob > chi2	0.00	
QIC	655.95	

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by * <0.05 , ** <0.01

Table A11. GEE regression (with logit link) of whether an EU policy response was adopted during Δt_0 with an alternative lag structure, where politicization precedes changes in public support

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	-20.79**	(6.69)
Change in public support t-1 (%)	-0.08	(0.07)
Politicization t-2	0.02	(0.02)
Time trend	-0.11	(0.23)
Policy change t-1	1.33†	(0.79)
Euroscepticism t-1	0.34**	(0.11)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H1: Politicization t-2 x public change t-1	0.01	(0.01)
<i>Model fit</i>		
n	106	
Wald Chi 2	39.08	
Prob > chi2	0.00	

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by † <0.10 , * <0.05 , ** <0.01

E. Control for policy area

Politicization might be an artifact of the policy area in which an issue is situated, and thus, it constitutes a relevant source of extraneous variance. Therefore, I included a random intercept for policy area in the subsequent model. Because of separation problems (perfect prediction), a model with fixed effects for policy areas would not converge. This model confirms the earlier results.

Table A12. Mixed-effects logistic regression of whether a policy response was adopted during Δt_0 with random intercepts for policy area

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	-15.35**	(5.04)
Change in public support t-2 (%)	-0.14†	(0.07)
Politicization t-1	0.08*	(0.03)
Time trend	-0.04	(0.15)
Policy change t-1	1.57*	(0.69)
Euroskepticism t-2	0.23**	(0.07)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H1: Politicization x public change t-2	0.04**	(0.02)
<i>Random intercept</i>		
Policy area	0.05	(0.32)
<i>Model fit</i>		
n	92	
Wald Chi 2	1743.32	
Prob > chi2	0	
AIC	63.73	

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by †<0.10, *<0.05, **<0.01

Table A13. Mixed-effects logistic regression of changes in public support with random intercepts for policy area

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	2.24	(2.28)
Public support t-2 (%)	0.00	(0.01)
Change in public support t-2 (%)	-0.13	(0.12)
Politicization t-1	0.01	(0.01)
Time trend	-0.04	(0.03)
Policy change t-2	0.41	(0.70)
Euroskepticism t-2	-0.05	(0.04)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H2: Politicization x policy change t-2	-0.05*	(0.03)
<i>Random intercept</i>		
Policy field	0.03	(0.23)
<i>Model fit</i>		
n	112	
Wald Chi 2	73.29	
Prob > chi2	0.00	
AIC	565.94	

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by *<0.05, **<0.01

F. Rare events logistic regression

Because of the limited number of issues that were repeatedly surveyed across all European member states, the analyses rely on a fairly low N. For only a limited number of the issue-time unit observations, policy responses were identified (n=12). A policy response could therefore qualify as a ‘rare event’. To take this into account in the analysis, a rare events logistic regression was computed. The analysis confirms the earlier results of the initial model.

Table A14. Rare effects logistic regression of whether a policy response was adopted

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	-15.19	(9.06)
Public support t-2 (%)	-0.01	(0.01)
Change in public support t-2 (%)	-0.13	(0.13)
Politicization t-1	0.08*	(0.04)
Time trend	-0.03	(0.14)
Policy change t-1	1.46	(0.92)
Euroskepticism t-2	0.23	(0.15)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H1: Politicization x public change t-2	0.04*	(0.02)

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by *<0.05, **<0.01

G. Long-term effects

The GEE and random-effects generalized least squares (REGLS) regression models present instantaneous or short-run effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The Kao test indicates that the panels are co-integrated, which suggests a long-run relationship between the independent and dependent variables. To account for these long-run effects, fully modified ordinary least squares (FMOLS) regression models were computed. The FMOLS models correct for endogeneity and serial correlations that may be present in a long-run relationship (Pedroni, 2001). The long-run effects obtained from the FMOLS models are highly similar to the instantaneous effects presented in the previous GEE, REGLS and mixed-effects regression models. In sum, the findings presented in the paper hold true when considering long-term effects.

Table A15. Fully modified ordinary least squares regression of whether a policy response was adopted during Δt_0

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	0.31	(0.33)
Change in public support t-2 (%)	0.00	(0.01)
Politicization t-1	0.02**	(0.00)
Time trend	-0.04**	(0.01)
Policy change t-1	1.63**	(0.06)
Euroskepticism t-2	0.00	(0.00)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H1: Politicization t-1 x public change t-2	0.01**	(0.00)
Standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by * <0.05 , ** <0.01		

Table A16. Fully modified ordinary least squares regression of changes in public support during Δt_2

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	-4.13*	(1.66)
Change in public support t0 (%)	3.23**	(0.04)
Level of public support t0	0.01*	(0.01)
Politicization t1	0.16**	(0.01)
Time trend	0.08*	(0.03)
Policy change t0	5.47**	(0.54)
Euroscepticism t0	0.07*	(0.03)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H2: Politicization x policy change t0	-0.54**	(0.06)

Standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by * <0.05 , ** <0.01

H. Random variation and the margins of error of the Eurobarometer surveys

A large portion of the observed changes in public support are subtle (below 2%) and hence may fall outside the confidence intervals of the sampled Eurobarometer polls. To ensure that my findings are not due to random variation of changes in public opinion, I ran models with only those observations where changes in public support were smaller than the margin of error of the percentages reported in the Eurobarometer polls. Margins of error are published in all Eurobarometer reports and depend on the reported percentages, the sample and population size. Based on this information, I selected only those observations of changes in public support that fall inside the 95% confidence intervals of the sampled Eurobarometer polls. When changes in support are below 2 and above -2 and the observed levels of support fall between 34% and 76%, observations are within the margin of error and were excluded from the analyses presented below to control for random variability. This step results in regression analyses with fewer observations but should constitute more valid observations of changes in public support. The coefficients and P values of the main interaction terms are consistent with the models presented in the paper, even if these models have a lower N

A17. Generalized estimating equation regression of whether an EU policy response was adopted during Δt_0 with only the changes in public support that fall within the 95% CFIs

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	-17.52 [†]	(9.76)
Change in public support t-2 (%)	-0.12	(0.12)
Politicization t-1	0.08**	(0.03)
Time trend	-0.03	(0.14)
Policy change t-1	0.93	(0.74)
Euroscepticism t-2	0.27 [†]	(0.16)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H1: Politicization x public change t-2	0.04**	(0.01)
<i>Model fit</i>		
n	73	
Wald Chi 2	89.62	
Prob > chi2	0.00	

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by [†]<0.10, *<0.05, **<0.01

A18. Random-effects generalized least squares regression of changes in public support for policy during Δt_2 with only the changes in public support that fall within the 95% CIs

	β	S.E.
<i>Main effects</i>		
Intercept	-0.14	(1.75)
Public support t0 (%)	0.00	(0.01)
Change in public support t0 (%)	-0.03	(0.09)
Politicization t1	0.01	(0.01)
Time trend	-0.02	(0.05)
Policy change t0	0.19	(0.70)
Euroscepticism t-2	0.00	(0.03)
<i>Interaction effects</i>		
H2: Politicization t1 x policy change t0	-0.05*	(0.03)
<i>Model fit</i>		
n	94	
Wald Chi 2	271.52	
Prob > chi2	0.00	

Robust standard errors are in parentheses, and significance levels are indicated by †<0.10, *<0.05, **<0.01

9. Additional tables and figures referenced in the paper

Figure A3. Relative changes in support for more policy among European citizens after six months for 15 policy issues

Figure A4. Marginal effects of (a) changes in public support on policy change and of (b) policy change on changes in public support for different levels of civil society mobilization with 95% CIs

(a)

(b)

Note: (a) Predicted marginal chances of policy change; (b) Predicted marginal changes in public opinion

Table A19. Overview of the measures used in the regression analyses

Variable	Description
Policy response	Whether or not the European Council adopted a regulation or directive and/or whether a treaty or agreement was adopted. Yes = 12 No = 109
Politicization (index)	Politicization = salience * (actor expansion + polarization) $\mu = 4.34$ $\sigma = 12.80$ Min=0; Max = 104.33
Polarization	The degree to which policy positions of political actors in media coverage disagree (see online appendix). $\mu = 0.24$ $\sigma = 0.33$ Min=0; Max = 1
Media salience	The number of articles that discussed the issue in eight different European news media (logged). $\mu = 1.47$ $\sigma = 1.25$ Min=0; Max = 4.38
Actor expansion	The number of statements by civil society groups (NGOs, social movements, citizen action groups) in the selected media outlets. $\mu = 4.30$ $\sigma = 1.70$ Min=0; Max = 30
Relative change in public opinion	Relative <i>change</i> in public support for more policy across EU member states (weighed by population), measured in percentages. $\mu = -0.39$ $\sigma = 2.9$ Min=-17; Max = 8
Relative support among public opinion	Relative <i>support</i> from public opinion for more policy across EU member states (weighed by population), measured in percentages. $\mu = 52.58$ $\sigma = 25.81$ Min=12; Max = 89
Euroskepticism	Relative number of citizens who indicated that they do not trust the European institutions. $\mu = 54.31$ $\sigma = 4.50$ Min=45; Max = 60
Time	Time period when public opinion was polled. Each time lag represents six months. $\mu = 7.76$ $\sigma = 3.46$ Min=0; Max = 13

10. Literature cited

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