

Issue Salience in the European Parliament Election: An Analysis of Economic, Environmental and Immigration Issues on Social Media

NURIA FONT 

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona

Abstract

This study investigates under what conditions Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) emphasised relevant policy issues—economy, climate/environment and immigration—during the 2019 European Parliament election campaign. Building on research on issue salience in EP elections and based on the content published on X/Twitter by MEPs in the weeks preceding the election, the study identifies key drivers of issue attention. It shows that issue relevance in the domestic public agenda and individual issue expertise increase MEPs' attention to the three policy issues, whereas parties' stance on the sociocultural dimension only affects attention to climate/environment. The study contributes to research on issue salience in EP election campaigns and MEPs' communication on social media, highlighting the importance of adopting a cross-issue approach when studying European elections.

Keywords: European Parliament; election campaign; issue salience; policy issues; social media

Introduction

To what extent and under what conditions did Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) emphasise relevant policy issues—economy, climate/environment and immigration—during the 2019 European Parliament (EP) election campaign? Research on issue salience and issue competition has extensively explored the determinants and implications of issue salience in electoral contests across European countries and at the EU level (e.g., Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen 2020; Adam and Maier 2016; Beach, Hansen, and Larsen 2018; Braun 2021; Fazekas et al. 2021; Font 2023; Vasilopoulou and Gattermann 2021). Recent studies highlight that major policy issues—for instance, those related to the Euro crisis, refugee crisis and immigration, and environmental protection—gained centrality during the 2019 EP campaign and in European politics in general (e.g., van der Brug, Gattermann, and de Vreese 2022). However, there is limited research on MEPs' motivations to emphasise relevant policy issues in EP elections. This study investigates MEPs' motivations to pay attention to policy issues that are relevant for Europeans—economy, climate/environment and immigration—in their digital communication during the 2019 EP election campaign.

Analysing issue salience in EP elections with a focus on MEPs is justified as MEPs play a significant role as relevant EU political actors who represent European citizens in the EU's parliamentary chamber. While there is abundant research on issue salience focused on parties and a well-established literature on MEPs' activity and behaviour, to the best of our knowledge, the question of under which conditions MEPs pay attention to

major policy issues during the EP campaign remains underexplored. In addition, studies on the EP have commonly assumed a weak electoral connection between the EU and citizens (Chiru 2024; Hix and Marsh 2007; Hix and Høyland 2013), suggesting that citizens rarely view EP elections as a way to express policy preferences or hold MEPs accountable (De Vries 2018; Hix and Marsh 2007). Investigating MEPs' emphasis on issues that are relevant for Europeans finds normative justification in terms of understanding whether and how MEPs have incentives to discuss certain policy issues on their digital communication, thereby potentially enhancing their engagement with voters.

Building on previous work on issue salience (e.g., Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen 2020), party positioning on the cultural dimension (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2018), and legislators' issue expertise (e.g., Krehbiel 1991; Yordanova 2009), we develop theoretical arguments on MEPs' emphasis on policy issues. MEPs are central to our study, as they decide whether and to what extent to emphasise specific policy issues in their digital communication during the European campaign. Our study covers active MEPs, that is, those serving in the last session of the 8th term. We investigate how their characteristics—shaped by their country of origin, their party and their individual experience—influence their decision to highlight certain policy issues. Specifically, we test hypotheses on how the domestic public agenda of MEPs' countries, their parties' stance on the cultural ideological divide and their policy expertise affect issue salience. Additionally, by covering active MEPs regardless of their candidacy status, we can also control whether standing for re-election influences their attention to policy issues during the campaign. We aim to contribute to research on issue salience in EP election campaigns.

We focus on the three most important issues for Europeans—economy, climate change and environment, and immigration—according to Eurobarometer data at the time of the election (Standard Eurobarometer 91, spring 2019). To provide some context, economic issues were relevant as some member states were still facing the economic consequences of the eurozone crisis, experienced social unrest driven by frustrations over socio-economic inequalities—like the 'Yellow Vests' movement in France—while concerns about economic growth, job creation and inflation persisted across member states. Climate change emerged as a major issue, driven by the success of social movements such as Fridays for Future and the EU's leading role in the 2015 Paris Agreement. Finally, immigration gained centrality in the public debate following the 2015–2016 refugee crisis, raising concerns about border control, national sovereignty and identity, and solidarity among member states. While other issues, such as Europe's future (Treib 2020) and Brexit (Braun 2021), were also debated, focusing on the issues that Europeans consider the most relevant puts the spotlight on major concerns shared by the European electorate. Additionally, these policy issues are key priorities in the legislative agenda of the European Parliament, given the extensive volume and far-reaching impact of EU policy-making in those fields. Our selection of issues aligns with recent research on issue saliency taking a cross-issue perspective. For example, Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen (2020) examine how parties adjust their policy positions on immigration, environment and the welfare state in response to changes in the saliency of these issues in the party system. Braun and Schäfer (2022) demonstrate that citizens were more likely to vote in the 2019 EP election when they attributed greater importance to major policy issues such as climate change and environment, economic growth and immigration. Finally, Maggini et al. (2019) analyse the impact of economic, environmental and migration

issues on party performance in the 2019 EP election. Our study adopts a similar cross-issue approach, aiming to contribute to this literature.

Our study is based on the content posted on X/Twitter by MEPs from all member states during the 4 weeks preceding the 2019 last election day. We analyse X/Twitter data because this platform allows politicians to deliver personalised content in their communication strategies during campaigns (Nulty et al. 2016). Moreover, analysing their digital communication on X/Twitter is justified considering recent research on the connections between social media and agenda setting in elections. Digital media has reshaped how political actors engage with the public (Jungherr, Rivero, and Gayo-Avello 2020), increasingly using these platforms to promote specific issues and place them at the centre of public debate. For instance, Alonso-Muñoz and Casero-Ripollés (2018) identify agenda-setting patterns that include low thematic fragmentation, a prevalence of strategic concerns over policy issues, and inconsistencies between the agendas set by politicians and the concerns of social media users. Similarly, Bentivegna, Marchetti, and Stanziano (2022) show that digital platforms facilitate the construction of political agendas by enabling candidates and parties split infinitive issues where they have established ownership. From a different viewpoint, Gilardi et al. (2021) find mutual influences among traditional media, candidates' social media and politicians' agendas. Interestingly, they observe an exception in the case of environmental issues, where political parties enhance their responsiveness to public concerns. This research has implications for our study, as it suggests that MEPs could be relevant actors in shaping the public agenda through their digital communication, with varying impact across policy issues. In addition, we assume that MEPs do not simply amplify party messages (Ivanusch 2024) but rather have various incentives to emphasise or de-emphasise specific policy issues (Fazekas et al. 2021; Barberá et al. 2019) and shape individual campaigning (Daniel et al. 2024). Recent research also explores social media by candidates and MEPs (Daniel, Obholzer, and Hurka 2019; Lorenzo Rodríguez and Garmendia Madariaga 2016), the expansion of EU issues, and MEPs' transnational linkages in campaigns (Fazekas et al. 2021; Stier, Froio, and Schünemann 2021). By identifying drivers of policy issue saliency on X/Twitter, we also aim to contribute to research on social media campaigning.

Our findings show that the drivers of MEPs' attention to policy issues vary across policies. We find that issue relevance in the domestic public agenda and individual policy expertise increase MEPs' likelihood of focusing on economic, climate/environment and immigration issues, whereas their party's stance on the cultural ideological dimension only affects attention to climate/environmental issues. The findings contribute to research on issue saliency and EP election research by identifying MEPs' motivations to emphasise relevant policy issues in their digital communication during the campaign. They also highlight the importance of adopting a cross-issue approach when studying European elections.

I. Theoretical Framework

Theories on issue saliency and issue competition in election campaigns have increasingly examined the conditions under which parties and politicians give attention to specific policy issues. Established research suggests that they differ in their emphasis on policy issues beyond the traditional left–right dimension (Budge and Farlie 1983) to gain an advantage

in electoral competition (Green-Pedersen 2007; Petrocik 1996), influence the issues that voters perceive as most important (Gunderson 2023; Klüver and Spoon 2016) and mobilise voters (Costello et al. 2021; De Sio and Weber 2014). Drawing on theoretical discussions on issue salience in the domestic public agenda, parties' stance on the sociocultural ideological dimension and legislators' issue expertise, our study elaborates arguments regarding MEPs' motivation to emphasise major policy issues in the 2019 EP campaign.

Issue Relevance in the Domestic Public Agenda

Research on the link between public opinion and party competition in electoral contests has extensively explored the relationship between issue salience and parties' policy shifts (e.g., Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen 2020) as well as the connection between party positioning on specific policy issues beyond the traditional left–right dimension and voters (e.g. Braun and Schäfer 2022; Klüver and Spoon 2016; Romeijn 2020). These contributions highlight the importance of focusing on policy issues when investigating party competition and election campaigns. Broadly, this literature argues that parties are responsive to public preferences to varying degrees, establishing a link between public opinion and party positioning on specific policy issues (Romeijn 2020; Giger and Lefkofridi 2014; Schwörer 2024). Recent studies show that certain conditions, such as being a niche party (Giger and Lefkofridi 2014) and the party's government status (Romeijn 2020), may affect this relationship in different ways. Studies also show that changes in public issue salience increase political attention (Jones and Baumgartner 2004) and that issue salience in the electoral contest has implications for voters' choices (e.g., Reher 2014). Overall, parties and political elites have incentives to strategically emphasise issues that are salient in the public agenda.

In the context of the EP elections, the link between the relevance of issues in the domestic agenda and MEPs' attention to policy issues has been underexplored. Among the relevant contributions, Braun and Schäfer (2022) find that participation in the 2019 election was affected not only by personal issue importance but also by systemic issue salience—the systematic relevance that citizens in the Member States attach to major policy issues, namely, economy, environment and immigration. We therefore expect that public opinion on the most important issues influenced MEPs' emphasis on those issues in the 2019 EP campaign. Importantly, research on public opinion and government responsiveness has raised questions about the potential reciprocal effects between citizens' issue salience and parties' and party elites' support (e.g., Barberá et al. 2019; Neundorff and Adams 2018). While we acknowledge concerns about reciprocity, we assume that there is a correspondence between public and government policy priorities (Jones and Baumgartner 2004) and that public opinion on policy issues precedes and affects politicians' attention during election campaigns. As public opinion reflects citizens' preferences and concerns, MEPs are expected to prioritise the issues that matter to citizens during the campaign.

Our hypothesis is based on the idea that the relevance of major policy issues in the public agenda varies across countries. For example, economic issues may be more relevant in countries most affected by the Great Recession (Hutter and Kriesi 2019); climate change and environmental concerns are unevenly salient in the EU, particularly between

Western and Eastern countries (McCright, Dunlap, and Marquart-Pyatté 2016); and Member States have faced different migration pressures, especially in the aftermath of the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ (Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2019). In the context of the EP election, the relevance of economic, climate/environmental and immigration issues varied across countries due to diverse political, socio-economic developments and geographical areas within the EU (Braun and Schäfer 2022; Maggini et al. 2019). We expect MEPs’ emphasis on these policy issues during the 2019 EP election to be influenced by the relevance of these issues in the domestic public agenda.

Hypothesis 1: MEPs are more likely to emphasise relevant policy issues in the EP election campaign when these issues are high in the domestic public agenda.

Party’s Stance on the Cultural Dimension

Research on the politicisation of European integration and party competition in Europe demonstrates the emergence of a sociocultural dimension of political conflict and transnational party competition beyond the traditional left–right divide (Hooghe and Marks 2018). This dimension is structured along the green, alternative and libertarian (GAL) and traditionalist, authoritarian and nationalist (TAN) standpoints (Hooghe and Marks 2018). Issues like environmental protection, gender equality and minority rights align with GAL, while immigration and national identity align with TAN. As GAL and TAN parties take opposing views on these sociocultural issues (Hooghe and Marks 2018), we expect MEPs’ party stances on this dimension to influence attention to economy, climate/environment and immigration in different ways.

The economic voting literature has traditionally emphasised the importance of the economic situation in election campaigns (e.g., Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). In the European context, the ‘Euro crisis’ had important electoral impacts both domestically (Hernández and Kriesi 2016) and in the 2014 EP election (Hobolt and De Vries 2016). While economic issues are not straightforwardly categorised as GAL–TAN, we hypothesise that MEPs from parties at the TAN pole are less likely to emphasise them than those from parties closer to the GAL endpoint. This is based on the idea that parties with strong stances on cultural issues, particularly immigration, have traditionally downplayed economic issues (Mudde 2013; Afonso 2015). Similarly, for voters of populist right-wing parties, economic issues are less important than those related to cultural and identity ones (Ivarsflaten 2005). While recent studies suggest that populist right-wing parties have shifted to centre or left-leaning economic positions to attract working-class voters and may support pro-welfare stances as junior coalition partners (Afonso 2015), they still tend to de-emphasise economy. While debatable, left parties, for whom the economy has traditionally played a central role in structuring power relationships (March and Mudde 2005), are seen as closer to the cultural left. Therefore, we expect MEPs from GAL parties to give more attention to economic issues than those from TAN parties.

We expect that attention to climate and environmental issues is affected by MEPs’ party stances on the GAL–TAN dimension. Green issues are central for GAL parties, which take a universalist stance in support of supranational and international actions to fight against climate change and environmental degradation. In contrast, TAN parties

have traditionally downplayed climate change and environmental concerns and advocated for their country to avoid climate costs. While recent research on EP legislative behaviour shows that the GAL–TAN dimension has a weak effect on MEPs' votes on EU energy and climate change legislation (Buzogány and Četković 2021), other studies indicate that new right-wing parties have denied climate change (Lockwood 2018) and that the presence of GAL parties may increase political discussions on climate issues (Weko 2022). Hence, MEPs from GAL parties are expected to emphasise climate/environmental issues.

Lastly, immigration has emerged as a central issue structuring electoral competition in the European contest (Braun and Schäfer 2022) and has become one of the most contested issues throughout Europe (Grande, Schwarzbözl, and Fatke 2019). We assume that the TAN pole of the cultural cleavage is occupied by radical right parties (Hooghe and Marks 2018), which hold extreme views on immigration (Mudde 2013). We expect MEPs from TAN parties to be more likely to emphasise this issue than those taking moderate stances on immigration (Hooghe and Marks 2018). We propose the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2.1: MEPs from parties closer to the GAL pole are more likely to emphasise economic issues in the EP election campaign than MEPs from parties closer to the TAN pole.

Hypothesis 2.2: MEPs from parties closer to the GAL pole are more likely to emphasise climate/environmental issues in the EP election campaign than MEPs from parties closer to the TAN pole.

Hypothesis 2.3: MEPs from parties closer to the TAN pole are more likely to emphasise immigration issues in the EP election campaign than MEPs from parties closer to the GAL pole.

Legislators' Policy Issue Expertise

Legislative studies and, in particular, informational theories of legislative organisation emphasise that legislative chambers provide their members with incentives to specialise in specific policy issues based, for instance, on their background and experience (Krehbiel 1991). Informational theories stress the importance of legislators' policy expertise for committee assignment and influence in policy-making at both the committee and the plenary (Krehbiel 1991). In the EP context, the informational rationale, which regards MEPs as experts (Daniel and Thierse 2022), has been applied to MEPs' committee assignment, selection of committee leaders, and policy activity and influence in committees (Yordanova 2009; Chiru 2020; Daniel and Thierse 2022).

However, little is known about how MEPs' issue specialisation affects their emphasis on policy issues in EP elections. We expect that MEPs' policy expertise increases attention to specific issues in their social media communication during the EP campaign. Our expectation is based on recent research on issue attention and political communication on social media, indicating that politicians highlight various

issues to demonstrate their expertise, signal they are specialists in certain topics, and boost the visibility and relevance of those issues (Peeters, Van Aelst, and Praet 2021). This logic is expected to apply to MEPs during EP campaigns. MEPs with policy expertise grasp the importance and implications of policies within their area of expertise. Consequently, they are more likely to actively advocate for these issues, showcasing their credibility and competence. Conversely, MEPs lacking specific policy expertise may underestimate the importance of certain policy issues and give them less attention.

Hypothesis 3: MEPs are more likely to emphasise relevant policy issues in the EP election campaign when they have policy expertise in those specific issues.

II. Data and Methods

The study uses data from X/Twitter published by MEPs during the 4 weeks prior to the 2019 EP election and is part of a larger research. Tweets were downloaded from MEPs' X/Twitter accounts facilitated in the EP official website and translated into English using Google Translate. The database includes 61,648 tweets from 379 MEPs from 150 parties across all member states. Some clarifications on the data are needed. First, using tweets by active MEPs provides a comprehensive overview of their communication during the European campaign period. Second, by including both candidate and noncandidate MEPs, we may control whether electoral incentives affect issue attention. Third, using accounts listed on the EP official website may raise concerns if MEPs used other X/Twitter accounts, such as a party one, either alternatively or alongside the one appearing in the official MEP profile. These accounts allow legislators to communicate on social media as representatives of the EP (e.g., Obholzer and Daniel 2016), ensuring that the data reflect their official positions. We also exclude handles not published on the EP website to avoid potential issues of over- or under-representation of certain MEPs. Third, we exclude MEPs from parties not covered in the 2019 or 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al. 2020; Polk et al. 2017) as we test hypothesis on MEPs' party affiliation (see below).

Given that the sample does not cover the entire population of MEPs, we analysed its distribution by national party, country and European Political Group (EPG). In terms of national party, 67% are represented: 97% of parties with five or more MEPs and 60% of those with four or fewer. Larger parties and those with only one seat are slightly under-represented, while parties with three to six MEPs are well represented. The country distribution is highly representative of the EP, with only $\leq 2\%$ variation for 26 of 28 countries and $\leq 3\%$ for the remaining two (see Figure S1). Regarding EPGs, tweets from the Greens/EFA are over-represented while those from the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) are under-represented, with smaller differences among other EPGs (see Figure S2). Despite some deviations, we are confident in the sample's representativeness, as key indicators show sufficient variation to test our hypotheses. Robustness checks excluding members of the Greens/EFA and ECR were conducted to validate our results.

Regarding the tweets, previous research on campaigning and political communication on X/Twitter assumes that the original content—tweets/posts and replies—matters more than endorsements like retweets/reposts (Fazekas et al. 2021). However, we consider all

three types in the analysis, as MEPs use this platform for political communication. Our dataset includes tweets/posts (32.7%), replies (13.5%) and retweets/reposts (53.8%), reflecting how MEPs engage with their audience. We perform robustness checks excluding retweets, resulting in a sample of 28,500 posts from 365 MEPs from 145 parties across all member states. To ensure that results are not influenced by the most active 10%, additional checks were performed excluding their posts.

To test our hypotheses, we use data on MEPs' country, party and individual characteristics. To operationalise attention to policy issues, three dependent variables indicate whether the tweet includes content on economic, climate change/environmental or immigration issues, respectively. For operationalisation, we use three dictionaries based on Font (2023), containing keywords and hashtags related to these policy issues (see Appendix S1). Tweets containing at least one keyword/hashtag from the corresponding dictionary take the value 1 and 0 otherwise. Coding was done automatically. To ensure coding reliability, we manually coded a random sample of 500 tweets, with a per cent agreement ranging from 0.84 to 0.91 for the three dependent variables. Examples of tweets are included in Appendix S1.

In descriptive terms, economic issues received the highest attention (8%), followed by climate/environment (6%) and immigration (3%). To provide a dynamic perspective, we analysed attention to each issue over the 4 weeks before the election. MEPs increased attention to economic issues during the second and third weeks but decreased it in the final week. In contrast, they increased attention to climate and environmental issues throughout the campaign. Their focus on migration issues was limited, with a slight rise during the second week, followed by a weak decline in subsequent weeks. For graphical representation, see Figure S3. Refer to Figure S4 for a map showing attention to the three policy issues by country.

We operationalised the independent variables as follows. For the relevance of the policy issue at the national level, we used survey data on the 'most important issue' (MII) question, reflecting what matters to Europeans (Bartle and Laycock 2012). We employed data from Eurobarometer 91 (spring 2019). We used the question: *What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment?* (QA3a). We take the country's average of answers mentioning the economic situation; environment, climate and energy issues; and immigration. While the issues in these categories do not perfectly match our three policy issues, they are reasonable approximations. Additionally, one might assume that the economic situation also embraces unemployment. While both scores strongly correlate (Pearson's $r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$), we conducted robustness checks by averaging the economic situation and unemployment scores.

For party position on the GAL-TAN dimension, we use data from the 2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) (Bakker et al. 2020). The scores range from 0 (*Green/Alternative/Libertarian*) to 10 (*Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist*). For parties not included in the 2019 wave, we use data from CHES 2014 (Polk et al. 2017). For parties operating at a subnational level but with ties to a national party, or part of a broader coalition, we assign the score of the original/national party. Independent MEPs having left a party are assigned the party's score. Additionally, since the left-right and pro-/anti-EU dimensions also structure political conflict in Europe, we perform robustness checks using the CHES general left-right score (0–10 scale) and EU position (1–7 scale) alternatively.

We operationalise policy issue expertise through MEPs' membership in parliamentary committees, which typically involves long-term engagement with policy issues, thereby helping them build and reinforce their expertise. While taking committees as a proxy for policy expertise may raise concerns due to potential committee shifts among MEPs, an alternative approach based on, for instance, previous ministerial experience (e.g., Chiru 2024), would overlook MEPs' development of expertise through committee membership during their mandates. Additionally, as informational theories of legislative organisation suggest, committee assignments are often influenced by legislators' policy expertise (Krehbiel 1991), indicating that committee membership typically reflects previous expertise. Three binary variables indicate MEPs' membership in one of the three permanent EP committees: the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee (ECON), the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee (ENVI) and the Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee (LIBE). Data were taken from the EP website.

We include several controls. Based on research indicating that the electoral list systems affect MEPs' behaviour (Däubler and Hix 2018) and candidates' strategies in EP elections (Obholzer and Daniel 2016), we control for the electoral list system. We partly rely on Däubler and Hix (2018). MEPs elected under closed list systems (party-centred) take the value 1, while those under open or single transferable vote (candidate-centred) take the value 0. We took the data from ParlGov (Döring and Manow 2019). While MEPs elected under candidate-centred rules may prioritise local issues, it is uncertain whether this results in a higher or lower emphasis on the policy issues under study. We also control whether MEPs' party is in national government at the time of the tweet, using a binary variable taking the value 1 for national government and 0 otherwise. As previous research shows that parties in the national government are less likely to obfuscate their position than those in opposition (Koedam 2021), national government is expected to increase issue emphasis. We control whether MEPs stand for re-election, as studies show that those seeking re-election are more likely to emphasise EU issues in EP campaigns (Font 2023). We expect that candidate MEPs align with relevant policy issues, seeking to appear more responsive to voters and mobilise them. A binary variable takes the value 1 when MEPs stand for re-election and 0 otherwise. We took data on candidates from the EP Press Room website. As previous work on X/Twitter campaigning shows that women representatives focus more on 'women's issues', such as environmental concerns, while men representatives focus more on issues such as economy and migration (Evans and Clark 2016), we control for gender (female = 1, male = 0). MEP's age is also controlled for. Lastly, as tweets/posts, replies and retweets/reposts may reflect different communication strategies (Fazekas et al. 2021), we control for the type of tweet. Descriptive statistics of the dependent, independent and control variables are summarised in Table S4.

Analysis

We perform three separate regression analyses for our dependent variables: attention to economy, climate/environment and immigration. As the dependent variables are binary, and given that tweets are nested in MEPs, who are nested in national parties and countries, we perform mixed-effects logistic regressions and include random effects for countries, parties and MEPs. For each dependent variable, we ran two models: Model 1

includes the independent variables, and Model 2 adds controls. The results are reported in Table 1 as odds ratios.

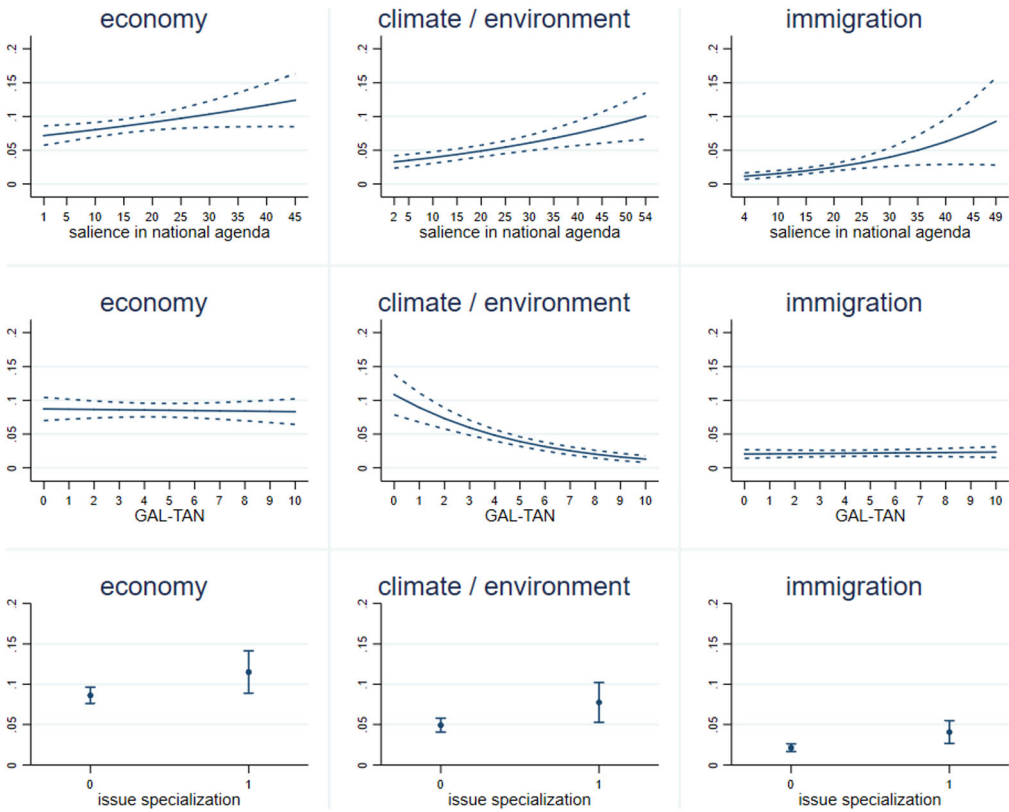
Our study confirms Hypothesis 1, showing that the relevance of policy issues on the domestic public agenda influences MEPs' attention during the EP campaign. Domestic issue relevance significantly increases the likelihood of attention to economy, climate/environment and immigration, with all effects being positive and statistically significant. Based on Models 1a, 2a and 3a, we calculate the probability of MEPs focusing on these issues, holding continuous variables at their means and binary ones at their modes, at 95% CIs (see Figure 1). The probability of emphasising economic issues increases from 7% at the minimum level of issue relevance to 12% at the maximum. For climate/environment, it increases from 3% to 10%, while immigration moves from 1% to 9%. Overall, MEPs are responsive to the relevance of policy issues in the domestic sphere, although the effect size varies: climate/environment and migration have a more pronounced impact compared with economy. One interpretation is that economic issues are well-established in party competition, leading to lower impact on MEPs' emphasis

Table 1: Attention to policy issues in the EP campaign (odds ratios).

	<i>Economy</i>		<i>Climate/environment</i>		<i>Immigration</i>	
	<i>M1a</i>	<i>M2a</i>	<i>M1b</i>	<i>M2b</i>	<i>M1c</i>	<i>M3c</i>
Independent variables						
Issue relevance	1.01** (0.01)	1.02** (0.01)	1.03*** (0.01)	1.03*** (0.01)	1.05*** (0.01)	1.05*** (0.02)
GAL–TAN	0.99 (0.02)	0.99 (0.02)	0.79*** (0.03)	0.78*** (0.03)	1.01 (0.03)	1.03 (0.03)
Policy expertise	1.4** (0.19)	1.38** (0.18)	1.67*** (0.31)	1.63*** (0.29)	1.97*** (0.35)	1.89*** (0.34)
Controls						
List system		0.96 (0.13)		1.31 (0.25)		1.26 (0.3)
National government		1.16 (0.13)		1.1 (0.18)		0.75* (0.11)
Candidate		1.14 (0.11)		1.55*** (0.21)		0.98 (0.14)
Gender		0.96 (0.08)		0.87 (0.1)		1.27** (0.15)
Age		1.01 (0.01)		1.01 (0.01)		0.99 (0.01)
Tweet type (ref. = Tweet)						
Reply		0.87** (0.05)		0.71*** (0.05)		0.53*** (0.06)
Retweet		1.17*** (0.04)		1.28*** (0.06)		1.21*** (0.08)
Random effects						
Country	0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)	0.06 (0.05)	0.05 (0.05)	0.13 (0.09)	0.14 (0.1)
Party	0.07 (0.06)	0.09 (0.06)	0.23 (0.09)	0.23 (0.09)	0.06 (0.07)	0.05 (0.08)
MEP	0.3 (0.05)	0.28 (0.05)	0.46 (0.08)	0.43 (0.07)	0.51 (0.1)	0.46 (0.09)
Constant	0.07*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.01*** (0.01)	0.01*** (0.01)
<i>N</i>	61,648	61,648	61,648	61,648	61,648	61,648

* $p < 0.1$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 1: Predicted probability of emphasis to policy issues, 95% CIs. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcms.13722)]



when campaigning compared with newer issues like climate/environment and immigration.

Hypothesis 2 regarding the effects of MEPs' parties stance on the GAL–TAN dimension on attention to policy issues is only partially confirmed. As expected in Hypothesis 2.2, MEPs from GAL parties are more likely to emphasise climate/environment during the EP campaign. However, contrary to our expectations, GAL–TAN positioning does not significantly affect emphasis on economy (Hypothesis 2.1) or immigration (Hypothesis 2.3). Based on Model 1b, the probability of MEPs emphasising climate/environmental issues decreases from 11% for parties closest to the GAL pole to 1% for those closest to the TAN pole, at 95% confidence intervals (CIs). While MEPs from GAL parties tend to highlight climate/environmental issues, this logic does not apply to MEPs from TAN parties regarding immigration. One interpretation is that TAN parties, often associated with anti-immigrant sentiments, may de-emphasise highly controversial issues like immigration and focus on less divisive issues related to national identity and cultural values. Another interpretation could be that TAN parties lead other parties to emphasise immigration.

Finally, Hypothesis 3 on MEPs' policy expertise is corroborated. MEPs with specific policy specialisations, which are often acquired or enhanced through membership in the ECON, ENVI or LIBE committees, are more likely to emphasise economic, climate/environmental and immigration issues, respectively. We calculated the predicted probability of attention to these issues, with 95% CIs. For economic issues, the probability decreases from 12% for ECON committee members to 9% for nonmembers, although CIs slightly overlap. For climate/environmental issues, it moves from 8% for ENVI members to 5% for nonmembers, and for immigration, it decreases from 4% for LIBE members to 2% for nonmembers.

The results do not substantially change when introducing controls. Standing for re-election significantly increases MEPs' likelihood of discussing climate and environmental issues, while no significant effects are observed for the economy or immigration. Additionally, female MEPs focus more on immigration issues than their male counterparts. Finally, the type of tweet affects attention to policy issues: replies reduce attention across all three issues, while retweets/reposts increase it, taking posts/tweets as the reference category.

Robustness Checks

Several robustness checks on the sample and independent variables were conducted. Regarding the sample, several regression models were performed excluding the 10% MEPs tweeting the most ($N = 55,303$), excluding reposts/retweets ($N = 28,500$) and excluding MEPs from the United Kingdom ($N = 49,972$). Also, given the over-representation of tweets by MEPs from the Greens/EFA and the under-representation of those from ECR, we ran a separate analysis without MEPs from each of these groups. The results remain practically unaltered, implying that they are consistent regardless of the number of tweets from members of these groups. Regarding independent variables, when using either the traditional left–right or the EU position CHES scores as alternatives to the GAL-TAN score, the results do not change. We also checked whether there are significant differences between GAL and TAN parties (coded as < 3 and > 7 , respectively, on a 0–10 scale) within the LIBE committee on immigration as well as two other cultural issues: gender themes and human rights. Coding of the latter two issues was also based on a dictionary approach (see Table S5). Differences between the two groups for the three issues are statistically significant, suggesting the need to conduct related research at the committee level. We also run Models 1a and 2a on attention to economic issues using the mean score of unemployment and economic situation (Standard Eurobarometer 91) as an alternative measure of economic issue relevance at the domestic level. The results remained virtually unchanged. To assess the impact of the stability of issue relevance in the domestic public sphere on MEPs' attention to policy issues, we take the mean data from Eurobarometer waves 85, 87, 89 and 91 (2016–2019) for economy and immigration. Climate/environment was excluded due to the differing coding in the corresponding Eurobarometer waves. The effect on MEPs' attention to economy is weaker but statistically significant at $p < 0.1$, while no significant effect is observed for immigration. This suggests that MEPs' attention to policy issues is influenced by short-term domestic concerns. Finally, in order to take additional national electoral context considerations into account, we checked that a higher effective number of electoral

parties increases attention to immigration ($p < 0.1$) but has no effect on economic or climate/environmental issues. Overall, our robustness checks did not alter the core findings of our analysis.

III. Discussion and Conclusions

This study identifies key drivers of issue attention by MEPs during the 2019 EP election campaign. By analysing the X/Twitter content from MEPs in the weeks leading up to the EP election, it shows that attention to policy issues varies by specific issue. Economic issues received the most attention, followed by climate/environment and immigration issues. MEPs initially prioritised economic concerns, but over the campaign, they shifted their focus to climate/environment, a topic with a strong supranational dimension and mobilisation potential, as noted by Braun and Schäfer (2022). Migration received less attention, possibly reflecting MEPs' preference to avoid this polarising topic. Overall, the results contribute to recent research adopting a cross-issue approach (e.g., Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen 2020; Braun and Schäfer 2022).

Our findings show that the relevance of issues in the domestic public agenda of MEPs' countries and their individual policy expertise increased MEPs' attention to all three policy issues, while their party stance on the GAL–TAN dimension only affected climate/environmental issues. Our first result is that issue relevance in the domestic public agenda strongly influences MEPs' attention to policy issues during the EP campaign, reflecting the policy priorities in their home countries. Our results contribute to the ongoing discussion in the literature on issue saliency in EP elections. They engage with Braun and Schäfer's (2022) work on the impact of systemic issue saliency on electoral turnout. Unlike their study, we treat issue emphasis as a dependent variable, showing that the effect of the domestic agenda is more pronounced for climate/environment and immigration issues, while slightly less so for economic issues. Our findings do not entirely align with Abou-Chadi et al.'s (2020) idea that welfare issue saliency minimally affects parties' strategies. We demonstrate that the domestic saliency of economic issues significantly increased attention during the EP campaign.

Our findings demonstrate that MEPs' party stances on the sociocultural dimension influence attention to climate/environmental issues during the EP election, but not to economic or immigration issues. MEPs from GAL parties are more likely to emphasise climate/environmental issues than those from TAN parties. Our interpretation of the different effects of GAL–TAN on emphasis on economic, climate/environment and immigration issues is not straightforward. Regarding climate/environment, our findings align with the idea that GAL parties increase discussions on climate issues (Weko 2022). Indirectly, they are consistent with the idea that the success of green parties—typically aligned with GAL positions—leads other parties to de-emphasise green issues (Abou-Chadi 2016). In brief, green issues are primarily discussed by GAL parties, with limited engagement from TAN parties. This logic does not hold for immigration. One interpretation is that MEPs from TAN parties may seek to expand their appeal by focusing on less divisive issues related to national identity. Another interpretation is that radical right parties, positioned at the TAN end of the sociocultural dimension, lead other parties to emphasise immigration (Abou-Chadi 2016; Hutter and Kriesi 2021). Overall, our findings nuance previous research, suggesting that climate/environment and immigration receive

more attention from parties that ‘own’ them (Kristensen et al. 2023). They also engage with previous work on digital media and agenda setting identifying issue specificity by showing that parties with a clear stance on climate/environment enhance their responsiveness to public concerns on these issues (Gilardi et al. 2021).

Our results also contribute to research of legislators’ policy specialisation and social media campaigning by showing that MEPs who have acquired policy knowledge through their membership to specialised committees are also incentivised to enhance issue visibility. The findings align with recent work on the effect of individual specialisation on politicians’ issue attention (Peeters, Van Aelst, and Praet 2021). Finally, our results also show that MEPs standing for re-election have incentives to discuss climate/environmental issues, suggesting once again the specificity of green issues in European elections.

Our study has some limitations. By focusing on the three most relevant policy issues, it overlooks other issues that might be of critical importance at the national level. Relatedly, our study addresses national considerations succinctly and does not comprehensively analyse how the national context affects MEPs’ attention to policy issues. In addition, although the sample of MEPs is representative of the overall population, it does not include all MEPs, highlighting the need for further research covering the entire population. These studies could be complemented by others covering candidates, whether MEPs or not. Finally, by focusing on a single election, our study provides context-specific results but lacks a broader scope. Further research would benefit from exploring how national electoral contexts influence emphasis across various issues over multiple EP elections.

Our findings show that policy issues are relevant in the European elections and suggest that they will become structurally salient in European politics. By highlighting cross-issue variations, this study contributes to recent research adopting a cross-issue approach when studying European election campaigns. Future research could benefit from analysing how issues are framed by, for instance, discerning whether immigration adopts an inclusionary or restrictive approach. Extending the analysis to more issues and examining how emphasis evolves over time, across media types and from a multi-level perspective would help not only in understanding better issue salience in European elections but also in understanding the interconnectedness between digital campaigning and agenda setting at the EU level. Finally, our study has some normative implications. It may inform discussions on how MEPs engage with voters through digital communication, potentially shaping the public agenda. Additionally, by highlighting how MEPs emphasise issues important to Europeans, it provides insights into discussions on the electoral connection between the EU and citizens, as well as on the EU’s democratic responsiveness and representation.

Correspondence:

Nuria Font, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.
email: nuria.font@uab.es

References

- Abou-Chadi, T. 2016. "Niche Party Success and Mainstream Party Policy Shifts – How Green and Radical Right Parties Differ in Their Impact." *British Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 2: 417–436.
- Abou-Chadi, T., C. Green-Pedersen, and P. Mortensen. 2020. "Parties' Policy Adjustments in Response to Changes in Issue Saliency." *West European Politics* 43, no. 4: 749–771.
- Adam, S., and M. Maier. 2016. "Campaigning on or Downplaying European Union Integration? Explaining the Salience Parties Attach to EU Matters in European Parliamentary Election Campaigns." In *(Un)intended Consequences of European Parliamentary Elections*, edited by W. van der Brug and C. H. de Vreese, 148–170. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Afonso, A. 2015. "Choosing Whom to Betray: Populist Right-Wing Parties, Welfare State Reforms and the Trade-Off Between Office and Votes." *European Political Science Review* 7, no. 2: 271–292.
- Alonso-Muñoz, L., and A. Casero-Ripollés. 2018. "Political Agenda on Twitter During the 2016 Spanish Elections: Issues, Strategies, and Users' Responses." *Communications Society* 31, no. 3: 7–23.
- Bakker, R., L. Hooghe, S. Jolly, et al. 2020. '2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey'. Version 2019.1. Available on Chesdata.Eu. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina.
- Barberá, P., A. Casas, J. Nagler, et al. 2019. "Who Leads? Who Follows? Measuring Issue Attention and Agenda Setting by Legislators and the Mass Public Using Social Media Data." *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 4: 883–901. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055419000352>.
- Bartle, J., and S. Laycock. 2012. "Telling More Than They Can Know? Does the Most Important Issue Really Reveal What Is Most Important to Voters?" *Electoral Studies* 31, no. 4: 679–688.
- Beach, D., K. Hansen, and M. Larsen. 2018. "How Campaigns Enhance European Issues Voting During European Parliament Elections." *Political Science Research and Methods* 6, no. 4: 791–808.
- Bentivegna, S., R. Marchetti, and A. Stanziano. 2022. "The Agenda-Building Power of Facebook and Twitter. The Case of the 2018 Italian General Election." In *Electoral Campaigns, Media, and the New World of Digital Politics. E-Book*, edited by D. Taras and R. Davis. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.12013603>.
- Braun, D. 2021. "The Europeaness of the 2019 EP Elections and the Mobilizing Power of European Issues." *Politics* 41, no. 4: 451–466.
- Braun, D., and C. Schäfer. 2022. "Issues That Mobilize Europe. The Role of Key Policy Issues for Voter Turnout in the 2019', European Parliament Election." *European Union Politics* 3, no. 1: 120–140.
- Budge, I., and D. J. Farlie. 1983. *Explaining and Predicting Elections: Issue Effects and Party Strategies in Twenty-Three Democracies*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Buzogány, A., and S. Četković. 2021. "Fractionalized but Ambitious? Voting on Energy and Climate Policy in the European Parliament." *Journal of European Public Policy* 28, no. 7: 1038–1056.
- Chiru, M. 2020. "Loyal Soldiers or Seasoned Leaders? The Selection of Committee Chairs in the European Parliament." *Journal of European Public Policy* 27, no. 4: 612–629.
- Chiru, M. 2024. "Legislative Performance and the Electoral Connection in European Parliament Elections." *European Journal of Political Research* 63, no. 2: 664–681.
- Costello, R., D. Toshkov, B. Bos, and A. Krouwel. 2021. "Congruence Between Voters and Parties: The Role of Party-Level Issue Salience." *European Journal of Political Research* 60, no. 1: 92–113.

- Daniel, W., L. Obholzer, and S. Hurka. 2019. "Static and Dynamic Incentives for Twitter Usage in the European Parliament." *Party Politics* 25, no. 6: 771–781.
- Daniel, W. T., E. Frelin, M. V. Robert, and L. Rowley-Abel. 2024. "Individual Drivers of Toxicity in Radical Right-Wing Populist Legislative Campaigns." *West European Politics* 1–28: 590–617. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2024.2311040>.
- Daniel, W. T., and S. Thierse. 2022. "Individual Amending Activity in the European Parliament Committee System." *Journal of European Integration* 44, no. 4: 531–550.
- Däubler, T., and S. Hix. 2018. "Ballot Structure, List Flexibility and Policy Representation." *Journal of European Public Policy* 25, no. 12: 1798–1816.
- De Sio, L., and T. Weber. 2014. "Issue Yield: A Model of Party Strategy in Multidimensional Space." *American Political Science Review* 108, no. 4: 870–885.
- De Vries, C. E. 2018. *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Döring, H. and P. Manow. 2019. "Parliaments and Governments Database (ParlGov): Information on Parties, Elections and Cabinets in Modern Democracies. Development Version."
- Evans, H. K., and J. H. Clark. 2016. "'You Tweet Like a Girl!': How Female Candidates Campaign on Twitter." *American Politics Research* 44, no. 2: 326–352.
- Fazekas, Z., S. Adrian Popa, H. Schmitt, P. Barberá, and Y. Theocharis. 2021. "Elite-Public Interaction on Twitter: EU Issue Expansion in the Campaign." *European Journal of Political Research* 60, no. 2: 376–396.
- Font, N. 2023. "Party Position, Electoral Incentives, and Attention to European Union Issues in the 2019 European Parliament Election." *Party Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688231224059>.
- Giger, N., and Z. Lefkofridi. 2014. "Salience-Based Congruence Between Parties & Their Voters: The Swiss Case." *Swiss Political Science Review* 20: 287–304.
- Gilardi, F., T. Gessler, M. Kubli, and S. Müller. 2021. "Social Media and Political Agenda Setting." *Political Communication* 39, no. 1: 39–60.
- Grande, E., T. Schwarzbözl, and M. Fatke. 2019. "Politicizing Immigration in Western Europe." *Journal of European Public Policy* 26, no. 10: 1444–1463.
- Green-Pedersen, C. 2007. "The Growing Importance of Issue Competition: The Changing Nature of Party Competition in Western Europe." *Political Studies* 55: 607–628.
- Green-Pedersen, C., and S. Otjes. 2019. "A Hot Topic? Immigration on the Agenda in Western Europe." *Party Politics* 25, no. 3: 424–434.
- Gunderson, J. R. 2023. "Determining Decidability: How Issue Salience Divergence Structures Party Systems and Affects Citizens." *European Journal of Political Research* 63: 236–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12591>.
- Hernández, E., and H. Kriesi. 2016. "The Electoral Consequences of the Financial and Economic Crisis." *European Journal of Political Research* 55, no. 2: 203–224.
- Hix, S., and B. Høyland. 2013. "Empowerment of the European Parliament." *Annual Review of Political Science* 16: 171–189.
- Hix, S., and M. Marsh. 2007. "Punishment or Protest? Understanding European Parliament Elections." *Journal of Politics* 69, no. 2: 495–510.
- Hobolt, S. B., and C. E. de Vries. 2016. "Turning Against the Union? The Impact of the Crisis on the Eurosceptic Vote in the 2014 European Parliament Elections." *Electoral Studies* 44: 504–514.
- Hooghe, L., and G. Marks. 2018. "Cleavage Theory Meets Europe's Crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the Transnational Cleavage." *Journal of European Public Policy* 25, no. 1: 109–135.
- Hutter, S., and H. Kriesi. 2019. "Politicizing Europe in Times of Crisis." *Journal of European Public Policy* 26, no. 7: 996–1017.

- Hutter, S., and H. Kriesi. 2021. "Politicising Immigration in Times of Crisis." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48, no. 2: 341–365.
- Ivanusch, C. 2024. "Where Do Parties Talk About What? Party Issue Salience Across Communication Channels." *West European Politics* 48: 618–644. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2024.2322234>.
- Ivassflaten, E. 2005. "The Vulnerable Populist Right Parties." *European Journal of Political Research* 44, no. 3: 465–492.
- Jones, B. D., and F. R. Baumgartner. 2004. "Representation and Agenda Setting." *Policy Studies Journal* 32, no. 1: 1–24.
- Jungherr, A., G. Rivero, and D. Gayo-Avello. 2020. "The Rise of Digital Media and the Retooling of Politics." In *Retooling Politics: How Digital Media Are Shaping Democracy*, 1–29. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Klüver, H., and J. J. Spoon. 2016. "Who Responds? Voters, Parties and Issue Attention." *British Journal of Political Science* 46: 633–654.
- Koedam, J. 2021. "Avoidance, Ambiguity, Alternation: Position Blurring Strategies in Multidimensional Party Competition." *European Union Politics* 22, no. 4: 655–675.
- Krehbiel, K. 1991. *Information and Legislative Organization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Kristensen, T. A., C. Green-Pedersen, P. B. Mortensen, and H. Bech Seeberg. 2023. "Avoiding or Engaging Problems? Issue Ownership, Problem Indicators, and Party Issue Competition." *Journal of European Public Policy* 30, no. 12: 2854–2885. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2022.2135754>.
- Lewis-Beck, M. S., and M. Stegmaier. 2000. "Economic Determinants of Electoral Outcomes." *Annual Review of Political Science* 3, no. 1: 183–219.
- Lockwood, M. 2018. "Right-Wing Populism and the Climate Change Agenda: Exploring the Linkages." *Environmental Politics* 27, no. 4: 7122–7732.
- Lorenzo Rodríguez, J., and A. Garmendia Madariaga. 2016. "Going Public Against Institutional Constraints? Analyzing the Online Presence Intensity of 2014 European Parliament Election Candidates." *European Union Politics* 17, no. 2: 303–323.
- Maggini, N., L. De Sio, D. Garzia, and A. H. Trechsel. 2019. "Impact of Issues on Party Performance." In *The European Parliament Elections of 2019*, edited by L. De Sio, M. N. Franklin, and L. Russo. Rome: LUISS University Press.
- March, L., and C. Mudde. 2005. "What's Left of the Radical Left? The European Radical Left After 1989: Decline and Mutation." *Comparative European Politics* 3: 23–49.
- McCright, A. M., R. E. Dunlap, and S. T. Marquart-Pyatt. 2016. "Political Ideology and Views About Climate Change in the European Union." *Environmental Politics* 25, no. 2: 338–358.
- Mudde, C. 2013. "Three Decades of Populist Radical Right Parties in Western Europe: So What?" *European Journal of Political Research* 52, no. 1: 1–19.
- Neundorff, A., and J. Adams. 2018. "The Micro-Foundations of Party Competition and Issue Ownership: The Reciprocal Effects of Citizens' Issue Salience and Party Attachments." *British Journal of Political Science* 48: 385–406.
- Nulty, P. Y., S. A. Theocharis, O. P. Poppa, and K. Benoit. 2016. "Social Media and Political Communication in the 2014 Elections to the European Parliament." *Electoral Studies* 44: 429–444.
- Obholzer, L., and W. T. Daniel. 2016. "An Online Electoral Connection? How Electoral Systems Condition Representatives' Social Media Use." *European Union Politics* 17, no. 3: 387–407.
- Peeters, J., P. Van Aelst, and S. Praet. 2021. "Party Ownership or Individual Specialization? A Comparison of Politicians' Individual Issue Attention Across Three Different Agendas." *Party Politics* 27, no. 4: 692–703. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068819881639>.
- Petrocik, J. R. 1996. "Issue Ownership in Presidential Elections, With a 1980 Case Study." *American Journal of Political Science* 40: 825–850.

- Polk, J., J. Rovny, R. Bakker, et al. 2017. "Explaining the Salience of Anti-Elitism and Reducing Political Corruption for Political Parties in Europe With the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey Data." *Research & Politics* 4: 1–9.
- Reher, S. 2014. "The Effect of Congruence in Policy Priorities on Electoral Participation." *Electoral Studies* 36: 158–172.
- Romeijn, J. 2020. "Do Political Parties Listen to the (Ir) Public? Public Opinion–Party Linkage on Specific Policy Issues." *Party Politics* 26, no. 4: 426–436.
- Schwörer, J. 2024. "Mainstream Parties and Global Warming: What Determines Parties' Engagement in Climate Protection?" *European Journal of Political Research* 63, no. 1: 303–325.
- Stier, S., C. Froio, and W. J. Schünemann. 2021. "Going Transnational? Candidates' Transnational Linkages on Twitter During the 2019 European Parliament Elections." *West European Politics* 44, no. 7: 1455–1481.
- Treib, O. 2020. "Euroscepticism Is Here to Stay: What Cleavage Theory Can Teach Us About the 2019 European Parliament Elections." *Journal of European Public Policy* 28, no. 2: 174–189.
- van der Brug, W., K. Gattermann, and K. H. de Vreese. 2022. "Electoral Responses to the Increased Contestation Over European Integration. The European Elections of 2019 and Beyond." *European Union Politics* 23, no. 1: 3–20.
- Vasilopoulou, S., and K. Gattermann. 2021. "Does Politicization Matter for EU Representation? A Comparison of Four European Parliament Elections." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 59, no. 3: 661–678.
- Weko, S. 2022. "Communitarians, Cosmopolitans, and Climate Change: Why Identity Matters for EU Climate and Energy Policy." *Journal of European Public Policy* 29, no. 7: 1072–1091.
- Yordanova, N. 2009. "The Rationale Behind Committee Assignment in the European Parliament: Distributive, Informational and Partisan Perspectives." *European Union Politics* 10, no. 2: 253–280.

Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Figure S1. Distribution of MEPs by country (whole EP and sample) (%).

Figure S2. Distribution of MEPs by EPG (whole EP and sample) (%).

Table S1. Keywords contained in the dictionaries to code the dependent variables.

Table S2. Hashtags contained in the dictionaries to code the dependent variables.

Figure S3. Attention to policy issues by week.

Figure S4. Attention to economic, climate/environment and immigration issues, by country (mean centred).

Table S4. Descriptive statistics of the dependent, independent, and control variables.

Table S5. Keywords contained in the dictionaries to code gender issues and human rights.