European Blame Games?

The Politicization of the Eurozone Crisis in Germany, Greece and Spain between 2009 and 2016

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CONTENT

ABSTRACT

From 2009 to 2016, the Eurozone Crisis fueled contentious debates over European issues and across European borders. With the blame game that followed the crisis outbreak, the politicization of Eu-ropean affairs seemed to have entered a new stage. Using quantitative primary data obtained from a standardized content analysis of newspaper coverage, this dissertation analyses the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis in public debates about responsibility in Germany, Greece and Spain between 2009 and 2016. How does the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis differ across countries? How can these differences be explained?

The first argument is that in times of crisis, politicization patterns depend on how collective actors engage in the public attribution of responsibility, especially of blame. Understanding the rules of the blame game at the micro level is crucial for explaining the macro patterns in which politicization unfolds. The second argument is that these strategies are conditioned by political opportunities, which emerge from the institutional characteristics of the political system and the political and economic impact of the Eurozone Crisis. Hence, politicization patterns change with country-specific contexts that influence the rules of the blame game.

The focus on responsibility attributions offers a new and comprehensive actor perspective on politicization. Moreover, the dissertation proposes a differentiated conceptualization which distinguishes intensity and shape of politicization, which is specified as the extent to which the politicization pattern is Europeanized or domesticized. This conceptualization grasps country differences in politicization patterns and it allows the direction of political conflicts to be analysed. The combination of the micro perspective of responsibility attributions and the macro perspective on political opportunities contributes to discussions about driving forces of politicization and on intermediary factors that condition the way political conflicts over Europe play out in public debates. Finally, the dissertation provides a detailed analysis of politicization processes in the Eurozone Crisis, covering the entire period from 2009 until 2016. In contrast to many existing studies, the analysis includes Greece and Spain as prominent Southern European debtor countries as well as Germany, as the most prominent case at the other end of the crisis continuum.

The comparative analysis reveals distinct patterns of politicization. In Germany, the low direct impact of the crisis and the consensual tradition led to a low politicization intensity. Given Germany's core role in the crisis management, politicization dynamics show a strong European dimension, but German actors largely refrain from joining European blame games. Rather, politicization takes the form of 'remote conflicts' in which the crisis appears as a problem of debtor states. In Greece, the drastic crisis impact and the closed political system triggered a very intense politicization. However, in

contrast to the theoretical expectation that blame follows the authority transfer to the EU and the 'troika' in the Eurozone Crisis, politicization is mainly driven by domestic competition rather than by European blame games. The crisis reinforced an adversarial political culture and European topics were absorbed into domestic conflict dynamics. Located between these poles, Spain shows a moderate intensity, domesticized politicization pattern. At least in the early years of the crisis, social dialogue and a comparatively stable political system contained an excessive politicization. Because of a pro-European consensus, a domestic crisis of political legitimacy and corruptions scandals, which overshadowed the European crisis dimension, blame concentrates on domestic political actors.

The attribution of responsibility approach to politicization helps to make sense of the varying intensity and the direction of conflicts in the Eurozone Crisis. The results underline the importance of domestic opportunity structures and political traditions for conflicts over Europe and they show that against the expectations, the relationship between the politicization of European affairs and the Europeanization of public spheres is negative rather than positive. Furthermore, it is shown that politicization intensity and the domestic direction of conflict is driven by the political opposition. Blame shifting to Europe, instead, emanates from governments. All in all, however, the study contradicts expectations of a European blame game between creditor and debtor states and rather suggests that the crisis has not fundamentally reshaped European conflict dynamics.

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

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To err is human. To blame someone else is politics
Hubert H. Humphrey

Ninety per cent of politics is deciding whom to blame
Meg Greenfield

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Blame Game Begins

On 19 October 2009, the Eurogroup finance ministers gathered in Luxembourg for one of their regular meetings. There was a new face among them: only 12 days before, Giorgos Papakonstantinou was appointed Greek finance minister of the recently elected PASOK government. His appearance in Luxembourg left a long-lasting impression. To the dismay of his European colleagues, Papakonstantinou announced that his country's budget deficit was more than three times higher than previously declared. Rather than 3.7 per cent, it was adjusted to an unprecedented 12.5 per cent of Greek GDP. What followed in the months and years to come was an economic, political and social crisis that brought Greece and the Eurozone to the edge of the abyss.

What also followed was an immediate and collective quest for responsibility all across the Eurozone. While the crisis was still unfolding and its consequences not yet clear, the drama of the blame game began: Questions of *Who caused the crisis?* and *Who is to blame for its consequences?* were omnipresent and highly disputed. The new Greek government blamed its conservative predecessors for falsifying statistics. Politicians from all over Europe blamed the entire Greek establishment for 'overspending', and Eurostat was blamed for a lack of institutional control. Soon, the sense of the coming crisis extended beyond Greece; scholars and politicians alike started to blame the Euro's founding fathers for the Monetary Union's flawed institutional design, and others, again, blamed financial institutions, banks and the real estate sector for causing the mess of the global financial crisis in the first place.

Crises spread collective uncertainty and they question taken-for-granted routines. This uncertainty requires answers and explanations and in times of crisis "to explain is to blame" (Bovens and t'Hart 1996, p. 129). "When crises occur, something or somebody must be blamed – for causing the crisis, failing to prevent it, or inadequately responding to it" (Boin et al. 2010, p. 706). The public blame game that follows the outbreak of the crisis is what Boin and t'Hart (2001) called the "crisis after the crisis" – a phase characterized by heated debates, intense polarization and public conflicts. In the Eurozone Crisis, these contentious European debates over responsibility pointed to what scholars labelled the *politicization of European affairs* (Hooghe and Marks 2009; de Wilde and Zürn 2012; Hutter et al. 2016b).

1.2 Blame and the Politicization of European Affairs

Politicization describes a societal process of transforming formerly uncontested matters into objects of public controversy. It is a compound of three sub-processes: a) an increasing salience of the issue in public debates; b) an expansion of these debates beyond a narrow circle of executive actors; and c) a process of polarization and conflict among these actors (Hutter et al. 2016b).

In the history of European integration, public attention towards and conflicts surrounding Europe have been the exception rather than the norm. European affairs have not always been as closely followed and intensively discussed as in recent years. Indeed, European integration was for a long time neglected and uncontested by the population. European integration was a "sleeping giant" (van der Eijk and Franklin 2004) with a high but as yet unexploited potential for political mobilization.

The Eurozone Crisis has further challenged this picture. The crisis revealed the growing entanglement of European societies and it contributed to an unprecedented public awareness of European politics and increasing conflicts over European integration. During the Eurozone Crisis, Europe appeared interconnected as never before. The threat of contagion and 'domino effects' became blatant symbols of these European interdependencies. Lay people all over Europe started following parliamentary debates about pension policies in Greece, Spain or elsewhere. The dramatic meetings of the Eurozone finance ministers were accompanied by live tickers all over the continent and the sense of European conflict was omnipresent. In this conflictual scenario, the attribution of responsibility was a particularly visible dimension of public debates. The question of *Who is to blame?* was ubiquitous and discussed intensively in the media and on the streets of European cities. Dynamics of blame shifting[1] between creditor and debtor countries reflected the economic divide in the Eurozone and stereotypes were played out across the media; images of the 'lazy Greek' and the 'ruthless German' were paradigmatic for the antagonism between the two countries and their fundamentally different positions in the crisis scenario.

Scholars argued that this intensification of European conflicts during the crisis years marked the latest peak and a new quality in the politicization of European affairs (Rauh and Zürn 2014; Statham and Trenz 2015; Leupold 2016) and it left no doubt about the ultimate end of the so-called 'permissive

[1] In this study, blame shifting describes the publicly articulated attribution of responsibility for what is perceived as negative outcomes to another actor. Blame shifting and blaming are used interchangeably. The term blame game describes a situation in which different actors attribute blame to each other for a problem or failure. Finally, blame avoidance behaviour describes strategic activities conducted in order to protect one's reputation in the face of potentially blame-attracting situations (Hinterleitner and Sager 2017, 587).

consensus'.[2] As Risse (2014a) has put it, with the Eurozone Crisis, "Politics is back" in Europe.

There is more to this dramatic episode in European integration that turns it into a relevant object of empirical inquiry. Crises are critical junctures. The destabilization of established rules and conventional wisdoms in times of crisis brings a potential for change and renewal. Crises bring to the fore new ideas, new interpretations and alternative codes of practice in politics and beyond. They are "crystallization points" (Heidenreich 2014, p. 26, translated by the author) for the emergence of cleavages and for lasting changes within the social, political and economic spheres. And indeed, throughout the crisis years, the contours of European (monetary) integration profoundly changed. The outbreak of the Eurozone Crisis and the following blame game questioned the basic idea of a European community. The logic of European decision-making changed from a predominantly consensual and diplomatic mode to open conflicts, threats and the blunt exertion of pressure. Established logics of European leadership were removed and, in particular, Germany took centre stage as a quasi-hegemon dictating austerity and market liberalization. The institutional structure of the Monetary Union experienced drastic changes and despite the constraints of economic hardship, political turmoil and popular resistance, the Eurozone Crisis "has produced major new steps of technocratic supranational integration" (Schimmelfennig 2014, p. 321). Instruments such as the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) have fostered financial integration, European fiscal regulation was continuously strengthened[3], and supranational measures such as the European Banking Authority can be seen as steps towards a European banking union. In national politics, many of these measures have been passed under conditions of emergency politics, including a systematic strengthening of executive powers (White 2014).

In the political arena and beyond, the crisis reinforced economic and cultural cleavages on European integration. The populist vision of those who stress national identity, sovereignty and closed borders has gained ground in its competition with the cosmopolitan view of those who advocate European solidarity and a deepening of supranational authority (Kriesi and Pappas 2015). The Eurozone Crisis was followed by a rise of radical parties from the left and right, it shook party systems and destabilized political systems throughout the Eurozone (Hutter and Kriesi 2019a). It was answered by massive protests (Kriesi et al. 2020) and fostered a general decline in trust in political institutions, including Euroscepticism (Nicoli 2017; de Wilde 2021). And while today the Eurozone Crisis hardly remains

[2] The notion of the "permissive consensus" refers to a time when EU policy-making was said to be largely uncontested as long as it promised to increase economic welfare (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970; Down and Wilson 2008). For politicization scholars, this period was followed by the "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe and Marks 2009) when European integration stopped being an exclusive matter of elites and became the object of larger societal conflicts over national sovereignty, identity or financial redistribution.

[3] As a set of European legislative measures, the so-called 'sixpack' and 'two pack' and the Fiscal Stability Treaty introduced a stricter version of the Stability and Growth Pact.

an issue of public debate, the phase of intense conflicts over European affairs that it had introduced is far from over. Looking back more than ten years after its outbreak, the Eurozone Crisis paved the way for fundamental conflicts in and over European affairs that were omnipresent during the heights of the so-called 'refugee crisis' and that still structure European politics today.

1.3 Research Questions and Main Argument

The Eurozone Crisis and its contestation deserve undivided academic attention. The arena in which these conflicts become visible for a broader audience are public debates. It is here, where responsibility is disputed, where collective choices are laid out, where consequences are discussed and where the legitimacy of public actors is questioned and affirmed. In short, to understand the nature of political conflicts in the Eurozone Crisis requires understanding its representation in public debates.

This dissertation analyses the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis in public debates about responsibility in Greece, Spain and Germany between 2009 and 2016. Using quantitative primary data[4] obtained from a standardized content analysis of newspaper coverage, the dissertation seeks to answer the following research questions: How does the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis unfold? How do politicization patterns differ across countries? How can these differences be explained?

According to a core argument in the literature, the politicization of European affairs is ultimately a consequence of the gradual transfer of authority to supranational institutions (Hooghe and Marks 2009; de Wilde and Zürn 2012). The more decision-making power shifts to the European level, the more attention towards and conflict around European affairs arise. By remaining on this explanatory macro level, however, this approach treats politicization as a quasi-automatic process (Hurrelmann et al. 2015) and little consideration is given to the fact that politicization is the aggregate outcome of the interaction between actors in the public realm. This dissertation adds to more recent strands in politicization research that go "beyond authority transfer" to explain politicization dynamics (de Wilde et al. 2016; Grande and Hutter 2016a; Hutter et al. 2016b). While the comparative research design of this study is at the systemic macro level, for an understanding of the different patterns of politicization, a comprehensive theoretical micro perspective on collective actor behaviour is needed. I propose the public attribution of responsibility as this perspective. In times of crisis, the public attribution of responsibility is the backbone of politicization processes in the public sphere. Politicization is about public conflict, and in times of crisis, public conflict is about responsibility and about

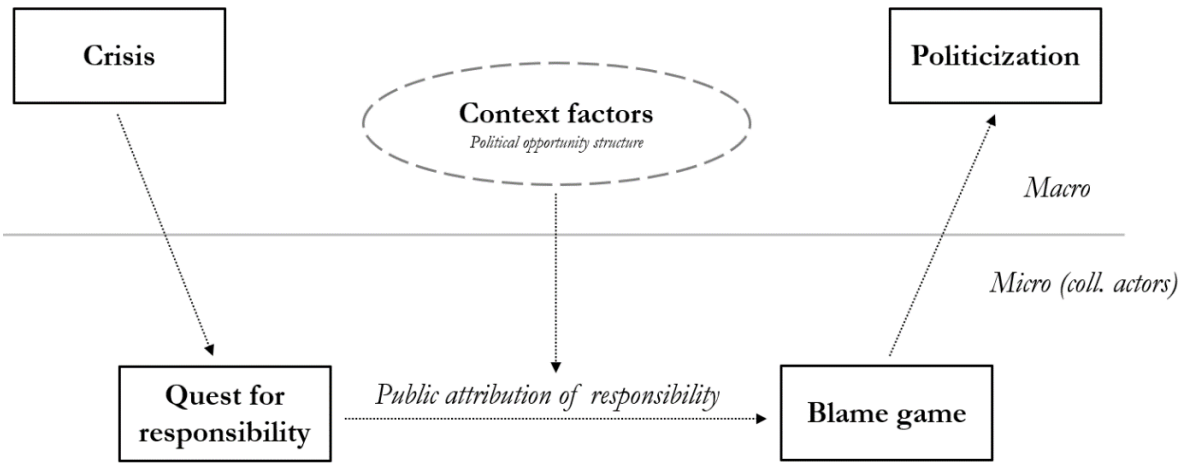
[4] The data for Greece and Germany result from the Greek-German research project GGCRISI ('The Greeks, the Germans and the Crisis') under the direction of Jochen Roose (Freie Universität Berlin) and Maria Kousis (University of Crete). As a member of the research team, the author contributed to the development of the content analytical method (see section 7.1) and to the data collection. The coding of Spanish newspaper articles was conducted by student assistants and the author.

who to put the blame on. With the attribution of responsibility perspective, politicization becomes theoretically and empirically tangible at the micro level.[5] Intensity and shape of politicization depend on the way in which political actors engage in the public attribution of responsibility, and most importantly, in the public blame game.

Recently, scholars have shown that politicization patterns are not homogenous but vary across countries (de Wilde et al. 2016; Hutter et al. 2016b; Hutter and Kriesi 2019b; Pircher and Farjam 2021). To explain this variation, the micro perspective on actor behaviour is not enough. In a second argument, I claim that actor strategies in the public sphere are conditioned by contextual factors at the macro level. More specifically, political opportunity structures influence the public attribution of responsibility. Hence, intensity and shape of politicization change with country-specific context factors that change the rules and the direction of the public blame game. Overall, I argue that to understand and explain politicization patterns in the Eurozone Crisis, one needs to consider strategies of responsibility attribution in the public sphere and context factors that influence these strategies.

Figure 1 summarizes the main argument of this dissertation. In the following section, I locate this argument in the academic field and establish why answering the research questions promises relevant contributions to distinct sets of literature.

Figure 1: Main Argument



1.4 Location in the Academic Field

This dissertation draws on distinct sets of literature: Firstly, the study is located in the political sociology of European integration (e.g. Lahusen 2019). More specifically and most importantly, it is inspired and adds to the literature on the politicization of and political conflict over European affairs

[5] While in most sociological studies, the label micro refers to individuals, here it refers to collective actors.

(e.g. Hutter et al. 2016b), as well as to studies on the Europeanization of public spheres (e.g. Koopmans and Statham 2010a).

Secondly, the dissertation addresses the literature on responsibility attributions (e.g. Gerhards et al. 2007; Hobolt and Tilley 2014) and blame avoidance behaviour (BAB) (Weaver 1986). This perspective serves a double function: The actor-centred perspective on responsibility attributions helps to theorize actor behaviour in order to understand and explain politicization dynamics in the public sphere. Moreover, and following from that, politicization is conceptualized, operationalized and empirically analysed with recourse to responsibility attributions. This twofold responsibility perspective on politicization enriches not only politicization research itself but also the study of responsibility attributions in the European multi-level system, in times of crisis and from a comparative perspective.

In addition to the micro perspective on actor behaviour, politicization patterns are explained with recourse to the macro perspective of the political opportunity approach, which originates in a third field of literature, namely social movement studies (e.g. McAdam et al. 1996). Thus, while touching upon at least these three literature fields, the empirical and theoretical contributions primarily relate to the first two fields, politicization research and the literature on responsibility attributions. I focus on these two strands in the following and in the review sections 3.1 and 3.2.

1.5 Contributions to the Literature

This section briefly summarizes contributions in the field of politicization research, before it then turns to the field of responsibility attributions and finally, to the more general relevance of the research beyond these two specific fields of literature. The foremost contribution, however, results from the theoretical merger of both mentioned perspectives.

1.5.1 An Attribution of Responsibility Approach to Politicization

The proposed analysis of politicization from the perspective of responsibility attributions provides a new angle for the study of politicization. It offers a comprehensive theory on actor behaviour and, as such, it further advances discussions about driving forces of politicization. And while in many existing studies, the attribution of blame is mentioned as relevant, it is hardly ever theorized. I argue that in times of crisis, when the quest for responsibility is pressing and blame shifting pervasive, insights from attribution theory are crucial to understanding conflict dynamics and politicization patterns in the public sphere. Politics and politicization in times of crisis are about causality and accountability; and for political actors in the public sphere, crisis communication is structured by the rules of the blame game.

Moreover, the potential of the attribution of responsibility perspective becomes evident in

conceptualization of polarization. Empirical politicization research mainly emphasizes programmatic preferences while perspectives on direct actor relations are rare (Rittberger et al. 2017, p. 910). Instead of issue positions or ideological distance, the attribution of responsibility perspective suggests an operationalization of polarization in terms of public blame games.

Further contributions to the politicization literature result from the research question and can be divided into conceptual (1.5.2), comparative/explanatory (1.5.3) and empirical contributions (1.5.4).

1.5.2 Unpacking the Concept of Politicization

In early politicization research, politicization was often treated as a linear phenomenon and forced into a dichotomous framework in which it is either present or absent, high or low. As a consequence, differences in the intensity and shape of politicization patterns across countries often went unnoticed (Hurrelmann et al. 2015). This research adds to more recent discussions about "differentiated politicization" (de Wilde and Lord 2016) or "punctuated politicization" (Grande and Kriesi 2016, p. 279). In one of the most dramatic crises in the history of European integration, the question is not whether the Eurozone Crisis has led to politicization but rather in what different ways. I develop a differentiated conceptualization of politicization which accounts for its multifaceted nature and which allows a systematic comparison of politicization patterns on its sub-processes, salience, participation and polarization. On each of those, I propose a distinction of intensity and shape. While intensity describes the quantifiable degree of the respective process, shape offers a more substantial perspective on the issue framing (salience), the actor composition (participation) and the direction of political conflict (polarization) in public debates. This distinction of the politicization shape allows the concept of Europeanization to be integrated into the politicization framework. In the literature, both concepts are often used synonymously but the politicization of European affairs does not necessarily imply a Europeanization of public sphere conflicts, or vice versa (Risse 2014b, pp. 144–145). Integrating both concepts, I specify shape as the extent to which the politicization pattern is Europeanized or domesticized in its different sub-processes. It is an open empirical question at what territorial level politicisation takes place and in how far the Eurozone Crisis has been debated in Europeanised or in domesticized constellations. Thus, the research also adds to discussions about the Europeanization of public spheres that are dealt with in political sociology and communication studies.

Overall, this conceptualization challenges the understanding of politicization as a one-dimensional phenomenon, and thus the dissertation takes on the task to "unpack the concept of politicisation" (de Wilde and Lord 2016, p. 150). This nuanced perspective is necessary for an assessment of whether the Eurozone Crisis has led to a new quality in the politicization of European affairs.

1.5.3 Explaining Country Differences in Politicization Patterns

Apart from the theoretical merger with the attribution of responsibility perspective, the comparative dimension of the central research question points to a second theoretical contribution to the field of politicization studies. The argument that politicization patterns change across countries raises the central question of how these differences can be explained. The authority transfer argument does not help to explain differences. So far, systematic explanations for these divergent patterns are still underdeveloped (de Wilde et al. 2016; Hutter et al. 2016b). I contribute to recent discussions on intermediary factors that "condition the way political conflicts over Europe play out in public debates" (Grande and Hutter 2016a, p. 24) by arguing that actor strategies of attributing responsibility at the micro level are conditioned by political opportunity structures at the macro level.

1.5.4 Empirical Analysis of Politicization Dynamics in the Eurozone Crisis

Assuming that it follows the expansion of supranational competences, scholars expect a steady increase in the politicization of European affairs (Rauh and Zürn 2014). Since strengthened fiscal supervision and the establishment of new European institutions have further shifted authority to Brussels (Schimmelfennig 2014), the Eurozone Crisis should foster this trend. However, evidence about politicisation dynamics in the Eurozone Crisis is still inconclusive. It remains unclear whether and how the crisis is indeed a "game changer" (Leupold 2016) in the politicization of European affairs or in how far the crisis has "introduced a qualitative shift of politicization" (Statham and Trenz 2015, p. 303). Moreover, politicization studies tend to focus on Western European member states and even studies on politicization dynamics during the Eurozone Crisis rarely cover Southern European countries. Furthermore, most existing studies on politicization dynamics in the Eurozone Crisis focus on the first years of the crisis which misses the final, dramatic episode after the election of the Syriza government in Greece in January 2015. Responding to these empirical blind spots, this dissertation provides a detailed empirical analysis of politicization dynamics throughout the entire course of the crisis from October 2009 until March 2016, covering Greece and Spain as two of the most prominent cases among the Southern European debtor countries and Germany, as the most prominent case at the other end of the crisis continuum. As such, the analysis allows a systematic comparison of politicization patterns across countries and over time. This includes the question of the extent to which the divide between creditor and debtor states in the Eurozone Crisis is visible in public blame games. It remains to be seen whether the crisis is indeed portrayed "as a question of conflict between states – Greece versus Germany" as predicted by de Wilde and Lord (2016, p. 151). And against a lumping together of the Southern European 'crisis countries', the inclusion of Spain allows a thorough investigation of politicization patterns across two of these two representatives on the debtor side.

While conceiving of politicization as an empirical phenomenon from the outset, the analysis allows the assessment of normative perspectives on the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis. By definition, the concept of crisis implies different possible scenarios and future developments. Supporters of a crisis as opportunity-thesis (Habermas 2012; Risse 2014c) emphasized potentially positive implications; cross-national debate and conflict over European issues are seen as steps towards the normalization of European politics, and Europeanized crisis debates across borders potentially foster a sense of European belonging (Statham and Trenz 2015; Zürn 2016). The pessimistic perspective underlined the re-emergence of nationalism, growing Euroscepticism and the formation of a north-south division in Europe (Streeck 2013, p. 237).

1.5.5 A Standardized Analysis of Responsibility Debates

Beyond contributions to the field of politicization studies, the research adds to the literature on responsibility attributions, blame avoidance and blame shifting. In a literature review on studies of blame avoidance, Wenzelburger and Hörisch (2016, p. 160) summarize that most empirical research in this area is based on qualitative case studies, while standardized analyses are largely missing. Using Discursive Actor Attribution Analysis, the dissertation adds a standardized, quantitative analysis of public debates about responsibility to the study of blame shifting and the more general discussions on the attribution of responsibility in political communication.

1.5.6 Understanding Responsibility Attributions in Europe

This research contributes to the empirical literature on responsibility attributions and blame shifting in European policy fields in general and in the Eurozone Crisis in particular. This perspective on public debates has rarely been the object of analysis in European studies. "[W]hile it is generally assumed that the EU facilitates blame shifting and blame avoidance by politicians, we have very little evidence of how [they] actually behave" (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, p. 104). An exception is the referenced work by Hobolt and Tilley, some more recent studies (Rittberger et al. 2017; Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020; Sommer 2020) and the pioneering work by Gerhards, Roose and Offerhaus (Gerhards et al. 2007; Gerhards et al. 2009; Gerhards et al. 2013). Gerhards et al., however, focus on the public attribution of responsibility in EU policy fields in times of routine politics but – to quote Hobolt and Tilley (2014, p. 104) once more – "there is currently little work that examines […] how European integration facilitate blame avoidance *in times of crisis"* [italics added]. This dissertation provides empirical evidence for attribution practices in a European crisis condition. Given its inherently European character, including European crisis management and the strong interference of European actors in domestic politics, the Eurozone Crisis is a paradigmatic case to study European blame games. Finally, comparative research designs have only rarely been applied to the analysis of blame

shifting, in general and in European policy fields (Hinterleitner and Sager 2015). Hence, comparing and explaining attribution patterns across countries promises useful insights for the literature on responsibility attributions.

1.5.7 Understanding Public Debates in the Eurozone Crisis

Finally, and beyond the two core theoretical strands mentioned above, the empirical analysis adds to a comprehensive understanding of public debates in the Eurozone Crisis. The Eurozone Crisis evoked immense scholarly interest, not least in respect to crisis discourses and public sense-making (Maesse 2013; Hepp 2015; Picard 2015). Most of these studies are qualitative, thereby focusing on a specific case and reconstructing crisis narratives and the use of metaphors (Joris et al. 2014; Joris et al. 2018), specifically in the tabloid press (Knight 2013; Scholz 2013; Wodak and Angouri 2014). Especially the discursive construction of the antagonism between Greece and Germany and mutual stereotypes such as that of the 'lazy Greek' and the 'ruthless German' were taken up by numerous studies (Otto Brenner Stiftung 2011; Theodossopoulos 2013; Tzogopoulos 2013; Kaitatzi-Whitlock 2014; Kutter 2014; Galpin 2015; Agridopoulos and Papagiannopoulos 2016; Doudaki et al. 2016; Ojala and Harjuniemi 2016; Sternberg et al. 2018; Kountouri and Nikolaidou 2019). This research adds a standardized, quantitative analysis which puts these qualitative spotlights into perspective.

1.6 Outline of the Text

In the following, I sketch the outline of the dissertation and the main arguments advanced in the respective sections. At first, it should be recalled that this thesis draws on different fields of literature, and therefore the literature review is introduced at different points in the text.[6]

Section 2 provides a background of the Eurozone Crisis as the general setting of the analysis. Section 3.1 introduces the literature on the politicization of European affairs. I present its theoretical background, definition and central concepts (3.1.1) and review empirical findings (3.1.2) with respect to different arenas, general trends and the Eurozone Crisis. In section 3.1.3, I assess central explanations for politicization and review normative perspectives in section 3.1.4.

Section 3.2 turns to the actor level and introduces the literature on the public attribution of responsibility as the second main field this study relates to. I present the general background of attribution theory (section 3.2.1) and insights from research on blame avoidance behaviour (BAB) (section 3.2.2). I underline the relevance of this perspective on public debates by arguing that responsibility

[6] While section 3 presents the two main fields this research addresses – the literature on politicization (section 3.1) and that of public attributions of responsibility (section 3.2) – the literature on the political opportunity approach in social movement studies is introduced in the explanatory framework in section 5.2.

attributions are highly consequential and contested in politics.

After introducing both main fields of the literature, section 3.3 presents the theoretical merger of politicization studies and the attribution of responsibility. I indicate commonalities in both fields and argue that the public attribution of responsibility is at the very core of public conflict and politicization, in particular in times of crisis. Based on this, section 4 presents the differentiated conceptual framework for the study of politicization. In particular, I make the case for integrating the concept of Europeanization into the politicization framework and, with that in mind, I distinguish politicization intensity and shape (section 4.1.4 and 4.1.5). Section 4.1.6 translates the theoretical merger into an operationalization of politicization from the attribution of responsibility perspective.

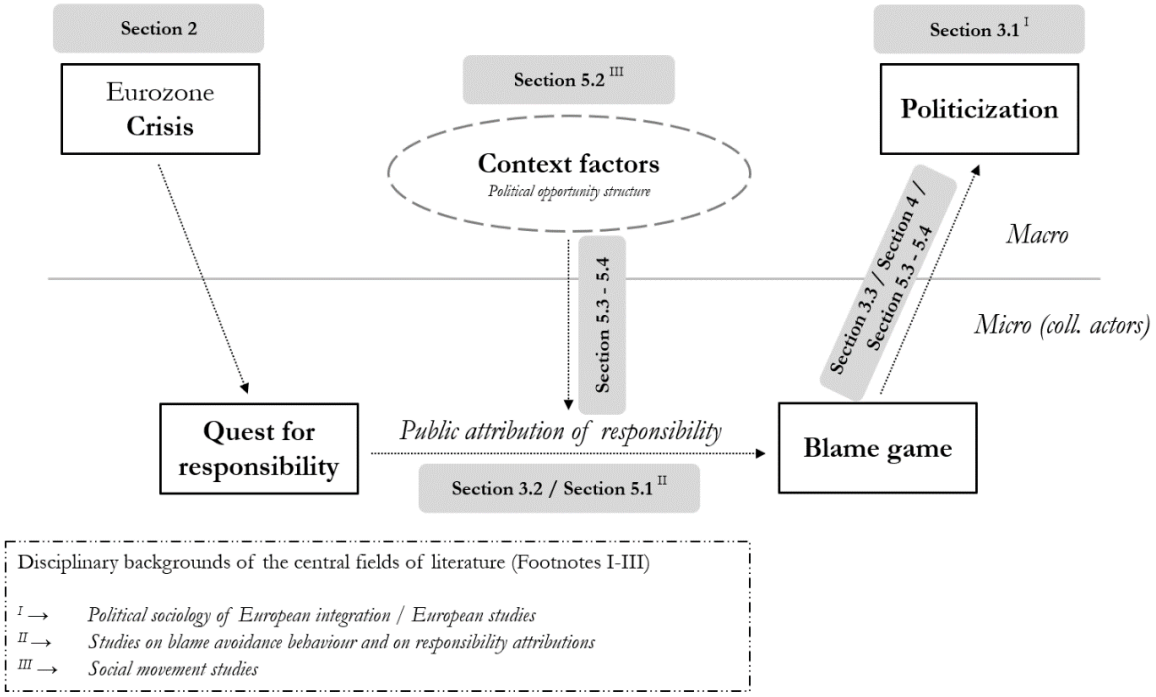
Section 5 presents the comparative, explanatory framework. I argue that beyond the authority transfer hypothesis in politicization studies, the explanation of distinct politicization patterns in different contextual settings requires a comprehensive explanatory framework that considers both the micro perspective on actor behaviour, as well as the macro perspective on context factors on country level that condition this actor behaviour. In this study, the micro perspective on actor behaviour is that on strategies of attributing responsibility whose main expectations are presented in section 5.1. The following section 5.2 turns to the macro perspective by presenting the political opportunity approach. Here, I argue that the institutional openness of the political system and the political and economic impact of the Eurozone Crisis mediate attribution behaviour in the public sphere and, therefore, help to explain politicization patterns in different countries. Based on that, section 5.3 builds the core of the explanatory framework. Here, I formulate expectations for four ideal case contexts with limited and closed political systems and limited and strong crisis impact. Figure 2 below recalls the outline of the main argument and its location within the structure of the first sections of this dissertation.

Section 6 presents the comparative research design. In section 6.1, I present the cases – Germany, Spain and Greece – which are then integrated into the explanatory framework. Section 6.2 qualifies the research design with respect to its limitations. Section 6.3 formulates expectations for politicization patterns in all three countries and section 6.4 presents expectations concerning temporal trends.

Section 7 presents the Discursive Actor Attribution Analysis, a content analytical method for the study of responsibility attribution in the public sphere, and the data. In section 8, I draw interim conclusions before starting the empirical analysis in section 9. Section 9.1 focuses on salience, section on actor participation 9.2 and section 9.3 on polarization and conflict. Section 9.4 adds aggregate indices of politicization intensity and Europeanization and section 9.5 summarizes the main findings and compares them to the initial expectations. In the concluding section, I review central arguments (section 10.1), answer the research questions and discuss findings (section 10.2), present broader

implications for politicization research (sections 10.3 to 10.7), review contributions to the literature (section 10.8), sketch avenues for future research (section 10.9) and present a final conclusion (section 10.10).

Figure 2: Central Arguments and Their Location Within the Text



2 THE SETTING: THE EUROZONE CRISIS

This section provides information of the overall context setting of this study. The timeline of the Eurozone Crisis gives an overview of central episodes and events during 2009 and 2016. Given the empirical focus, Germany, Greece and Spain receive most attention. The brief overview of interpretations of the Eurozone Crisis in section 2.2 illustrates its complex and contested nature.

2.1 A Timeline of the Eurozone Crisis

Given the contested causes of the Eurozone Crisis (see following section), its beginning is equally disputed. Most scholars agree that the Eurozone Crisis erupted in the wake of the subprime mortgage and banking crisis in the U.S. and the following global financial crisis that culminated in the global panic after the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy in September 2008. The recession hit Europe in 2008. In 2009, fears of a sovereign debt crisis spread and dramatically increased with the new Greek government's revelation of a revised public deficit. For several European countries, credit-ratings collapsed. The socialist governments in Greece and later in Spain introduced several rounds of austerity measures in order to cut state expenditures. To prevent default, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the EU agreed on the first bailout package to provide Greece with 110 billion euros in loans in exchange for further austerity and tax increases, supervised by the 'troika' of European Commission, European Central Bank (ECB) and IMF. In November 2010, Ireland entered the European bailout scheme and submitted to harsh austerity.

In 2011, the Eurozone Crisis deepened with further credit down-gradings and economic recession, widespread austerity, the eruption of massive protests and a fear of contagion spreading to other countries. EU leaders struggled to resolve their disagreement over plans for a second bailout programme for Greece. In Greece, austerity protests reached a new high in May and June 2011 with the Greek indignados, as prime minister Papandreou announced further cuts in response to the conditions of the bailout agreement. In November 2011, Papandreou resigned after calling a referendum on the latest EU bailout plan, which was soon abandoned after open threats from EU leaders at the G20-summit in Cannes. At the same time, Spain also had a change of government after the massive defeat of the Spanish socialist party in the general election. The Popular Party (PP) under the leadership of Mariano Rajoy took over. After Greece and Ireland, Portugal became the third country to receive bailout relief from the EU and the IMF in May 2011. EU leaders agreed on a permanent bailout fund (European Stability Mechanism/ESM), and, in their efforts to reform the Stability and Growth Pact on tighter budgetary control and fiscal discipline in December 2011.

In early 2012, credit down-gradings continued all over the Eurozone and unemployment hit a record

high. Yet, with the establishment of new institutions of supranational crisis management, the worst-case scenarios seemed to be contained. In February, EU finance ministers approved the second bailout for Greece. As the Greek parliament approved the conditional next round of austerity, violent street protests erupted. Initial positive reactions by the markets were soon upstaged by the continued possibility of an uncontrolled Greek default and the possibility of an exit from the Eurozone ('Grexit'). In summer 2012, double-elections shook the political system; the former major parties, ND and PASOK, formed a coalition government under prime minister Samaras. In Spain, the new conservative government announced massive austerity measures despite growing protests. Spain registered the highest overall unemployment rate in the EU and regional governments struggled with unsustainable debt. In May, the largest national bank, Bankia, was effectively nationalized. In June, Rajoy asked for a 'soft' bailout in order to recapitalize Spanish banks.

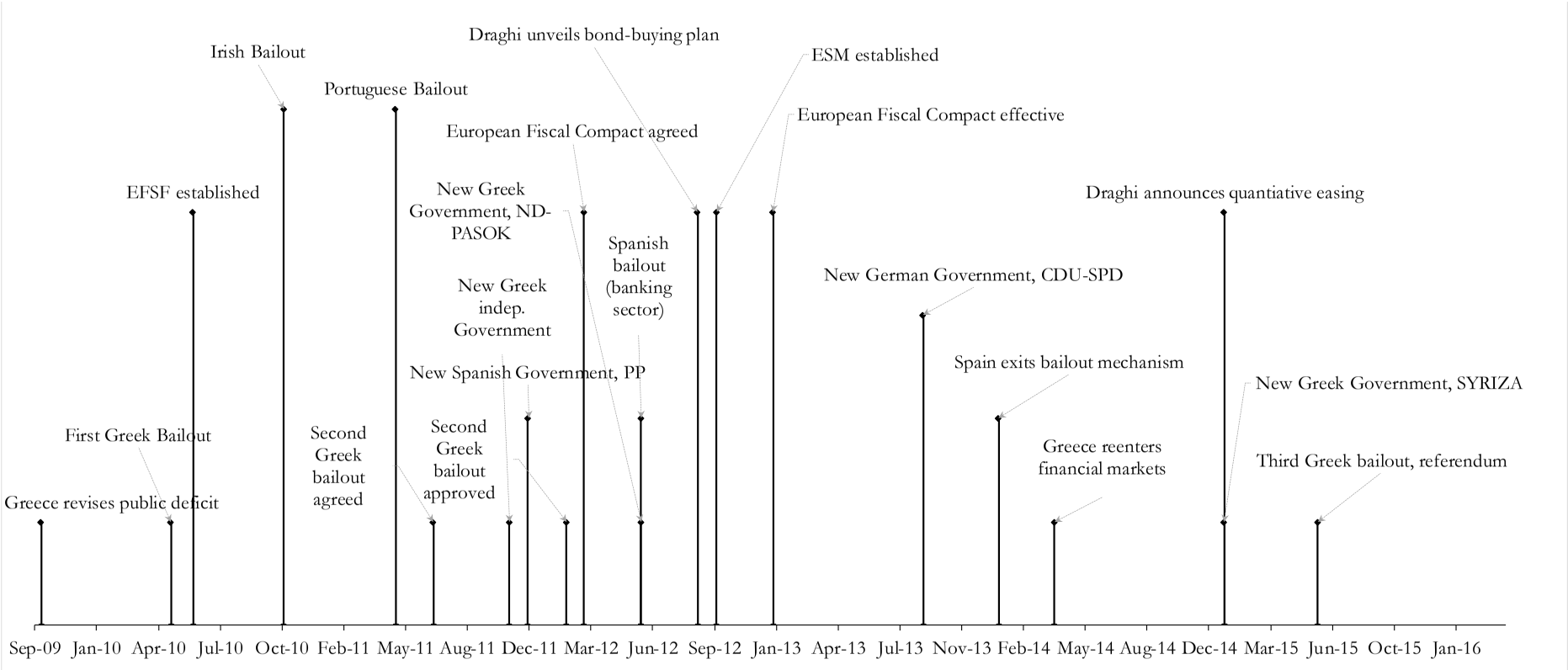
In March 2012, Eurozone finance ministers signed the European Fiscal Compact treaty to impose guidelines for fiscal discipline. In September, the German Federal Constitutional Court authorized the ratification of the ESM, which came into being as a permanent fund designed as a lender of last resort for ailing Eurozone countries. At the same time, ECB President Mario Draghi unveiled an unlimited bond-buying plan following his vow to "do whatever it takes to preserve the euro" (Draghi 2012) some weeks earlier. Markets started to calm down. Anti-austerity protesters did not – in November 2012, millions took to the streets across Europe to protest austerity.

After its peak in 2011 and early 2012, the crisis seemed to calm down in 2013. In August, the Eurozone emerged from an 18-month period of recession with an overall GDP growth of 0.3 per cent. However, unemployment levels remained high. Austerity and widespread anti-austerity protest remained the norm. In January 2014, Spain followed Ireland as the second country to exit the bailout mechanism after investor confidence was restored. Portugal followed in May. When Greece returned to the international bond market in April 2014, the crisis seemed to be nearing the end.

In January 2015, ECB President Draghi announced a 1.1 trillion Euro quantitative easing programme to boost Eurozone growth against German pledges for further austerity. In Greece, snap elections swept Tsipras' leftist Syriza into government in an unlikely coalition with right-wing ANEL. In summer 2015, the crisis dramatically reappeared as EU leaders failed to strike a deal on Greece's third bailout and German finance minister Schäuble suggested 'Grexit' as the alternative. Tsipras implemented capital controls and Greece effectively defaulted on June 30. On July 5, a referendum supported Tsipras' rejection of the bailout plans, which he nevertheless approved after massive pressure from the EU. The situation calmed down after the parliament passed the bailout in August.

The timeline in Figure 3 provides an overview of the central events mentioned in this section.

Figure 3: Timeline of the Eurozone Crisis, 2009-2016



2.2 Making Sense of the Eurozone Crisis – a Review of Central Interpretations

Writing almost ten years after its unfolding, the Eurozone Crisis can by now be considered one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of European integration. With changing intensity, the crisis shook the Eurozone continuously between 2009 and 2016. In short, the Eurozone Crisis fundamentally challenged the institutional, political and economic foundations of the currency union and the future course of European integration.

There are innumerable books and papers written on the causes and lessons of the Eurozone Crisis (for instance: Beblavy et al. 2011; Lapavitsas and Kouvélakis 2012; Berend 2013; Illing 2013; Streeck 2013; Pisani-Ferry and Gouardo 2014; Matthijs and Blyth 2015). Depending on ideological tradition, disciplinary background and national focus, scholars discussed a wide range of different explanations, possible ways to overcome it and remedies to prevent future crises. The Eurozone Crisis was described as a sovereign debt crisis, a crisis of competitiveness, a banking and financial crisis, a crisis of legitimacy and trust or simply the '*Euro* Crisis'. It was all of this at the same time (Shambaugh 2012). All these labels emphasize specific aspects of the crisis and they illustrate that there is no single narrative and no universal agreement on the causes of the crisis. For some, Germany was the main culprit due to its insistence on austerity and its resistance to redistributive measures. Some point the finger at Greece or Spain for irresponsible public spending and stalled structural reforms. Others again underline systemic factors of global capitalism or design flaws in the construction of the Eurozone and the economic heterogeneity in the monetary union. Systematically reviewing 161 publications on the Eurozone Crisis in the political science debate, Höing and Kunstein (2019, p. 2) identify five central crisis interpretations.

1. *Fiscal and Economic Crisis*: In this reading, the Eurozone Crisis primarily resulted from fiscal profligacy in Southern Europe combined with the growing economic imbalances within the Eurozone. "The insufficient compliance with the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) before 2010 is often interpreted as a major factor for unsustainably high sovereign debt levels of some Eurozone countries" (Höing and Kunstein 2019, p. 299). Therefore, policy measures should focus on reducing economic divergences in the Eurozone.

2. *Design Flaws*: A second reading sees the flawed construction of the Economic and Monetary Union as the central cause. The combination of fixed exchange rates, low labour mobility and absence of fiscal transfers prevented internal devaluations on the expenses of wage policies. From this perspective, the economic heterogeneity can only be overcome through fiscal transfers or the dissolution of the Eurozone.

3. *Crisis of Trust*: This reading emphasizes the mismatch between fiscal responsibilities and institutional

control, and the resulting destructive dynamics which were discussed as the notorious 'moral hazard' - or 'the free-rider-problem'. Adherents of this interpretation champion the institutionalization of the European Central Bank as a lender of last resort. Draghi's promise to "do whatever it takes" to preserve the Euro and the subsequent calming down of the markets is paradigmatic for this line of reasoning.

4. *Financial Regulation*: For scholars in this camp, the outbreak of the crisis was mainly due to poor financial regulation, such as lax tax regulations in countries like Cyprus and Ireland, or an oversized banking sector such as that in Spain. "In order to break the vicious circle between troubled banks and sovereigns, the Banking Union was eventually created, accompanied by intensified efforts at the international level to regulate global financial markets" (Höing and Kunstein 2019, p. 300).

5. Crisis of *Political Legitimacy*: From this perspective, the lack of legitimate political structures and the dominance of executive actors has "hampered efficient decision-making during the immediate management of the crisis, regularly leading to brinkmanship and tough intergovernmental bargaining" (Höing and Kunstein 2019, p. 300).

The identification of these five readings is certainly not complete. Overall, many scholars would agree that the Eurozone Crisis was a complex and multi-faceted mixture of mutually re-enforcing external factors such as the preceding global financial crisis and flaws in the institutional design of the Eurozone as well as internal factors connected to the specific economic and political situations in the Eurozone countries. However, the different readings presented above show that the debate on the origins of the Eurozone Crisis is contested, in academia and certainly beyond. Responsibility for its outbreak and for the drastic social, economic and political consequences is far from obvious. The complexity of the crisis setting allows alternative interpretations, many of which are equally valid and plausible. Marking one actor as responsible helps to reduce this complexity and to make sense of the crisis, but it is not necessarily a factual representation of causality. The attribution of responsibility is a social construction. There is no straight answer to the question of who is to blame. With this in mind, it should be noted that this study does not seek to explain the unfolding of the Eurozone Crisis, neither to present causes and culprits nor to add to the collective quest for responsibility. Instead, from the side-lines, I observe and grasp the intrinsic controversiality of this collective contest about responsibility in public debates on the Eurozone Crisis.

3 POLITICIZATION AND THE PUBLIC ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

After presenting the setting of the Eurozone Crisis in the previous section, section 3 introduces the two main fields of literature this dissertation draws on, namely the literature on the politicization of European affairs (section 3.1) and the literature on the public attribution of responsibility (section 3.2). Section 3.3 then presents a theoretical merger of both perspectives.

3.1 The Politicization of European Affairs

I now review central aspects of the politicization literature in the political sociology of European integration. At first, I locate the discussions in the broader social science perspective on European integration and present definitions and central concepts (3.1.1). In section 3.1.2, I present empirical findings with respect to different arenas, long-term trends and the Eurozone Crisis. After that, I review central explanations for the politicization of European affairs (3.1.3). In section 3.1.4, I disentangle the relationship between politicization and Europeanization before turning to normative perspectives on politicization (3.1.5). Section 3.1.6 summarizes open questions in politicization research.

3.1.1 Contextualizing Politicization

3.1.1.1 Background and Definition

For a long time, sociological perspectives were marginal in the study of European integration (Zimmermann and Favell 2011, pp. 490–492). While the initial founding efforts of the European project were guided by the normative vision of a European society, the actual trajectory of regional integration soon followed an economic logic with the principal objective of market integration. The idea that market integration was primarily an initial step towards *social* integration and the emergence of a European society was soon side-lined in public debates, as well as in academic ones.

For social scientists, the theorization of European integration has long been based on theories of international relations and their focus on states (Favell and Guiraudon 2009). Later, with more and more steps towards political integration and reaching a peak with the Maastricht treaty in 1992, political scientists and political sociologists began to wonder about questions of polity-building, European decision-making processes or the constitution of European political authority. Nevertheless, "society remain[ed] a blind spot of European integration studies" in the years to come (Delanty and

Rumford 2005, p. 3).[7] "Society was merely conceived as a contextual variable, not as an intervening variable of European integration" (Trenz 2008, p. 3). The integration process was seen to be largely neglected and uncontested by the public as long as it promised to increase economic welfare. Scholars argued that in the first decades of the European Union, integration steps were advanced under the condition of what they labelled the "permissive consensus" (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970; Down and Wilson 2008). European integration was regarded as a "sleeping giant" (van der Eijk and Franklin 2004) with a high but as yet unexploited potential for public mobilization.

European integration studies had paid little attention to the possibilities of popular contestation, and it is not least because of this that the rejection of the European constitutional treaty in France and the Netherlands in 2005 came as a surprise. With the constitutional process at a standstill (Hooghe and Marks 2006) and with the public debates surrounding Turkey's possible accession to the European Union, scholarly interest in the societal conditions of European integration and the conflict potential of European affairs increased. This political sociology-turn in European integration studies highlighted the contested character of the emerging polity and its internal cleavages.

In 2009, Hooghe and Marks famously argued that after 1992 the period of the permissive consensus steadily gave way to a new period of "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe and Marks 2009). In their post-functionalist theory, the authors established how European integration was no longer driven solely by functional spill over, but rather by political conflict, public contestation and the "mobilization of identity". They argued that the increasing transfer of authority from national executives to Brussels gave rise to new conflicts over European integration. European affairs became visible, salient and contested in public opinion, civil society and electoral politics, where collective actors started to mobilize on the issue and constrained decision-making processes on the European level. European integration slowly stopped being an exclusive matter of political and economic elites and became the object of larger societal conflicts over national sovereignty, political identity, or financial redistribution. In short, European integration normalized and became the object of "mass politics" (Hooghe and Marks 2009, p. 13).

Hooghe and Marks described this process as the *politicization* of European integration. Since then, the concept of politicization has gained momentum in European Union studies, and it is fair to say that by now an entire sub-field of EU politicization studies has emerged (e.g. de Wilde and Zürn 2012; Statham and Trenz 2013; de Wilde et al. 2016; Hutter et al. 2016b; Costa Lobo and Karremans 2018;

[7] An exception is research about the emergence of a European public sphere (and that of a European identity), which had brought together European integration and questions of community-building since the 1990s (see section 3.1.4; important work in this tradition is from Gerhards (1993; 2000), Eder et al. (1998), Neidhardt et al. (2002), Koopmans and Erbe (2004), Koopmans and Statham (2010a) and Risse (2010).

Hutter and Kriesi 2019b; Zürn 2019; Bressanelli et al. 2020). The use of the term in European studies initially goes back to Schmitter (1969, p. 166), who defined politicization in the EU as the growing "controversiality of joint decisionmaking". At about the same time as Hooghe and Marks made use of the concept, research teams in Berlin and Bremen introduced it in their studies of conflicts surrounding the growing authority of international organizations[8] (Zürn 2006; Nonhoff et al. 2009; Zürn et al. 2012).

The Oxford dictionary of the social sciences defines politicization as "the process through which certain issues become objects of public contention and debate" (Calhoun 2002). Politicization is directly tied to the process dimension of political affairs, that is to politics. Greven (1999, p. 72) defines it as an expansion of the political space. Politicization means making topics, institutions or decisions *political,* and opening them up for collective preference formation (de Wilde and Zürn 2012, p. 139). This understanding is based on a definition of the political which underlines the intrinsic role of conflict (Schattschneider 1975). The definition in the Oxford dictionary continues that "politicization is therefore generally a contentious process". Rendering an issue political means rendering it contested (Grande and Hutter 2016b, pp. 7–9). Politicization in this sense is constitutive of politics itself insofar as it opens up an issue as contingent and as the subject matter of politics.

At the same time, this understanding of politics and politicization emphasises the importance of the public sphere as the arena in which these public debates take place and in which conflicts are taken to a wider audience (Habermas 1981).[9] Here, politicization is understood as a discursive phenomenon.[10] The awareness of an issue and the formation of diverging opinions are preconditions of politicization but an issue is only politicized when these opinions are articulated and when the issue's controversiality becomes visible in public debates (Hurrelmann et al. 2015, p. 44). Applied to a European Union framework, the politicization of European affairs entails an opening up of European politics 'behind closed doors' to public debates of larger societal interest. European politics gradually move from the field of consensual elite politics to the field of contentious mass politics.

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[8] Zürn (2019) identifies three distinct kinds of empirical politicization research in comparative politics, EU studies and international relations studies (IR).

[9] This central role of the public sphere features, for instance, in the definition promoted by de Wilde, who describes politicization as "an increase in polarization of opinions, interests or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation" (de Wilde 2011, p. 559).

[10] Zürn and de Wilde differentiate this discourse-theoretical understanding of politicization ('politicization I') from a system-theoretical understanding ('politicization II'), which emphasizes governmental decision-making. "One can speak therefore of 'politicization I' when matters are moved from the realm of the private sphere to the public sphere and of 'politicization II' when it is moved from the public sphere to the sphere of governmental decision-making (cf. Hay, 2007, p. 79)" (de Wilde and Zürn 2012, p. 139; Zürn 2016); for a critique, see Kauppi et al. (2016, p. 78).

3.1.1.2 Basic Elements and Sub-Processes of Politicization

In the following, I briefly introduce some basic elements of politicization which are present in most empirical studies in this field in one way or the other: namely, sub-processes of politicization, arenas and objects. Later, in section 4.24.1, I build on these basic elements to advance my operationalization for the subsequent empirical analysis.

Politicization is a gradual process which results from the contentious participation of collective actors in public debates around an issue. Before this background, it is useful to distinguish the political activity of collective actors to 'politicize' an issue by raising it in public and by engaging in contentious debates on the one hand, and the procedural outcome of these collective activities, on the other hand. In this research and, at least implicitly, in most empirical politicization studies, politicization describes this outcome dimension of aggregate actor behaviour.

Most empirical studies of politicization in the European integration framework have converged around an operational definition of politicization that entails three constitutive sub-processes (Hutter et al. 2016b; Börzel and Risse 2018). Firstly, an increasing issue salience of European affairs in public arenas; secondly, an expansion of these debates beyond a narrow circle of elite actors; thirdly, a process of polarization and conflict between these actors. Hutter and Grande connect these dimensions to Schattschneider's identification of the four key dimensions of politics, visibility (salience), scope (expansion/participation), intensity and direction (polarization and conflict) (Schattschneider 1957; Hutter et al. 2016b, p. 8).

To speak of politicization, all sub-processes need to be visible.[11] Again, this line of reasoning follows the now well-established conceptualization of politicization which is most aptly laid out in Hutter at al. (2016b). Firstly, salience is the basic necessary condition of politicization. Only when an issue is put on the public agenda can debates unfold around this issue. When there is no debate, an issue cannot be politicized. Secondly, the extent to which an issue is politicized hinges on the expansion of actors participating in the debate around the issue. Politicization implies an extension of debates beyond a narrow circle of executive, elite actors to broader segments of society. The intensity of politicization dynamics depends on a diverse participation of actors from within and without the political sphere. Thirdly, politicization is about polarization and conflict. Highly salient debates with a broad range of actors do not necessarily imply high levels of politicization when they all agree. Whilst salience is the necessary condition of politicization, conflict and polarization are its essence.

[11] Depending on the politicization arena, scholars have also referred to the sub-process of awareness (Roose 2015; Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016), especially in public opinion research, and collective mobilization in the protest arena (Dolezal et al. 2016b).

Most studies working within the politicization framework operationalize polarization by means of diverging issue positions in public debates[12]. Grande and Hutter define polarization as the "the intensity of conflict related to an issue among the different actors involved" (Grande and Hutter 2016a, p. 9). This follows Dalton's definition of (party system) polarization as the "degree of ideological differentiation among political parties" (Dalton 2008). Intensity of polarization then follows from the polarity and the breadth of contrasting arguments in public debates and many opposing issue positions. While this is certainly one core aspect of polarized debates, this perspective misses direct actor relations and the direction of political conflict. For Rittberger et al. this is a "'blind spot' in research on politicization" (2017, p. 910). I will come back to this when introducing my conceptualization of politicization from the attribution of responsibility perspective in section 4.

3.1.2 Empirical Findings of Politicization Research

The majority of scholarly contributions in the sub-field of what I earlier described as EU politicization studies are empirical, quantitative inquiries. Apart from the widespread agreement on the basic conceptual dimensions of politicization and on the basic sub-processes, scholars also largely concur that in recent years in European politics "something like politicisation has happened" (Schmitter 2009, p. 211). Assessments on what exactly this 'something' is, however, and on the ways in which it becomes manifest, depend on the focus, research methods and the empirical data at hand.

For all those different research endeavours, politicization functions as the conceptual umbrella which gathers together different manifestations and their respective research strands. Overall, studies come to different conclusions when it comes to the extent to which it is present in what arenas (section 3.1.2.1), since when (section 3.1.2.2) and about the role of the Eurozone Crisis in the long-term trajectory of the politicization of Europe (section 3.1.2.3). This is partly since scholars differ in their understanding of the object of politicization or the question of what and which dimensions of 'Europe' are actually politicized. Studies have focused on European policy issues or policy areas (Hutter et al. 2016a; Rauh 2016; Schmidtke 2016; Maricut-Akbik 2019), European Union institutions (Hartlapp 2015) and European decision-making processes (Wendler 2012), but also on fundamental questions of EU membership (Hurrelmann et al. 2015; Grande and Hutter 2016c) or the constitutional treaty (Statham and Trenz 2013).

[12] All central empirical studies of politicization dynamics in the public sphere follow this approach which is most thoroughly applied and explained in Hutter's work, who in turn, builds his measure of polarization on the Taylor and Herman's index of left-right polarization. To assess issue polarization, Hutter measures the issue position of one actor vis-à-vis the salience-weighted average position of all actors (see appendix by Hutter in Hutter et al. 2016b; see also: Höglinger 2016; Grande et al. 2019). Further examples are Schmidtke (2016, p. 69), who measures polarization by contradictory claims per article or Leupold (2016, p. 90), who uses the share of claims by different party families within countries.

3.1.2.1 Different Arenas of Politicization

Politicization can be observed in different discursive arenas. Hurrelmann et al. (2015) distinguish a) "institutional arenas at the core of the political system" such as national parliaments, b) "inter-mediary arenas linking political decision-making processes to the broader citizenry", such as public debates as covered by the media and c) "citizen arenas in which laypeople communicate about politics". Empirical studies have provided evidence for the politicization of European affairs in different settings and arenas. European affairs, be they constitutional issues, question of membership or policy issues, are shown to be more and more controversially discussed in national parliaments (Wendler 2011; de Wilde 2014b; Wonka 2016) as well as European institutional fora, such as the European Parliament (Hix et al. 2007; Otjes and van der Veer 2016). Leaving the institutional arena, others have focused on the salience and controversiality of European issues in election campaigns (Hutter and Grande 2014; Hoeglinger 2016; Hutter and Kriesi 2019b) and party manifestos (Kriesi et al. 2008; Braun et al. 2016). Finally, some studies focus on the politicization of European affairs among the population and in citizen arenas (de Wilde and Zürn 2012; Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016; van der Veer and Haverland 2018; Ademmer et al. 2019). Using Eurobarometer data, Roose, for instance, shows how the Eurozone Crisis has led to increasing discussions, awareness and more decisive opinions on European issues among citizens in the so-called 'crisis countries' (but not in other EU countries) (Roose 2015). Hurrelmann et al. (2015) study citizen focus groups and they show that "only the fundamentals of European integration have gained political saliency, while the EU's day-to-day activities remain largely non-politicized" (p.43) (see also: White 2010).

Studies that look at either institutional arenas, citizen arenas, the content of political speeches or party manifestos, however, are constricted in the sense that their focus necessarily limits the potential range of actors participating in these debates. It is not surprising, though, that the majority of empirical studies focuses on the public sphere as an intermediary arena with, at least in principle, access for all kinds of different actors.

3.1.2.2 Long-term Trends of Politicization

Some recent longitudinal studies challenge the idea that the politicization of European affairs is a new phenomenon which can be traced back to specific events and starting points in recent episodes of the integration process. Measuring a politicization index which combines data for all three sub-processes, Grande and Kriesi show how already in the 1970s politicization had developed as a punctuated phenomenon "in which a significant but limited number of singular events produce high levels of political conflict for shorter periods of time" (Grande and Kriesi 2016, p. 279; Hutter and Kriesi 2019b). Their findings not only contrast with the widespread assumption that politicization only really

kicked off with the Maastricht treaty or the constitutional treaty (Statham and Trenz 2013), they also question the entire idea that the history of European integration is divided into a period of 'permissive consensus' followed by one of politicization or 'constraining dissensus'. Debates over EU membership in the UK, for instance, show that there had been important conflicts over Europe early on. Finally, these longitudinal studies illustrate that politicization is a gradual or punctuated process developing in waves around events, crises and central milestones of European integration rather than a linear process following the transfer of authority to Brussels (see section 3.1.3).

Another longitudinal perspective is offered by Hoeglinger (2016), who takes issue with the central claim in politicization research that the 'sleeping giant' of European integration is 'no longer asleep' and that it has entered the field of mass politics for good. While conceding that the salience of European affairs has increased since the 1970s, he also shows that there are clear limits to this trend; benchmarked against other issues, the salience of European integration in election campaigns is rather low and the magnitude of politicization moderate at best. Hence, his study "seriously questions the predominant scholarly claim of a rampant politicization of Europe" (Hoeglinger 2016, p. 46).

3.1.2.3 Politicization in and of the Eurozone Crisis

As one of the latest episodes in the politicization of European affairs, the Eurozone Crisis has attracted scholarly interest. Especially in the early accounts of the crisis, scholars argued for at least three central developments: Firstly, the Eurozone Crisis was presented as a peak in the historical trajectory of politicization with an "unprecedented degree of politicization" (Statham and Trenz 2013, p. 167), with high salience, a broad actor participation, and particularly contentious debates (Rauh and Zürn 2014; Risse 2014b; Statham and Trenz 2015). Secondly, scholars have argued for highly Europeanized debates with trans-European discourse coalitions and a high presence of EU actors in discursive conflicts. Finally, it is assumed that the Eurozone Crisis has not only led to a new intensity of politicization but also to a new quality: Whereas early politicization scholars like Hooghe and Marks stood for a perspective that focused on the salience of national identity in conflicts over European integration, the crisis brought the issue of redistribution back to prominence in European politics. For Statham and Trenz, "central to the Eurozone Crisis is that the 'who you are' question is following behind the restructuring of social relationships across the region according to 'what you get' in redistributive outcomes" (Statham and Trenz 2013, p. 303).[13] As a consequence, they hypothesize a new division between those constituencies which win and those which perceive themselves to

[13] For a parallel argument in the electoral arena and the return of economic voting in the crisis, see Gomez (2015) and for Southern Europe Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2012). Also in the field of contentious politics, Peterson et al. (2015) identify a materialist turn in protest activities between 2009 and 2014.

be losers in economic and monetary integration, within and across EU countries (see also: Leupold 2016; Wonka 2016). For Leupold, this makes the Eurozone Crisis a "game changer" in the politicization of European affairs (2016, p. 85). Analysing party competition in election manifestos, however, Schäfer et al. contend that the Eurozone Crisis "has not dramatically restructured political conflict over European integration" (Schäfer et al. 2021, p. 1) and the most comprehensive study on the reshaping of party systems by Hutter and Kriesi shows a strong transformation of the party system in Southern Europe only and overall, "no systematic revival of economic conflicts in the structuration of party competition" (Kriesi 2019, p. 380).

Summarizing its role for EU politicization, Rauh and Zürn describe the Eurozone Crisis as a "prism of politicization as it pools its causes and as it creates a new range of possibilities for the integration process" (Rauh and Zürn 2014, p. 124, translation by the author). But again, the empirical findings so far are not always clear cut, especially when it comes to the first two assumptions presented above. Hutter et al. (2016b) have provided the most comprehensive account of the politicization of European affairs in the crisis so far but, surprisingly, they find that the Eurozone Crisis triggered only medium levels of politicization and that this episode does not stand out vis-à-vis earlier phases such as debates on the Maastricht treaty or the constitutional treaty. This contrasts with earlier findings from Rauh and Zürn (2014), who identify a clear peak in the long-term politicization trends for the initial period of the Eurozone Crisis. In a more recent longitudinal study on the basis of national election campaigns, Hutter and Kriesi differentiate their findings for the party arena and show that the Eurozone Crisis led to new peaks in the politicization of European affairs especially in the crisis-hit countries of Southern Europe, including very salient debates in Greece and a surprisingly low emphasis on European affairs in Spain (Hutter and Kriesi 2019b). For Germany, Wonka (2016) documents a high salience but, in line with Hutter and Kriesi (2019) only limited conflicts over Eurozone Crisis measures among political parties.

Recent studies also question the idea that the crisis resulted in a significant expansion of actors participating in public debates on European issues. Evidence from the Eurozone Crisis rather suggests a strong presence of technocratic actors and a further strengthening of executives in public debates due to the strong emphasis on intergovernmental decision-making (see also: Rauh and Zürn 2014; Leupold 2016). Kriesi and Grande conclude that "the euro crisis does not pave the way towards a 'cosmopolitan Europe' based on a strong mobilisation of civil society; rather, it reinforces the bureaucratic and technocratic deformations of the European integration project" (2016, p. 274).

This leads to connected questions concerning how far the Eurozone Crisis has contributed to a Europeanization of public spheres (Risse 2014c). Summarizing the results in a nutshell, most scholars find that the theoretically-grounded hopes do not hold up the empirical reality – though the results

depend on the approach to Europeanization, be it focused on communication ties and the presence of European actors (Koopmans and Erbe 2004; Koopmans and Statham 2010a) or the synchronization of issue debates "in which the citizens, albeit divided along national and other audience-specific lines, converge around a common topic and follow the relevant controversies in other countries and publics" (Ojala 2013, p. 85) (Eder and Kantner 2000; Kleinen-von Königslöw 2012).

Focusing on the latter, precisely the convergence of issue salience and frames in Spanish and German newspaper editorials on the Eurozone Crisis, Drewski (2015) concludes that hopes for a common European public discourse on the Eurozone Crisis are misguided. National orientations prevail. In a similar study, Kaiser and Kleinen-von Königslöw (2017) are slightly more optimistic, even though the diagnosis of the multi-segmentation of the European public sphere remains (Kleinen-von Königslöw 2012; Barbieri et al. 2019). Heft (2017) and Picard (2015) come to contradictory conclusions. On the one hand, they find a simultaneous visibility of issues of common concern and a strong presence of Europe as the object of reference in crisis debates. Moreover, to a certain extent, the Europe-wide debate on the merits and perils of austerity indicates the emergence of a shared set of vocabularies and concepts. And yet, on the other hand, national views in the interpretation of the crisis remain largely dominant (also: Müller et al. 2018).

The assessments differ when Europeanization is operationalized on the actor level and on that of communication ties. Monza and Anduiza (2016) find significant differences when it comes to the visibility of European actors across European countries. While the crisis led to a strong increase in references to European actors in Germany, it did not have an impact on this aspect of Europeanization in most other countries. Hutter et al. (2016b), however, find signs of a more universal boost in the Europeanization of national debates throughout the crisis years. They report a strong presence of supranational actors in domestic public spheres (vertical Europeanization) as well as a strong presence of executive actors form other countries (horizontal Europeanization).

In light of the (real or expected) importance of the Eurozone Crisis for the long-term perspective of EU politicization, it is surprising that the picture is still incomplete. Most of the existing longitudinal studies do not cover the whole crisis period and, as such, fail to include crucial episodes such as the dramatic re-intensification of the crisis situation in Greece with the referenda over European bailouts and the steady threat of 'Grexit' in the early summer of 2015.[14] What is more, most empirical accounts of the Eurozone Crisis and also the vast majority of earlier politicization studies in general are

[14] Examples for the crisis periods covered in empirical studies are Leupold (2016): 01.2010-04.2011, Hutter et al. (2016b): 12.2009-03.2012, Wonka (2016): 01.2010-02.2013 and Heft (2017): 11.2009-06.2010.

confined to Western European (creditor) countries.[15] With reference to the country focus on Germany, France, Austria, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Switzerland, Kriesi and Grande admit that "the selection is less well suited to study the domestication of politicization due to the crisis, given that [it] does not include a debtor nation" and they "expect different patterns of politicization in debtor states such as Greece, in which political mobilization and polarization is stronger" (Kriesi and Grande 2012, p. 10; see also: Risse 2014c).[16] When Grande and Kriesi (2016) conclude that the political opportunity structure in the Western European countries under investigation was not conducive to high levels of politicization, the question remains how political opportunities in Southern European countries were different in the crisis scenario and what impact this has on intensity and shape of politicization patterns in these countries.

3.1.3 Explanations of Politicization

3.1.3.1 The Authority Transfer Hypothesis and its Limits

The aforementioned long-term trends of politicization raise the question of its driving forces. The theoretical starting point for explaining the politicization of European integration was advanced by Hooghe and Marks (2009), according to which the ever-growing levels of supranational authority are followed by growing public contestations around this authority. According to this so-called authority transfer hypothesis, the "rising politicization of European integration is primarily a reaction to the increasing authority of the EU over time" (de Wilde and Zürn 2012, p. 140). The "more decision-making power shifts to the European level for a policy field, or over time, the more attention for and criticism of the European Union rise" (Statham 2010, p. 295). The growing relevance of the European Union results in increasing attention paid to European issues but also in doubts about the legitimacy and accountability of European decision-making more generally. Hence, European policy-making witnesses increasing demands for responsiveness and justification and, ultimately, a growing public resistance. From this perspective, politicization is an unintended but inevitable consequence of authority transfer. As long as supranational authority is not reduced, attempts to reverse its politicization are in vain. Indeed, scholars found evidence on how this newly accumulated authority triggered growing levels of attention and conflict over European issues (Rauh and Zürn 2014).

Recently, the utility of the authority transfer hypothesis has been questioned on several levels. *Firstly*, the argument that authority transfer triggers politicization remains on the systemic macro level

[15] Exceptions are Leupold (2016), who includes Ireland in her study and Costa Lobo et al. (2018).

[16] To be fair, Hutter, Kriesi and colleagues (2019a) later provided a very detailed analysis of the restructuring of European party systems, which includes Southern European countries and which touches upon central aspects of the politicization framework.

and research in this tradition hardly theorizes the role of actors and actor strategies in the structuration of politization patterns. However, politicization is not a free-floating phenomenon. Instead, politicization dynamics at the macro-level hinge on collective actors at the micro level. The authority transfer argument hypothesizes increases in the intensity of politicization, but it does not specify which actors participate in this process, how and why.

Secondly, the authority transfer hypothesis fails to explain the findings of punctuated politicization developing in waves that were presented in the last section. The results question the implicit assumption in some of the early studies in this field which tend to treat politicization as a static process where increases in supranational authority are followed by increases in public conflict (Hurrelmann et al. 2015). In fact, "patterns of authority transfer and politicization only match to a limited extent" (de Wilde et al. 2016, p. 2) and increases in politicization are not steady over time.

Thirdly, politicization does not only change over time; it also varies across countries. Politicization dynamics around European issues differ from one country to another. Supranational authority transfer affects all member states but it does not automatically translate into parallel politicization patterns in the affected countries. Due to the functionalist focus on the role of authority transfer and a mostly aggregate analysis of politicization, early politicization research missed that politicization is not uniform but context dependent. Hurrelmann et al. summarize that "empirical observations of politicization are often forced into a dichotomous framework in which politicization is either present or absent […] rather than acknowledging that its shapes and implications might be diverse and context dependent" (Hurrelmann et al. 2015, p. 2). And indeed, "[t]he authority transfer hypothesis primarily explains commonalities between member states, not differences" (Zürn 2016, p. 171). These limitations of the authority transfer argument are illustrated by a comparative study of debates about EU membership (Hutter et al. 2016b). Summarizing main results, Grande and Kriesi conclude that "conflict has been most intense in *less* integrated [emphasis added] countries such as Britain and Switzerland, which have been quarrelling about membership and the scope of integration for decades" (2016, p. 281). For them, this suggests a "'negative relationship' between politicisation and European integration, rather than the positive one assumed by [the] neo-functionalist integration theory" of Hooghe and Marks (2009).

Overall, the authority transfer argument is not well-suited to account for the multidimensionality of politicization and its qualitative specifications such as the direction of conflict and the question as to how far European affairs are politicized in domestic or Europeanized conflict dynamics.

3.1.3.2 Drivers of Politicization

Given these recent empirical findings, the scholarly debate has moved away from the narrow focus on authority transfer. In the introduction to a special issue on the politicization of European integration, de Wilde, Leupold and Schmidtke (2016) call for a differentiated analysis which understands authority transfer as the driving force of politicization whose diverging patterns are conditioned by intermediary factors. Lately, the scholarly debate has intensified discussions about these possible intermediary factors to explain diverging patterns of politicization over time and across countries.

Emphasizing the crucial role of events as boosters of politicization, Statham and Trenz (2013), Hutter (2016) and Hoeglinger (2016) show that referenda on European issues lead to increased levels of salience of European affairs and to increased visibility of non-executive actors. Referenda shift the initiative to political challengers beyond the usual suspects of executive decision-making, they put European issues in the spotlight of public attention for a condensed period of time, and the reduction of complexity to the binary choice of 'yes or no' intensifies framing contests. Other studies document that the general intensity of politicization increases before and during EU summits or European election campaigns when public attention to European issues increases and political challengers try to take advantage of this (Boomgaarden et al. 2010; Hutter et al. 2016b).

Other studies underline the role of actor characteristics as drivers of politicization. Here, most attention is paid to the role of parties, in terms of party position and party ideology. Research in this vein links the politicization level to which parties expect to gain from conflicts over European issues. Following the salience theory of partisan competition, parties are expected to trigger debates about Europe when they expect a comparative electoral advantage (Dolezal et al. 2014). Government parties are engaged in collective decision-making on European levels but more often than not, compromise solutions do not reflect original partisan preferences (Green-Pedersen 2012). Moreover, publics are generally more sceptical towards European affairs than political elites for which European integration is merely a consensual issue and, hence, government parties have few incentives to emphasize EU affairs and to engage in critical debates on the issue. Oppositional parties, instead, will try to highlight these discrepancies between government action on the European level and voter preferences. Thus, from this perspective, parties in opposition are expected to mobilize on European issues, while turning more quiet once they are elected into office (Sitter 2001). Recent studies, however, cannot confirm that politicization is mainly driven by strategically competing party officials (de Wilde et al. 2016). And in a study on the salience of European affairs in national parliamentary debates, Rauh and de Wilde (2018) show that political debates over Europe are predominantly driven by governing rather than by oppositional parties. These finding correspond to earlier ones from European

public sphere research, which preceded the height of politicization research; Koopmans (2007), for instance, showed that Europeanized debates strengthen the visibility of executive actors at the expense of the opposition and civil society.

While the preceding arguments are limited to the distinction of government parties and opposition, scholars have further looked at the role of party ideology. They argue that emerging right-wing challengers successfully exploit the discrepancy between public Euro-scepticism and the pro-European consensus among mainstream political elites. The core argument here is based on the idea of a fundamental transformation of European societies and the emergence of a new cultural cleavage between integration and demarcation. This cleavage is manifest in the formation of winners and losers of denationalization and European integration. Parties from the populist and radical right have been most successful in exploiting this structural transformation – not least by framing Europe as a threat to cultural and national identity (Kriesi et al. 2012). According to this perspective, the politicization of Europe is driven by identity politics and by radical right parties as its principle proponents (Hooghe and Marks 2009, p. 21). "In the electoral arena, the main path towards the politicisation of Europe is dominated by Eurosceptic parties of the right" (Grande and Hutter 2016b, p. 24). Empirical studies in this tradition, therefore point to the strength of the Eurosceptic right to explain the politicization of European issues in the electoral arena (de Vries, Catherine 2007). Some recent studies, however, suggest that the role of right-wing, Eurosceptic challengers for the politicization of European affairs might be overrated. Green and Petersen show for the case of Denmark that the long-term presence of the radical right in parliament has not led to any significant increase in the politicization of European affairs (Green-Pedersen 2012). Similar findings are reported by Hoeglinger (2016) and Dolezal and Hellström (2016) who empirically show that the presence of radical right challengers is less important for the explanation of politicization than referenda or government-opposition conflicts among the main parties. In the highly salient and controversial debates around the constitutional treaty in France, for instance, the radical right played only a minor role.

Apart from the radical right and challengers from the party arena more generally, scholars have emphasized the role of protest actors as drivers of the politicization of Europe (Statham and Trenz 2013, pp. 145–146). But again, empirical studies show that compared to the electoral arena, the protest-arena contributes relatively little to the overall politicization of Europe (Dolezal et al. 2016b; Kriesi 2016, p. 34). The vast majority of protests is still oriented towards domestic politics and civil society actors play a minor role in public debates about European issues (Uba and Uggla 2011; Roose et al. 2017; Altiparmakis and Lorenzini 2018; Roose et al. 2018a).

Overall, this short review showed that despite advances to turn away from the limited macro perspective on politicization, the role of actors for the structuration of politicization patterns remains

inconclusive. In the field domestic party competition, "[t]he jury is thus still out on which parties are driving the politicization process in the public sphere" (Hutter and Kriesi 2019b, p. 5) and overall, comprehensive approaches that cover the whole range of possible actors contributing to politicization dynamics in the public sphere, are rare. In contrast to approaches focusing on (right-wing) challengers, salience theory covers a broader range of party actors, but it focuses on the selective *emphasis* of European topics and is not well equipped to explain European *conflicts* and their direction.

3.1.4 Politicization and Europeanization

Above, I have argued that in early politicization research little consideration was given to the different patterns in which politicization unfolds. A central aspect of this is a missing distinction between politicization and the Europeanization of public spheres.

Following Gerhards' (2000) insight that a supranational European public sphere is hardly realistic, scholars have since focused on the Europeanization of domestic spheres which, in its basic core, describes the extent to which European issues and actors are covered in domestic media debates. Koopmans and Erbe (2004, p. 101) have further distinguished this actor focus in terms of "vertical Europeanization, which consists of communicative linkages between the national and the European level" and "horizontal Europeanization, which consists of communicative linkages between different member states".

In European political sociology, the Europeanization of public spheres and the politicization of European affairs and are often used synonymously or treated as two sides of the same coin. It is surprising that empirical studies rarely systematically distinguish both concepts. However, the Europeanization of public spheres and the politicization of European affairs are not the same. Table 1 below (adapted from Risse 2014b, p. 146) shows how European affairs can be highly politicized in the domestic arena without European actors appearing in the debate as either speakers or addressees (high, domestic politicization). Conversely, we can imagine a strong discursive presence of European actors with limited intensity of polarization and conflict (limited, Europeanized politicization). This integration of both concepts exemplifies, on the one hand, how closely connected they are. In fact, scholars assume a close and positive relationship between Europeanization and politicization (Statham and Trenz 2013, p. 7; Grande and Hutter 2016c, pp. 78–83). Risse argues that "[t]he emergence of Europeanised public spheres constitutes a first step in the politicisation of European policies" (Risse 2010, p. 232). Combining the share of European actors in the debate and a politicization index, Grande and Hutter, however, conclude that the relationship between the Europeanization of the actor structure and the politicization of European integration is negative (Grande and Hutter 2016c, p. 80); the more a debate is Europeanized, the less it is politicized.

Table 1: Politicization of European Affairs and Europeanization of Public Spheres

		Europeanization of Public Spheres	
		Low	*High*
Politicization of European Affairs	*Low*	- Low issue salience - Few controversies - Few European actors involved in domestic public spheres (vertical) - Few communicative linkages between different European countries (horizontal)	- Low issue salience - Few controversies - European actors involved in national public spheres (vertical) - Many communicative linkages between different European countries (horizontal)
	High	- High issue salience - Strong polarization - Few European actors in national public spheres (vertical) - Few communicative linkages between different European countries (horizontal)	- High issue salience - Strong polarization - European actors involved in national public spheres (vertical) - Many communicative linkages between different European countries (horizontal)

Wilde and Lord (2016) distinguish three ideal types of politicization that follow a similar, though less systematic, line of reasoning when compared to the one proposed by Risse (Table 1). In their differentiation, the intensity of politicization is treated as constant, but again the shape of actor participation and actor polarization varies. More specifically, de Wilde and Lord consider not only the presence of European actors but also the extent to which the dominant conflict lines are Europeanized. They distinguish a) *The remote conflict,* where EU affairs are portrayed as foreign problems and where attention concentrates on struggles between other EU member states or EU institutions. "The key components are: comparatively high presence of foreign actors in the news with their domestic voice mainly restricted to executive actors, low overall coverage and the attribution of blame and responsibility[17] to foreign actors". b) *The international conflict,* "where European integration in general or a specific policy question – is presented as pitting one's own nation state against others or against supranational institutions" (p. 151); this type emphasizes vertically and horizontally Europeanized conflict lines and in particular, the role of European actors as addressees in contentious debates among domestic actors. c) *The domestic conflict,* where debates on European affairs are fought in domestic partisan channels. This is the counterpart of the remote conflict and synonymous with Risse's domestic type of politicization presented above (high politicization, low Europeanization).

These distinctions underline at least three crucial points: Firstly, the identification of ideal types suggests once more that politicization is not a linear process but rather one that appears in different

[17] Note the importance assigned to the role of blame shifting in this conceptualization.

patterns. Secondly, they exemplify the necessity of distinguishing politicization and Europeanization and to analyse their relationship. Thirdly, the ideal types underline the importance of analysing not only the actor composition of speakers in public debates, but also the structure of addressees, or in other words, the dominant directions of conflict in public debates. Below (section 4.1.4), I take up these insights by integrating both concepts into one conceptual framework, and I argue that Europeanization in public debates is best understood as a shape of the politicization pattern.

3.1.5 Normative Perspectives and Consequences of Politicization

While there is a broad consensus that 'politicization is here to stay', implications often remain unclear (de Wilde and Lord 2016) and scholars disagree in their normative judgements about politicization and its consequences for European integration. In the historical emergence of politicization studies, perspectives oscillated between a clearly pessimistic stance, one that emphasized positive implications and, one that argues that politicization as such is neither good nor bad.

To start with the first camp, Hooghe and Marks' post-functionalist take is overtly negative about the possible consequences of politicisation. The emphasis on the *constraining* dissensus (italics added) hints at a pessimistic outlook that politicization decreases room for political manoeuvre at the European level. In this scenario, citizens will reject further integration steps and parties from the radical right will profit from this growing distrust and further spur Euroscepticism among the population. Politicization thus undermines EU support. And since supranational authority transfer will necessarily lead to further politicization, this view rejects the upright optimism of the neo-functionalist camps who regarded further integration as unconditionally positive. Empirical evidence cannot fully back either camp: While Börzel and Risse argue that the failure to coordinate a European asylum system in the recent Schengen crisis is not least due to the strongly increased politicization of European migration policies in certain member states (Börzel and Risse 2018), Schimmelfennig (2014) shows that in the Eurozone Crisis, European decision-makers found ways to further advance political and monetary integration despite high levels of politicization in European societies. From his perspective, the constraints are overstated and the logics of European decision-making have not fundamentally changed vis-à-vis politicization (see also: Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2016).

An optimistic vision is advanced by scholars who underline the deliberative and potentially democratizing functions of politicization.[18] In this view, the detached elite decision-making in Brussels might have been effective and output-oriented, but it primarily constituted a fundamental democracy deficit and accountability deficit in European politics (Follesdal and Hix 2006). The opening up of these

[18] In contrast to Hooghe and Marks, Schmitter (1969) expected that politicization increases EU support.

closed circles provides a chance rather than a threat since it enhances public debates and increases visibility and transparency of European decision-making. From a Habermasian perspective, public attention, public debates and the increasing pressure for European decision makers to communicate their policies are important steps towards a normalization of European politics. Democratic functionalism (Trenz and Eder 2004) argues that the more political actors debate European decision-making, the better the chances for supplying the important sources of critical feedback that enhance responsiveness, and ultimately the democratic legitimacy of European politics (Zürn 2006; Statham and Trenz 2013, p. 5). Moreover, a more politicised European Union "counters the low visibility of its policymaking and the disaffection this may breed" (White 2010, p. 55). In a similar vein, Risse directly connects politicization to the Europeanization of public spheres, and since European politics is only possible under conditions of cross-border communication, politicization is "very good news for European democracy" (Risse 2010, p. 232; Hix 2014). Finally, Börzel and Risse (2009, p. 219) argue that instead of the radical right, mainstream parties "of the centre-left and centre-right could actually profit from politicisation, the more Europeans stop fighting over the European finalité politique and start debating what kind of European policies they would prefer'."

Empirical studies about direct effects of politicization on European policies are only recently becoming more important (e.g. van der Veer and Haverland 2018; Koop et al. 2021). Among the first to study those was Rauh (2016), who finds that the European Commission has advanced consumer friendly positions particularly in those issue fields which were most strongly politicized in the public. These and other of the more recent findings back the optimistic version that politicization can contribute to a higher responsiveness of European decision-makers.

The Eurozone Crisis has again confronted pessimists and optimists of politicization. By definition, the concept of crisis implies different possible scenarios and developments. Supporters of a 'crisis as opportunit'-thesis (Beck 2012; Habermas 2012) emphasized the potentially positive implications; the increasing attention paid to European affairs, cross-national debates, and actor alliances which potentially foster a sense of European belonging (Statham and Trenz 2015; Zürn 2016).[19] The pessimistic perspective underlines the re-emergence of nationalism, the growing strength of radical-right parties, increasing Eurosceptic populism and the formation of a North-South division in Europe (Streeck 2013, p. 237) that fundamentally question the course of European integration.

While both camps are opposed, empirical scholars have rather refrained from taking sides and argued that politicization is neither good nor bad, per se (Palonen et al. 2019, p. 258). "Too little can be as

[19] For similar arguments and a critique of the technocratic attempts to 'de-politicize' European crisis politics, see White (2014, 2015), and for a general argument, Mouffe (2005).

problematic as too much" (Grande and Hutter 2016b, p. 5). A polarization around European issues does not equal growing Euroscepticism among parties or even the population. It is a matter of empirical inquiry to check in which direction anger is expressed by the public. Hence, normative evaluations of politicization and its consequences need to be grounded in a differentiated analysis of politicization and its many dimensions.

3.1.6 Summary: Open Questions in Politicization Research

All in all, this review of the central findings and debates in politicization research shows that despite some basic agreements, discussions are far from over. Departing from the macro perspective of the traditional authority transfer hypothesis, early politicization research paid little attention to a comprehensive perspective on actor behaviour. Recent debates about the role of actor strategies in the structuration of politization patterns are ongoing. The same is true for discussions about the role of country specific context conditions and the challenge to grasp the multi-dimensionality of politicization, which includes the distinction between politicization and Europeanization. Finally, the role of the Eurozone Crisis in the politicization of European affairs calls for substantiated analysis.

Reiterating its basic contributions, the coming sections add to all dimensions of the politicization literature presented above. Arguing that politicization processes in the public sphere depend on the way in which political actors engage in the public attribution of responsibility, it offers an alternative perspective on the structuring role of actor behaviour. It tackles "the major challenge" to "unpack the concept of politicisation" (de Wilde and Lord 2016, p. 150) by proposing a differentiated conceptualization that includes Europeanization as a potential shape of the politicization pattern. The operationalization of polarization in terms of blame games allows the direction of political conflict to be accounted for. To explain country differences in politicization patterns, it introduces context factors at the macro level that influence attribution activity on the actor level. It also provides empirical evidence for politicization patterns during the Eurozone Crisis and, by including creditor as well as debtor countries, the study takes account of this crisis-specific dichotomy which is crucial to understand politicization dynamics in the Eurozone Crisis. The core innovation, however, lies in the attribution of responsibility approach to politicization. To further advance this merger, the following section now reviews central aspects of the literature on the public attribution of responsibility. Afterwards, both perspectives are brought together in section 3.3.

3.2 The Public Attribution of Responsibility

This section introduces the literature on the public attribution of responsibility. As the second theoretical approach in this study, it presents the actor perspective on politicization. To advance the main

argument, I introduce basic arguments in this tradition, in particular attribution theory (section 3.2.1) and the literature on blame avoidance, which help to develop a political sociology perspective on responsi-bility attributions (section 3.2.2). Based on this, the subsequent section 3.3 bridges both theoretical strands of this research by arguing that responsibility attributions form the backbone of politicization pro-cesses, especially in times of crisis.

Before that, a preliminary remark: This research pursues a constructivist understanding of responsibility. This means that responsibility is understood not in the sense of factual or legal responsibility but rather in terms of perceived, constructed and discursively *attributed* forms of responsibility. This focus neither implies inferences as to whether responsibility attributions are 'right' or 'wrong', nor do I differentiate justified and unjustified attributions as suggested by Boin et al (2005). Rather than seeking normative assumptions about the (democratic) quality of responsibility debates, I focus on their empirical assessment.[20]

3.2.1 The Attribution of Responsibility: Individual Perspectives

The attribution of responsibility is omnipresent in everyday life. The basic idea of attribution theory developed by Weiner (1985) and others is the premise that people need to assign responsibility for events. Attribution theory posits a natural search for the causes of events, especially when they are unexpected and negative. The quest for responsibility helps to make sense of the chain of cause and effect. It constructs meaning and as such it reduces the complexity which is inherent to social life. In basic terms, the attribution of responsibility is the act of deciding who or what is held accountable for such developments, events or outcomes (Shaver 1985). In that sense, the attribution of responsibility is a central and necessary ingredient of the social construction of reality. In Iyengar's words, "responsibility is such a compelling concept that we even invent responsibility where none can exist in purely random or chance events" (Iyengar 1989, p. 800). Indeed, social psychologists have shown in numerous experiments that the attribution of responsibility among individuals is an instinctive process deeply rooted in our way of thinking (McGraw 1990). That being said, the attribution of responsibility for outcomes, for social change or for its absence is a social process for several reasons:

Firstly, it is socially constructed or a process of "meaning making" (Boin et al. 2005, p. 69). In complex societies, every development and phenomenon are products of many different conditions, actions or inactions. The identification of one actor as responsible is a reduction of a complex relationship of cause and effect and, hence, a selection which, in principle and could be different.

[20] For a similarly approach to responsibility attributions see Gerhards et al. (2007), Greuter (2014), Rittberger et al. (2017), Heinkelmann-Wild et al. (2020).

Secondly, the attribution of responsibility is "the last step in a process of social judgment" (Shaver 1985, p. 164). To select one actor as responsible, be it for positive or for negative developments, is a judgement. Blame or credit "depends on a prior attribution of moral responsibility in the same fashion as that attribution depends on a prior judgment of causality" (ibid.).

Thirdly, attributions of responsibility trigger social interaction processes. Often attributions of responsibility are undisputed and taken for granted as the result of conventions or cultural rules. However, essential problems in society, such as unemployment, demographic change, climate change, etc., are much more complex and with missing conventions, there are no objectively responsible actors. As soon as responsibility attributions are articulated in public, they tie sending and receiving actors together and become disputable. Addressees of responsibility attributions might share or, in the case of blame, more likely dispute these judgements and impose their own interpretation of reality. Therefore, the public attribution of responsibility is inherently conflictive.

When it comes to the discussion of responsibility attributions in scholarly literature, most attention has been paid to blame, which is considered its most relevant, consequential and interesting form (see below). In principle, however, blame is just one possibility of attributing responsibility among others.[21] A central distinction is that between causal responsibility and treatment responsibility. The attribution of causal responsibility identifies a causal link between the attributed actor and an effect. The actor's action or inaction is perceived to be the cause of an outcome or event. Treatment responsibility, on the other hand, shifts the focus to the necessary steps ahead. It appears as a form of competence attribution or a request to take action.[22] Iyengar sums up the distinction as follows: "Causal responsibility focuses on the origin of a problem, while treatment responsibility focuses on who or what has the power to alleviate (or forestall alleviation of) the problem" (Iyengar 1991, p. 8).

Apart from this useful distinction, Iyengar's quote (and its focus on "problems") illustrates the literature's bias towards blame. Responsibility attributions are most often associated with problems. However, the evaluation of the relationship between addressee and the outcome of its actions can take different forms, and there is not always a problem at stake. The opposite of blame for a problem or failure is credit for successes. Whereas blame articulates a negative evaluation of the outcome, an actor is credited if the outcome is considered positive. Credit, blame and the attribution of treatment responsibility are the three basic forms of ascribing responsibility. In social sciences, the attribution of responsibility has been studied from different angles. The following provides a short overview.

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[21] For a detailed overview of this and the following distinctions, see methods section 7.

[22] In the empirical sections, both forms of treatment responsibility are taken together as 'demand attributions'.

3.2.1.1 Social Psychology

On the individual level, social psychologists have analysed to what extent individuals seek to internalize blame for negative developments and to what extent they look for external factors to explain undesired outcomes (Fincham and Hewstone 2002). Scholars in this tradition have shown that the way individuals attribute responsibility is marked by a number of errors and biases (Fiske and Taylor 2017). The self-severing bias or ultimate attribution error (Ross 1977) describe how individuals tend to attribute success to individual achievements, whereas responsibility for negative developments is attributed to external and adverse conditions beyond their personal sphere of influence. This is a general pattern, but the strength of this systematic bias varies among personalities. The central driver is the tendency to present oneself in favourable terms, vis-à-vis the self as well as vis-à-vis others. From the social-psychology perspective, then, the attribution process is not only motivated by the human desire to understand the cause of events but also by the equally human need to sustain one's self-esteem (Shaver 1985; Fiske and Taylor 2017). In the process of social structuration, the attribution of responsibility serves as a fundamental psychological cue for the formation of favourable attitudes toward the in-group and negative attitudes toward out-groups. The self-serving bias translates into the attribution of success to positive characteristics of the in-group.

3.2.1.2 Voting Research

Attributions of responsibility are not confined to everyday life. Research on voting behaviour connects individual perceptions of responsibility to the political sphere. In representative democracies, elections are the central mechanism by which citizens hold political representatives to account and the attribution of responsibility among voters is the principal mechanism that links individual evaluations of policies and politicians and voting behaviour. Adherents of economic voting theory, for instance, argue that voters hold politicians accountable for their economic performance. In a simple cause-effect logic, voters evaluate policies for their impact on their personal economic situation, assign responsibility to certain parties or politicians, and vote accordingly (Gomez and Wilson 2008; Malhotra and Kuo 2008). Following ideas from economic voting theory, social movement scholars have recently investigated how perceptions of government responsibility shape patterns of political action, such as the propensity to engage in demonstrations against the government (Rüdig and Karyotis 2014; Giugni and Grasso 2021).

Further research on the attribution-voting nexus, however, has questioned this classical reward-punishment model, both from an institutional perspective and from the individual social-psychological perspective. *Firstly*, institutional factors mediate individual responsibility judgements by potentially blurring the clarity of responsibility distribution in a given political system. Functional differentiation

and the sharing of authority in multi-level systems hampers clear attributions of responsibility for the voter. Scholars have highlighted the role of decentralization in political systems, or differences in attribution patterns when evaluating single or coalition governments (Vowles 2010). *Secondly*, voting behaviour is conditioned by personal, political beliefs. Rudolph (2003), for instance, has shown how partisanship influences perceptions of responsibility and, consequently, vote choice. Partisanship equals the systematic in-group bias inherent in the attribution of responsibility. Empirical research on the public perception of responsibility for the flooding of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, for instance, reveals stark variation among individual responsibility judgements (Maestas et al. 2008). Some identified the federal government and US president Bush as culpable, others blamed local authorities or state agencies, and some blamed all levels of government at the same time. Responsibility perceptions were shown to be influenced by individual factors and group membership, as well as by media exposure and prior knowledge and information about the allocation of authority (ibid.).

3.2.1.3 Media Studies

A third area of research in which responsibility attributions are analysed, is media studies. Scholars have identified how the attribution of responsibility by the media follows those self-serving patterns identified by social psychologists. More importantly, research has shown how news framing of responsibility influences the audience to determine causes and solutions to social problems (Harteveld et al. 2018). Differentiating between societal and individualized attributions for problems such as crime or poverty, Iyengar (1991) has set out how TV news shapes individual perceptions of responsibility. In general, information, exposure to media coverage and knowledge about the issue at stake are crucial mediators of responsibility attributions (Hasler et al. 2016). Recently, scholars in media studies and beyond have connected the attribution of responsibility to affective framings and the study of emotions like anger or outrage (von Scheve et al. 2016; Hameleers et al. 2017).

3.2.2 The Attribution of Responsibility: A Political Sociology Perspective

3.2.2.1 From the Individual to Collective Actors

While all three perspectives presented in the preceding section – those of social psychology, of voting research and of media studies – help to understand the relevance of responsibility attributions, they are of only limited help for researching them in the realm of political sociology. As Gerhards and colleagues (2007) have rightly indicated, all of these perspectives follow the social-psychological focus on individuals. The level of abstraction is at the level of individual choice, behaviour or character. A political sociology perspective, instead, enquires into the role of collective actors and institutions not as mediators but in their own right. This shift of perspectives places an emphasis on the societal

embeddedness of responsibility attributions and on the role of structural rather than individual conditions that influence attribution behaviour. Following from that, a political sociology perspective on responsibility attributions concerns the *public*[23] attribution of responsibility and its role in the political process. Responsibility attributions articulated in the public sphere go beyond the often un-reflected, self-serving bias in social-psychology. Senders of responsibility attributions are aware of their public nature and the potential impact of their statements. The attribution of responsibility turns into a strategic form of political communication which cannot be captured by the basic insights of social psychology alone. Having said that, this study focuses on the role of public attributions of responsibility as a means of strategic political communication. The interest is not in citizens perceptions of responsibility per se, but in the way political actors deal with it and how they handle and negotiate questions of responsibility. The focus then is not on the individual level but on the political and public sphere. In the coming section, I follow this shift of focus and introduce scholarship on responsibility attributions from the political sociology perspective.

3.2.2.2 Politics, Responsibility and Blame Avoidance

The attribution of responsibility is an inherent ingredient of politics. This is true for the individual demand-side of voting behaviour, but it is also true for the supply-side of the political process and the ways collective actors deal with questions of responsibility. Responsibility attributions tie political actors and public audiences in a relationship of accountability in which "the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct, the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face consequences" (Bovens 2007, p. 450). Political actors understand that attributions of responsibility influence voting preferences and public reputation; therefore, they integrate the question of responsibility into their strategic political calculations. Questions of who is to blame for failures or who is responsible for successes structure public interpretation processes and set the framework of political change. Blaming, in particular, offers a form of "social catharsis" (Boin et al. 2008, p. 9). The attribution of blame is a simple and appealing political narrative; "it helps to reassure us that failure is not an inevitable result of the complex systems that characterize modernity but that it is preventable and remediable" (Moynihan 2012, p. 568).

Much of the recent scholarly interest in the attribution of responsibility and blame in the political process goes back to Weaver's seminal work on blame avoidance (Weaver 1986). Again, the starting point is that of the self-serving bias but the focus is on the behaviour of political actors. In the collective contest over responsibility, political actors have an interest in presenting themselves in

[23] Public responsibility attributions mean responsibility attributions articulated in front of a public audience.

favourable terms. For Weaver, however, political handling of responsibility attributions is structured by a second bias: He argues that politicians are generally loss-averse and more interested in avoiding blame than claiming credit: "they are not credit-claiming maximizers but blame minimizers" (Weaver 1986, p. 372). Politicians consider the negativity bias of constituents, which implies that voter attention focuses more on negative than on positive information and that voters give more weight to potential losses than to gains (but see Leong and Howlett 2017 for a critical discussion). This understanding of elite behaviour contrasted with beliefs that the dominant strategy used by political actors to reach their goals is to claim credit for their actions whenever possible. Weaver and others have translated this basic idea into more complex sets of political behaviour or, *the politics of blame avoidance*. Blame avoidance behaviour (BAB) describes strategic activities conducted in order to protect one's reputation in the face of potentially blame-attracting situations (Hinterleitner and Sager 2017, 587). The central motif is to counter the (perceived) risk of electoral punishment and loss of legitimacy.

There are different strands and several classifications of blame avoidance strategies. Weaver (1986, p. 385), for instance, proposes eight different strategies for implementing unpopular reforms[24]. Hood (2002) categorizes his selection of blame avoidance strategies according to the types of behaviour or tools of manipulation: agency strategies are intended to shift responsibility to others; presentational strategies aim to avoid blame by denying the existence of a problem in the first place or by offering excuses and scapegoats; and policy strategies intend to limit formal responsibility and liability e.g. by means of protocolization or automaticity (Hinterleitner and Sager 2015, p. 153). Other classifications are proposed by Vis and van Kersbergen (2007) or Pierson, who highlights "compensation", "obfuscation" and "division" (Pierson 2012; see also Hering 2008, p. 177).

3.2.2.3 Arenas of Blame Avoidance: Political Process and Public Sphere

The many enumerations of blame avoidance strategies in the literature obscure the fact that most classifications are based on a basic distinction; explicitly, or often implicitly, most classifications differentiate the arena of blame avoidance, be it the political process or the public sphere, which entails, in other words, a distinction between political *organisation* and *communication* (Wenzelburger 2014).[25]

Blame avoidance in political organization relates to the use of spin, 'the art of the state' and strategic

[24] He distinguishes 1) "agenda limitation", (2) "redefining the issue", (3) "throw good money after bad", (4) "pass the buck", (5) "find a scapegoat", (6) "jump on the bandwagon", (7) "circle the wagons" and (8) "stop me before I kill again."

[25] Pal and Weaver (2003), for instance, identified their set of strategies based on possible "targets of manipulation": the decision-making procedures, on the one hand and voters' perceptions and payoffs, on the other. A similar distinction is made in Hood's juxtaposition of policy strategies, on the one hand, and presentational and agency strategies, on the other.

manoeuvres directed at the internal dynamics of the political process. Here, the immediate target of strategic intervention is the decision-making process, the organization and planning of policies and their designs. Political actors, for instance, can consider effective timing or reform (such as 'honey-moon' periods after electoral wins or summer breaks), they can compensate important voter groups or delegate the implementation of unpopular measures to other levels of government. In most cases, these strategies in the political arena function as anticipatory forms of blame avoidance applied to prevent or to prepare for blame-attracting situations in the future.

Blame avoidance in the public sphere is understood as a way of framing political communication. It is mostly understood as a reactive form of political strategy, even though the distinction of proactive and reactive strategies is not always easy to grasp (Leong and Howlett 2017). Public sphere strategies are more directly targeted at a public audience as forms of "presentational strategies" (Hood 2002). Blame avoidance behaviour in the public sphere can be traced in the general framing of policies in ways which accommodate citizens' views or affections. To persuade the public, politicians appeal to norms and values, present arguments and highlight or conceal certain aspects of a problem. Other forms of blame avoidance in the public sphere such as 'finding a scapegoat' are more directly related to attributions of responsibility. Here, the framing process immediately focuses on the presentation of culpable subjects and the dispersion of blame. The goal is to "manipulate perceptions" (Pal and Weaver 2003, p. 30) of how responsible political actors are for unpopular outcomes. In order to protect the actor's reputation in the public quest for responsibility and to counter the risk of electoral punishment and legitimacy loss, collective actors invest in convincing the audience by actively justifying their role and by 'clarifying' matters of responsibility distribution in their favour. This form of responsibility framing "is one of the most important means of elite influence on public opinion" (Slothuus and de Vreese, Claes 2010, p. 630). Given that "most citizens do not like to think deeply about complex political problems, they will adhere to the interpretation of the issue offered in the communication of the political actor, especially if the frame is not contested by a counter-frame" (Wenzelburger and Hörisch 2016, p. 161).

3.2.2.4 Fields of Blame Avoidance: Crisis Politics and Politics of Unpopular Reforms

In empirical research, blame avoidance behaviour and the public attribution of responsibility by political actors have been studied specifically for two blame-attracting political constellations: situations of crises as well as the politics of unpopular reforms.

The politics of crises are politics of blame avoidance. "When crises occur, something or somebody must be blamed – for causing the crisis, failing to prevent it, or inadequately responding to it" (Boin et al. 2010, p. 706). Crises spread collective uncertainty and question taken-for-granted routines. This

uncertainty requires answers and explanations and in times of crisis, "to explain is to blame" (Bovens and t'Hart 1996, p. 129). Blaming provides a meaningful narrative. Public framing contests concentrate on the causes of the crisis and the responsibility for its occurrence. *What went wrong? Whose fault is it?* Public authorities are scrutinized by the media and the wider public and the opposition seeks to exploit the moment of possible change by intensifying their attacks on the adversary in power. Executive actors are the central targets of these blaming impulses and have to cope with this pressure and the accompanying risk of electoral punishment. Empirical studies have focused on the use of blame avoidance in situations of policy fiascos (Hood et al. 2009), natural disaster (Moynihan 2012) or economic crises (Jensen and Mortensen 2014).

The second area of research in which strategies of blame avoidance are widely discussed is the field of unpopular reforms or, more specifically, welfare state retrenchment (Vis and van Kersbergen 2007; Wenzelburger 2011; Vis 2016; Sommer 2020). Interest in the issue goes back to Pierson's "New Politics of the Welfare State" (1996, 2001) and the assumption that voters punish governments for implementing welfare state reforms because these impose "tangible losses on concentrated groups of voters in return for diffuse and uncertain gains" (Pierson 1996, p. 179). Governments "must withstand the scrutiny of both voters and well-entrenched networks of interest groups". Because they fear being punished at the ballot box, governments are generally reluctant to cut welfare state entitlements. "Assaults on the welfare states carry tremendous electoral risks" (ibid.).

As in the field of crisis politics, the presumed unpopularity of welfare state retrenchment raised the question of how governments cope with the electoral risks. The politics of blame avoidance promises to counter this risk and to minimize electoral consequences. In Pierson's words, "The contemporary politics of the welfare state is the politics of blame avoidance". Empirical studies have shown how governments seek to form large coalitions in the retrenchment process in order to diffuse blame or how they delegate public programmes to non-state actors in order to 'depoliticize' blame-attracting situations (Hering 2008; Hinterleitner and Sager 2017).

Both strands of the literature – that focusing on crisis politics and that focusing on the politics of unpopular reforms – have documented how governments aim to counter the risk of electoral punishment by dispersing responsibility for what they consider risky outcomes, and studies in both fields find evidence for blame avoidance in the policy process as well as in political communication.

3.2.2.5 Quantitative Analyses of Blame Shifting

"Despite their ubiquity, blame games are notoriously difficult to study" (Hinterleitner 2020, p. 1). Most research is based on qualitative case studies, while standardized analyses are largely missing; "the question whether blame avoidance strategies have been used – has not been tested in quantitative

studies yet, as it is very hard to capture blame avoidance in an indicator" (Wenzelburger and Hörisch 2016, p. 160). A recent strand of the literature has come closer to this quantitative perspective, at least concerning one strategy of blame avoidance in public communication: "Finding a scapegoat" ('*Deflect blame by blaming others*') or, in other words, blame shifting[26] is identified as the central reactive form to diffuse responsibility in the public sphere in all classifications of blame avoidance strategies. In the public sphere, blame shifting is a "standard way for politicians to avoid being punished for unpopular policies" (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, p. 100). Summing up popular quotes on the political blame game such as Hubert Humphrey's verdict "To err is human. To blame someone else is politics", Hobolt and Tilley note that "the art of politics is the art of passing the buck" (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, p. 100).

Recent studies have applied standardized content analyses to systematically assess and compare blame shifting and the public attribution of responsibility more generally (Gerhards et al. 2009; Greuter 2014; Rittberger et al. 2017; Schwarzenbeck 2017; Roose et al. 2018b; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020; Roose et al. 2020; Sommer 2020; Traber et al. 2020).[27] However, despite the fact that these studies start from the basic principles of attribution theory, such as the self-serving bias (Shaver 1985), the negativity bias (Weaver 1986), or the general focus on responsibility, they deviate from the more classical literature on blame avoidance in public policy studies in various ways: As mentioned above, the focus is *firstly* confined to patterns of public responsibility attributions and, in particular, to blame shifting as one possible way of dealing with responsibility in the public sphere. *Secondly*, the focus is less on the detailed analyses of political communication about specific policy problems, but rather a more general perspective on systematic differences in the way public actors engage in the debate about responsibility. *Thirdly,* from this follows that these analyses are based on standardized analyses of public statements in media reporting, rather than on detailed, qualitative cases studies of, for instance, rhetoric and discourse. *Fourthly*, these studies not only focus on the way government politicians deal with the risk of reputational damage but they compare public attribution strategies of all kinds of public actors.

Comparative studies in this field assume that the positive self-presentation in public is not equally

[26] This study and the literature quoted in this section follow a narrow, empirical understanding of blame shifting. In technical terms, I conceptualize blame shifting as the publicly articulated attribution of responsibility for what is perceived as negative outcomes to another actor. Following the social constructivist reading of responsibility, the use of blame shifting in the public sphere and the selection of blaming targets are primarily strategic choices and reductions of complexity, and not necessarily precise representations of the factual or 'real' distribution of responsibility. Blame shifting and blaming are used interchangeably. The term blame game describes a situation in which different actors attribute blame to each other for a problem or failure.

[27] Traber et al. (2020) applied an extensive automated content analysis of prime minister speeches to study blame shifting. While this research has great merits, the broad operationalization of blame shifting as "negative sentiment" around an object shows the complexity to study blame shifting in automated forms (see also: Ladi and Tsagkroni 2019).

important to all kinds of political actors and in all situations. To explain varying patterns of public responsibility attributions, studies have referred to the structural position in the political process (Gerhards et al. 2009), the institutional setting (Greuter 2014), the policy decisions at stake (Rittberger et al. 2017), degrees of legitimation pressure (Sommer and Roose 2015) or the extent to which actors are exposed to popular elections. Gerhards et al., for instance, argue that non-elected actors "have fewer incentives to invest in their public reputation than elected policy actors" […] since "they are mainly accountable to their principal and not to the public at large" (Gerhards et al. 2009, p. 537). While technocratic actors might not like to receive blame either, they can withstand blame better than those dependent on voter perceptions. Results reported by Greuter (2014), and Sommer and Roose (2015) indeed confirm that the communicative behaviour of unelected actors is less prone to blame shifting. Reversing the perspective by focusing on the addressees, Hasler et al. (2016) show that elected actors are more often blamed for policy failures than other actors.

3.2.2.6 Blame Shifting in European Politics

In general, the targets of blame shifting depend on non-institutional and institutional context conditions. Non-institutional context conditions are the policy issues at stake or the nature of the problem. Institutional conditions mainly refer to the structure of the political system; here, blaming opportunities and the institutional division of power are core. One example are coalition governments in which junior partners can blame their senior partners and blur their own responsibility (Tzelgov 2017). Another factor is the degree of centralization: the obfuscation of responsibility is easier in decentralized systems where power is delegated to different layers of government (Weaver 1986; Mortensen 2013). This latter condition is particularly relevant in European policy fields.

Hobolt and Tilley's claim that there is "currently little work that examines, theoretically or empirically, how the EU institutions facilitate blame avoidance" (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, p. 103) for national politicians is not wrong, but it overlooks contributions made by Gerhards and colleagues (2007; 2009; 2013) who theorize and empirically demonstrate how European integration offers opportunities for blame shifting by national politicians. In line with the general assumptions of attribution theory, national politicians tend to claim credit for positive European policy outcomes while attributing responsibility for unpopular outcomes to Brussels.[28] EU institutions function as ideal scapegoats; they are less involved in domestic public debates and they are less driven by vote-seeking objectives, which minimizes the risk of backfire for the blame sender. Finally, the division of power and the general

[28] Note that these assumptions are tendentially opposed to salience theory in European integration studies, according to which it is mainly opposition actors that seek to mobilize on European issues in an attempt to highlight discrepancies between government action on the European level and voter preferences (see section 3.1.3).

complexity of European multi-level policies complicates the 'correct' attribution of responsibility among the general public and the voter.[29] When it is harder for citizens to understand the sharing of power, it is easier for domestic politicians to credibly blame the EU. Hence, EU institutions and other European member states provide a permanent possibility for blame shifting. Rittberger at al. (2017, p. 912) describe this as the complexity-hypothesis according to which "[c]omplex decision-making structures provide political decision-makers with a beneficial opportunity structure: actors with superior authority can more easily dodge responsibility even for policies they have enacted themselves". Heinkelmann-Wild et al. further substantiate findings by Gerhards and colleagues by differentiating the European policy field at stake and showing that "blame games are Europeanized primarily by governing parties and when policy-implementing authority rests with EU-level actors" (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020, p. 85).

While Gerhards and colleagues base their analysis on public responsibility statements reported in the media, Hobolt and Tilley (2014) assess 200 political speeches by national leaders in Britain, Germany, and Ireland. They argue that in the financial crisis there were several opportunities but, more importantly, strong incentives to externalize responsibility for the crisis and its disastrous consequences. Interestingly, however, they cannot entirely reproduce findings reported by Gerhards et al. Hobolt and Tilley find that blame shifting is rather directed towards previous governments and that national politicians rarely scapegoat the EU. In a study on blame shifting in Greece, Vasilopoulou et al. (2014) also find low levels of blame shifting to the EU among political parties in the first years of the crisis.

3.2.3 Summary: Open Questions in Attribution Research

This brief review of the blame avoidance literature and the literature focusing on responsibility attributions revealed two research gaps, which this dissertation seeks to address (see section 1.5).

Firstly, standardized research on attribution processes in the public sphere is still rare. Particularly in the area of blame avoidance studies, most research is based on qualitative case studies relying on narrative approaches. Quantitative studies in general, but also systematic comparisons across actors and countries, are largely missing (Wenzelburger and Hörisch 2016, p. 160). The systematic collection and comparison of attribution processes is an empirical challenge.

Secondly, apart from the presented work by Gerhards et al., Hobolt and Tilley and Rittberger at al.,

[29] Cutler (2004), for instance, shows how the complex distribution of formal responsibility in federal systems prevents the public from attributing responsibility to those actors that have promoted these policies under scrutiny. Similar research on voting behaviour documents how the clarity of authority structures affects public responsibility perceptions and vote choice among citizens (Hobolt et al. 2013). In general, most studies touching upon the attribution of responsibility in the European multilevel context focus on these public *perceptions* of responsibility which are less central to the perspective on public attributions of responsibility pursued in this study.

there is little work that brings attribution research to the study of political communication in European multi-level frameworks. In general, there is still little knowledge about how and when politicians shift responsibility to Europe, about how opportunity structures change the direction of blame games and how patterns of responsibility attribution differ across countries. Here, debate about the role of contextual factors in explaining attribution processes and blame-avoidance behaviour has only begun even though Brändström and Kuipers (2003, p. 305) already encouraged scholars two decades ago to "begin to look into the factors – individual, institutional, cultural, situational – that may help explain why certain patterns of blaming occur in a political context".

3.3 Bringing Responsibility Attributions to Politicization Research

In the preceding sections, I presented politicization research (section 3.1) and research on blame avoidance and responsibility attributions (section 3.2) as the two main theoretical fields this dissertation draws on. In this section, I connect both fields in an attribution of responsibility approach to politicization. I argue that responsibility attributions are at the heart of politicization. More specifically, the focus on responsibility attributions offers a theoretical perspective at the micro level of actor behaviour that helps to detect and explain politicization dynamics at the macro level. In section 3.3.1, I elaborate on this theoretical merger by focusing on the conflictual character of responsibility attributions and how it relates to politicization. In section 3.3.2, I show how the attribution of responsibility approach adds the direction of political conflict to the empirical study of politicization. In section 3.3.3, I argue that especially in times of crisis, communication strategies in the public sphere follow the 'rules of the blame game'.

3.3.1 Politicization and the Nature of Responsibility Attributions

In politics, attributions of responsibility are highly contested. This results from the idea that they are consequential for the reputation and perceived legitimacy of public actors. In particular, blame is dangerous (Carpenter and Krause 2012). Research on voting behaviour shows how the individual attribution of responsibility among voters influences electoral choices (see section 3.2.1.2; e.g.: de Vries, Catherine and Giger 2014). Political actors understand that voters attribute responsibility for negative and for positive developments, and therefore they care about responsibility attributions, too. Assuming that they can influence and alter responsibility perceptions among the electorate, they try to present themselves in favourable terms and to maintain public legitimacy by deflecting blame and claiming credit. Iyengar sums up this point as follows: "Politicians typically behave as though their political future depends upon their constituents' attributions of responsibility for public events: witness the alacrity with which they claim responsibility for favorable outcomes and deny or shirk responsibility for unfavorable outcomes" (Iyengar 1991, p. 9). Due to these (real or assumed)

consequences of responsibility attributions, they are central to the strategic interests of political actors, in particular elected ones, and to their public communication efforts. While it is generally hard to identify the effect of politicians' use of responsibility attributions on perceptions of responsibility among citizens, studies document how elite framing cues political opinion; hence, Hameleers et al. (2017, p. 889) assume that when in political debates blame is attributed to political entities such as the EU, citizens follow suit. These real or perceived consequences of public attributions of responsibility for public reputation and voting choices are the first argument for the contested nature of responsibility attributions in the public sphere.

The second argument directly follows from the first: Above (section 3.2.1), I argued that the attribution of responsibility is a social construction. The use of blame shifting in the public sphere and the selection of blaming targets are strategic choices and reductions of complexity. To mark one actor as responsible is a specific selection which implies a judgement or evaluation of this actor. This evaluation ties attribution sender and addressee together and transforms the description of a situation into a conflictive statement. In politics, this conflictive potential is all too obvious: The interest to blame and the reluctance to accept blame clash. For blaming to work, it requires someone to put the blame on; deflecting blame necessarily means blaming *others*. At the same time, political actors have a strong incentive to avoid blame. Therefore, "[e]fforts to blame are unlikely to be met with acceptance, passivity, or future cooperation. Instead, they instigate counteraccusations and conflict" (Moynihan 2012, p. 567).

How does this emphasis on the conflictive nature of public responsibility attributions now link to politicization research? In the competition over voter sympathy and public reputation, political debates turn into a collective contest over the allocation of responsibility. This public contest between political actors points to the core of politicization. The quest for responsibility and blame problematizes, it triggers discussions and sets in motion the politicization process. It is this crucial role of conflict in both fields – politicization research and attribution research – that serves as the starting point of the theoretical merger. Patterns of politicization are the aggregate outcome of actor behaviour and their interaction in the public realm. The way in which actors present themselves and interact with each other in public are the result of strategic interests. From the perspective of attribution research, this strategic interest in public debates is specified as the goal of a positive reputation in the public contest over responsibility. Hence, I argue that politicization patterns in the public sphere depend on the way in which political actors engage in the public quest for responsibility. In particular, the rules of the blame game help to understand dynamics of politicization.

3.3.2 The Direction of Political Conflict

In the previous section, I showed that both fields of literature are closely connected and how the attribution of responsibility approach adds an alternative actor perspective to the study of politicization. I will now extend this argument and argue that this theoretical merger offers a further advantage to the study of politicization. Essentially, the contested and evaluative nature of responsibility attributions adds an 'legitimatory perspective' to the analysis of politicization dynamics.

For Statham and Trenz, legitimation is a core mechanism of a public sphere-grounded understanding of (EU) politicization. In this reading, the unfolding of public contestations are "intrinsically related to struggles over political legitimation" (Statham and Trenz 2015, p. 7). So far, however, politicization research has rarely specified who is held responsible nor who is ultimately targeted in public sphere conflicts (an exception is: Hurrelmann and Wagner 2020). The direction of conflict in the sense of core addressees of de-legitimation efforts, has rarely been integrated into the analysis of politicization patterns and, in general, actor evaluations have often been secondary (Rittberger et al. 2017, p. 910). This is true for politicization research in which polarization is predominantly measured on the basis of ideological distance and issue positions (see section 4.1.6) but it is also true for research on the Europeanization of public spheres. Following the idea that every EU related news increases EU visibility and is therefore good news for the integration process, empirical studies tend to focus "less on evaluation and more on structural dimensions of Europeanized public spheres, such as the frequency with which the EU is mentioned in media reporting" (Kleinen-von Königslöw 2013, p. 44). With its focus on struggles over reputation and public legitimacy, the perspective on responsibility attributions adds this 'legitimatory perspective' and a way to grasp the direction of public conflicts.

3.3.3 Responsibility Attributions and Politicization in Times of Crisis

Finally, the attribution of responsibility approach explains why politicization dynamics intensify in times of crisis. Crises and responsibility attributions are almost naturally linked to each other. Understanding crises as temporarily limited, unexpected and unusual situations in which societal structures of general impact are perceived to be questioned and unstable (Koselleck 2001; Kreps 2001; Roose et al. 2015, p. 8), "[i]t is logical to connect crises and attribution theory. Stakeholders will make attributions about the cause of a crisis; they will assess crisis responsibility" (Coombs 2007, p. 136). Indeed, existing research has shown how crises intensify the quest for responsibility in public debates (Coombs and Holladay 1996). Traber et al. (2020), for instance, show that prime ministers engage more in blame shifting when the domestic economy is in decline. In particular, the literature on (post-) crisis communication has identified two central traits of crises that tie them closely to the attribution of responsibility. They are clearly negative and they are unexpected. In classical attribution

theory it is precisely these two characteristics that are identified as "driving people's need to search for causes of an event" (Coombs 2007, p. 136). Crises question taken for granted routines and they destabilize common knowledge. They demand explanation which actors offer by attributing responsibility (Bovens and t'Hart 1996, p. 129). Especially for office holders in times of crisis, political communication means blame avoidance and since crises constrain alternative forms of blame avoidance in the political process, presentational strategies become even more important (Hinterleitner and Sager 2017; Traber et al. 2020, p. 6).

Overall, the nature of public debates in times of crises exemplify how responsibility attributions form the discursive backbone of politicization. When uncertainty is pervasive, the pressing quest for responsibility becomes a key trigger of politicization. The attribution of responsibility perspective is particularly relevant for the study of politicization dynamics in times of crisis. This is even more the case in the Eurozone Crisis which comprises two areas that are particularly prone to blame avoidance behaviour; crisis politics and austerity politics (see section 3.2.2.4).

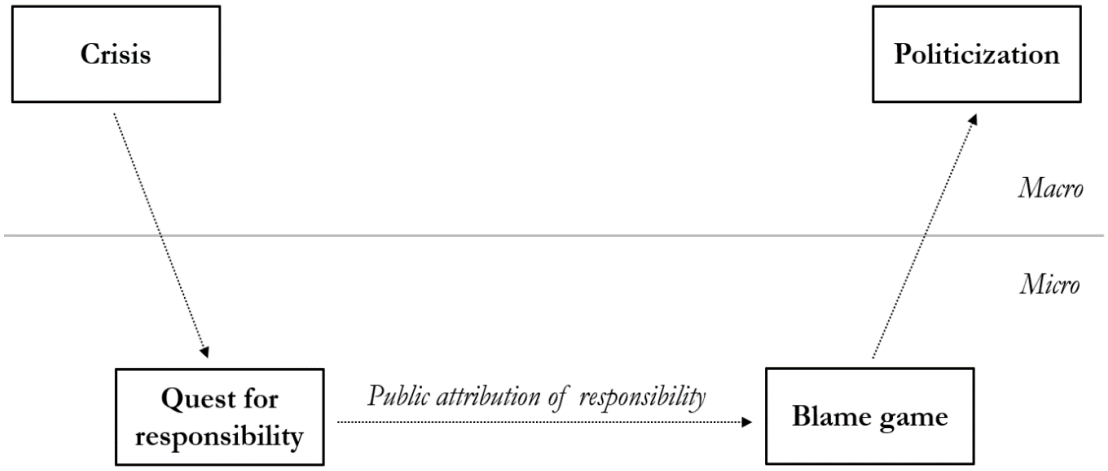
3.3.4 An Attribution of Responsibility Approach to Politicization in Times of Crisis

Figure 4 presents the theoretical merger in an attribution of responsibility approach to politicization.

Politicization is about political contestation in the public sphere and the public attribution of responsibility is at the very core of this contestation, and therefore, of politicization and politics more broadly. Attributions of responsibility form the backbone of political debates, and particularly in times of crisis, they make up the core of collective sense-making. The focus on responsibility attributions offers a theoretical perspective on actor behaviour to explain politicization dynamics. From this angle, politicization depends on the way in which political actors engage in the debate about responsibility and on their attempts to mitigate or spread blame. As such the attribution of responsibility approach adds the direction of conflict to the study of polarization and politicization.[30]

[30] In this work, I make the case for the use of an attribution of responsibility approach for the analysis of politicization. To complete the picture, it is worth tracing the role of politicization in attribution research. In that, politicization is understood as an individual actor strategy and a tool to delegitimate political opponents. It describes attempts to draw attention to potentially blame attracting situations. Negative developments are brought into the realm of public discussions in order to blame those held responsible. The aim of public officials is to avoid these kind of discussions, since these may "attract the attention of actors who are willing and able to politicize them by coupling them to critical values and by naming culprits" (Brändström and Kuipers 2003, p. 281). Whereas challengers seek to politicize failure, authorities seek to de-politicize by avoiding discussions. Summing up the role of 'selective politicization' in the public blame game, Brändström and Kuipers argue that the assignment of blame "sets in motion a 'politicization process'". "Politicization is neither an automatic nor a dominant response to critical incidents. Many social ills or governmental failures pass by without any of the institutional watchdogs taking notice. When they do bark, and thus seek to politicize incidents as policy failures, other actors may manage to redefine the issue at hand as non-political. […] This is the discursive safe haven for actors who seek to depoliticize critical incidents, as is the elusive sphere of 'fate', 'chance' and 'tragedy'" (Brändström and Kuipers 2003, p. 280).

Figure 4: An Attribution of Responsibility Approach to Politicization in Times of Crisis



4 DIFFERENTIATED POLITICIZATION FROM AN ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY PERSPECTIVE

Reviewing recent findings in politicization research in section 3.1, I emphasized that politicization is neither linear over time nor a uniform process across countries. In the following, I add to recent contributions calling for a nuanced understanding of politicization. Taking variance seriously means advancing a conceptualization that allows for a systematic analysis of the different ways in which politicization unfolds. In the following, I specify the politicization arena (section 4.1.1), agents (section 4.1.2) and sub-processes of politicization (section 4.1.3). Since these specifications build upon basic conventions in politicization research (see section 3.1.1), they receive less attention. Section 4.1.4 proposes a distinction between intensity and shape of politicization. Section 4.1.5 summarizes the conceptualization and section 4.1.6 specifies the politicization object. In section 4.2, I show how the theoretical merger of the preceding section translates into an attribution-based operationalization for the empirical analysis of politicization dynamics. With that in mind, the following structures the explanatory framework in section 5 and the empirical analysis in section 9.

4.1 Conceptualizing Differentiated Politicization

4.1.1 Politicization Arena: The Mediated Public Sphere

Starting with the politicization arena, this study focuses on the (mass mediated) public sphere. The public sphere is the central arena that enables public contestation in modern democracies (Ferree et al. 2002, p. 10). Neither limited to certain institutional contexts nor to elite circles and expert committees, this public contestation is a defining element of politicization. In contrast to the focus on parliamentary debates and other institutional arenas, the public sphere perspective includes all kinds of actors potentially representing large parts of society. Only this inclusive view allows a differentiated perspective of politicization in all its dimensions.

In modern societies, mass-media reporting is still a core institutionalized manifestation of the public sphere. In "audience democracies" (Manin 2009, p. 218), for decision makers and political challengers, the public stage and media attention are crucial in gaining resonance among the public, in order to clarify positions and to counter criticism. Public debates as covered in media reporting provide the space for actors to negotiate questions of responsibility and construct meaning. These interactions influence interpretations of responsibility among the broader audience. Rather than from personal interactions, their perceptions and judgements of public actors results from these observations of public debates. At the same time, media attention enhances the transparency of the political process and enables the public to hold policy makers accountable. In the context of the Eurozone Crisis, the

public sphere is the arena in which the discursive struggle to define the crisis unfolds and where attributions of responsibility are communicated to the public (Statham and Trenz 2015, pp. 4–5). All this makes the public sphere[31] the central arena for studying politicization.

4.1.2 Agents of Politicization: Collective Actors in the Public Sphere

Politicization agents are all individual or collective actors who actively contribute to the politicization process, who bring topics to the public agenda, and who publicly engage in controversial discussions around these topics. Instead of focussing on one actor group, the comprehensive analysis of politicization in the public sphere pursued in this research examines a full range of collective actors. This range of actors is primarily distinguished in terms of a geographic differentiation (domestic vs. European). To substantiate the distinct role of domestic actors and to understand domestic dynamics that drive politicization patterns, domestic actors are further distinguished in terms of functional differentiation, including the distinction of executive actors and political challengers from within the political system (party opposition) and from without (civil society). Understood in the very broad sense, civil society refers to all actors and organizations beyond the realm of the state and the economy that contribute to the public debate.

4.1.3 Sub-Processes of Politicization: Salience, Actor Expansion and Polarization

With Hutter (2016b), I distinguish three sub-processes of politicization[32]: a) a certain salience of the issue in public debates; b) an expansion of these debates beyond a narrow circle of executive actors; c) a process of polarization and conflict among these actors. Finally, it should be noted that I understand politicization as a gradual process and, therefore, refrain from setting benchmarks that define whether politicization is present or absent. Politicization in one country is assessed relative to others and to different moments in time.

4.1.4 Intensity and Shape of Politicization

In the review of the literature, I argued that empirical politicization research risks to miss differences in the substantial characteristics of politicization patterns across countries (Hurrelmann et al. 2015). Acknowledging these qualitative differences also requires a distinction between the concepts of Europeanization and politicization. I argue that the politicization of European affairs does not equal a Europeanization of communication flows and that the territorial level at which the politicisation of European affairs takes place is an open empirical question. To grasp the different ways in which

[31] Given the absence of a European public sphere, the focus is on domestic public spheres as covered in domestic media reporting.

[32] For the justification of this operationalization in the literature, see section 3.1.1.2.

politicization unfolds and to integrate the concept of Europeanization into the politicization framework, I propose a distinction between intensity and shape on all three sub-processes. While intensity describes the quantifiable degree of each sub-process, shape refers to these substantial characteristics and the extent to which politicization dynamics unfold on domestic or Europeanized lines. When speaking of the politicization pattern, I am referring to this combination of intensity and shape.

Politicization intensity encompasses: a) a low to high issue salience; b) a narrow to broad range of participating actor; c) weak and strong levels of polarization and conflict. Politicization shape encompasses: a) the issue framing; b) the composition or participating actors; c) the direction of conflict. On all three sub-processes, politicization shape is specified as the extent to which the politicization pattern is Europeanized or domesticized. For the issue framing (salience), this means the distinction of debates over European crisis governance, on the one hand, and debates over the domestic implementation and consequences of European policies in the sense of "effects of European integration on domestic politics, that is, issues in national politics that emerge as an implication of EU membership" (Hurrelmann and Baglioni 2014, p. 6). For the actor composition (participation) and the direction of conflict (polarization), Europeanization is conceived as the extent to which European actors are present and involved in domestic public debates as speakers or addressees. I follow the distinction of "vertical Europeanization, which consists of communicative linkages between the national and the European level" and "horizontal Europeanization, which consists of communicative linkages between different European countries" (Gerhards 2000; Koopmans and Erbe 2004; 2010b, p. 36).

4.1.5 The Politicization Pattern

Figure 5: The Politicization Pattern

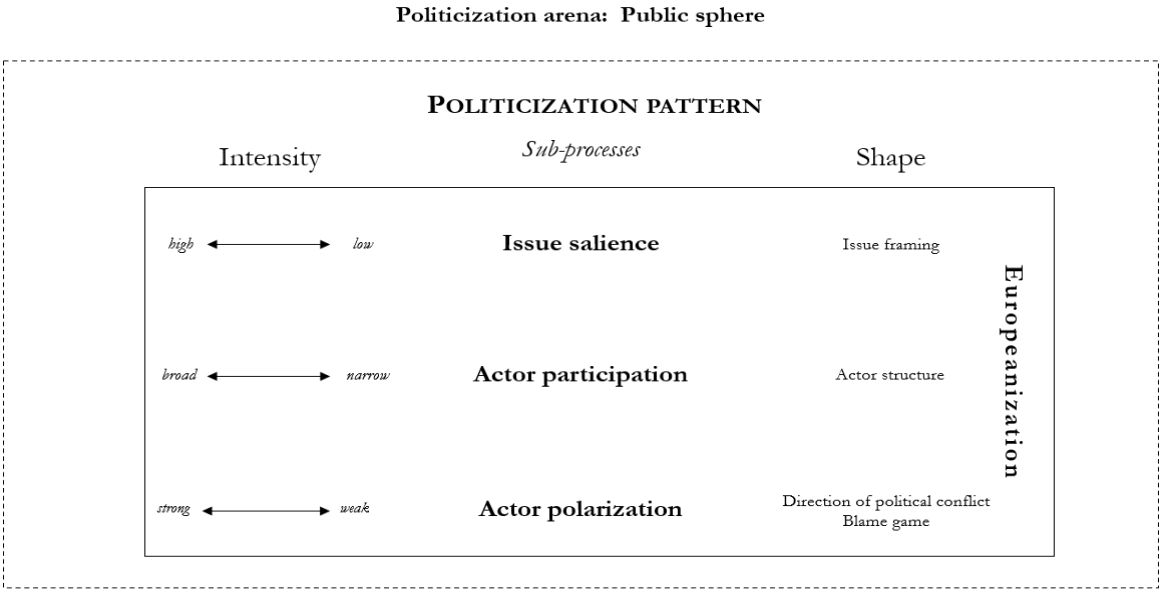


Figure 5 summarizes the conceptualization of politicization advanced in the previous sections.

The distinction of intensity and shape of the politicization pattern is central for the task of unpacking the differentiated nature of politicization on its different dimensions. This results in four ideal types of politicization (Table 2).

Table 2: Politicization Patterns – Intensity and Shape

		Politicization Shape	
		Europeanized	*Domesticized*
Politicization Intensity	*Low*	Low intensity, Europeanized politicization pattern	Low intensity, domesticized politicization pattern
	High	High intensity, Europeanized politicization pattern	High intensity, domesticized politicization pattern

4.1.6 Politicization Object: the Eurozone Crisis

What often remains unspecified in politicization research in the European multilevel framework is the politicization object (Hurrelmann and Baglioni 2014, p. 5; Kauppi and Wiesner 2018). Whether it is 'Europe', the European Union or European integration as such, European policy issues, EU membership or the EU's institutional design, the question of what is actually politicized is often confusing. In order not to limit the analysis in one way or the other, I follow a broad focus on the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis.[33] To grasp this broad understanding of the politicization object, the earlier disentanglement of Europeanization and politicization and the following distinction of politicization intensity and shape are helpful. The Eurozone Crisis is a European issue by definition. The focus on the Eurozone Crisis comprises debates about different European policy issues within the context of the European crisis management, European actors as participating actors in the debate and as potential targets of blame and conflicts over European decision-making. At the same time, this perspective encompasses the politicization of "effects of European integration on domestic politics" (Hurrelmann and Baglioni 2014, p. 6). Constraints imposed by European bailout conditions on national budgets are one example. Accordingly, just as with European actors, domestic actors who

[33] I define a societal crisis as "an unusual situation which is temporarily limited in which societal structures of general impact are perceived to be unstable and questioned" (Roose et al. 2014, p. 2; Koselleck 2001). Following this definition, the Eurozone Crisis refers to a societal crisis of the Eurozone or parts of the Eurozone with a perceived link to the Eurozone (Roose et al. 2015, p. 8).

implement or resist Eurozone Crisis measures are potential targets in the crisis blame game.

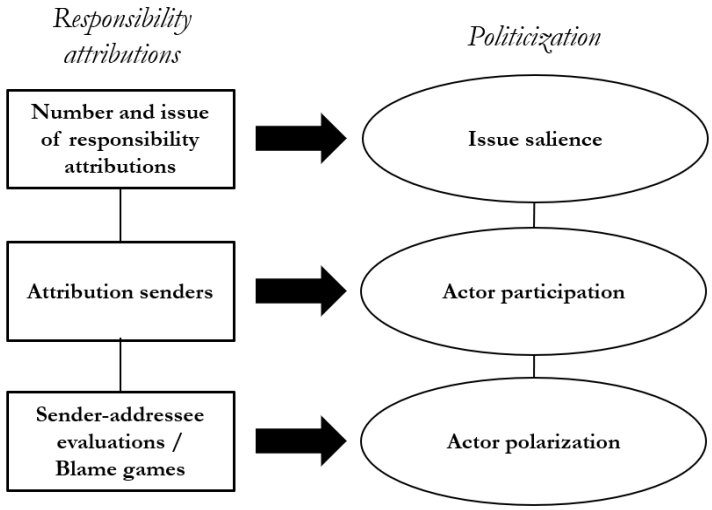
4.2 Operationalizing Politicization in Terms of Responsibility Attributions

In order to study the conceptualization of politicization proposed in the last section, this section now advances its operationalization through the perspective of responsibility attributions. Earlier, I argued that a theoretically grounded understanding of the public attribution of responsibility and, in particular, blame, is crucial for an understanding of the different patterns in which politicization processes unfold. I now suggest a way to translate these ideas into empirical research.

To advance the basic operationalization, I briefly present the basic logic of the analysis of public responsibility attributions: A responsibility attribution is the (reconstructed) answer to the question *Who makes whom responsible for what*? In this research, the triad of attribution sender (AS), attribution addressee (AA) and attribution issue (AI) builds the core unit of analysis. The relationship between sender and addressee can take different forms: *Blame* as the most conflictive form establishes a negatively evaluated link between the addressee and the attribution issue (e.g. The German chancellor blames the Greek prime minister for falsifying statistics). In analogy, *credit* implies a positive evaluation of this link (e.g. The German chancellor applauds the Greek government's pensions reform). *Demands* ascribe treatment responsibility either by calling others to action (requests) or by ascribing factual competence to an actor (competence attributions).[34]

Figure 6 shows how the components of the attribution triad fit into the politicization framework.

Figure 6: Operationalization – Responsibility Attributions and Politicization



[34] The analytical method to grasp this debate is specified in section 7.1, which furthermore presents the complete overview of attribution types.

Issue salience, or the visibility dimension of politics (Schattschneider 1957), is measured by means of the number of responsibility attributions within the debate (intensity). The shape of this sub-process is assessed by analysing the specific sub-issue framing of the responsibility attributions, including the distinction of issues connected to European governance and issues connected to the domestic implementation of European policies. Actor participation or, the scope dimension of politics, is measured by the presence of attribution senders. All individual and collective actors going public and stating attributions of responsibility are considered agents of politicization.

In general, salience is a necessary condition of politicization and actor participation is a prerequisite for a polarized debate among these actors. However, the conflictive nature of politics and politicization is most evident in the third sub-process of polarization. In the literature review, I showed how operationalizations of polarization in politicization research tend to emphasize programmatic preferences and issue positions while direct actor relations have rarely been taken into account (Rittberger et al. 2017, p. 910). When it comes to the strategic delegitimating of political opponents in public debates, however, issue positions are often secondary or not clearly stated. We can even imagine coherent issue positions and a yet a conflictive and polarized political debate. Iyengar and others have advanced the concept of "affective polarization" (Iyengar and Westwood 2015) to make sense of the difference between ideological distance, on the one hand, and general feelings of hostility towards competing groups, on the other hand (Reiljan 2020). While the perspective on 'affective polarization' is grounded in the study of emotions, partisan feelings and socio-psychological perspectives, the political sociology perspective on responsibility attributions helps to adapt this perspective for the study of public debates. The focus on responsibility attributions gets to the core of political conflict. Rather than opposing issue positions, polarization takes the form of mutual evaluations in the public sphere. Recalling Schattschneider's identification of the key dimensions of politics, the attribution of responsibility perspective allows a systematic analysis of the direction of political conflict. That is not to suggest that politics and polarization are solely down to blaming and responsibility attributions. That would, indeed, leave politics void of content and programmatic dispute. Nevertheless, blaming is a crucial part of politics that has so far been secondary in empirical studies of polarization and politicization. Summing up, actor polarization and political conflict in this dissertation are assessed by studying the contentiousness of sender-addressee evaluations from a public attribution of responsibility perspective. From this perspective, the unfolding of the blame game points towards dominant conflict lines and the direction of conflict in the debate.

5 EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORK

In the preceding section, I presented the conceptualization and operationalization of politicization. The differentiated approach allows for a detailed comparison of country-specific politicization patterns. In this section, I present the overall framework applied in order to explain these patterns. First, section 5.1 substantiates the argument that responsibility attributions add an alternative perspective on actor behaviour and it presents a basic set of attribution strategies for collective actors. I then argue that these basic actor strategies are conditioned by contextual factors at country level. As a way to grasp these contextual factors, section 5.2 introduces the political opportunity approach and specifies two complementary dimensions of the political opportunity structure that are expected to influence collective actor behaviour in the Eurozone Crisis. Section 5.3 translates these arguments into specific expectations for each sub-process of politicization. Section 5.4 summarizes the central arguments into four ideal type patterns of politicization.

5.1 The Micro Perspective: Actor Strategies and the Attribution of Responsibility

In the literature review in section 3.1.3, I presented explanations of politicization, including the central argument which states that the politicization of European affairs is driven by the transfer of authority from the domestic to the European level. However, the politicization of European affairs does not come upon societies as a force of nature. In the following, I add an alternative perspective to recent discussions that focus on the role of actors in the structuration of politization patterns.

5.1.1 Political Strategy and Politicization

Every actor-based analysis of political conflict starts with the question of which goals actors pursue in the public sphere and which strategies they apply in order to attain these goals. Political strategy can be defined as "calculations of political actors related to their aims, influenced by their means and their environment, that refer to more than just one concrete situation" (Raschke and Tils 2013, p. 127; *quoted and translated in* Wenzelburger 2011). The underlying assumption is that of the political (and democratic) process understood as the competition between rational, goal-oriented and, in the end, power-maximizing actors (Downs 1957). Following this rationalist perspective, scope and intensity of political conflicts are not predefined by the nature of a political problem but rather the results of strategic political decisions. Schattschneider's emphasis on the "highly strategic character of politics" underlines this understanding (see above; Schattschneider 1975, p. 6). Political actors incorporate their role in existing and potential conflicts into the parameters of strategic calculation. According to their aims and potentials, political strategy then deals "with the exploitation, use, and suppression of conflict" (Schattschneider 1957, p. 935). Translating this idea to the field of politicization and the

debate on the Eurozone Crisis, the degree to which actors enter the debate, the degree to which they join public conflicts, or the degree to which they emphasize the responsibility of certain actors hinges on the strategic considerations in competitive situations. In this study, these actor strategies are theorized from the perspective of responsibility attributions and blame avoidance.

5.1.2 Basic Actor Strategies From an Attribution Theory Perspective

In the theoretical merger of both perspectives, I argued that attributions of responsibility form the contentious backbone of political debates. In the following, I recall basic insights from attribution theory from section 3.2.1, then specify the theoretical implications of the attribution of responsibility perspective for different actors and their communication strategies in the public sphere.

Once again, the starting point is the idea of the political process as the competition of rational actors aiming to secure influence and power. Strategies to pursue these goals depend on the arena in play. From a public sphere perspective, actors that enter the public stage aim to win public support. Following the idea of the self-serving bias in social-psychological attribution theory, they seek to present their own role in favourable terms (Gerhards et al. 2009) and invest in influencing public perceptions of how responsible they or others are for political outcomes by means of political communication (Wenzelburger 2011, p. 1158). In the public quest for responsibility, this basically means publicly claiming credit for what is perceived as positive outcomes; denying, shifting or dispersing responsibility for alleged negative developments; or diffusing responsibility by requesting others to take action. Recalling Weaver's argument that politicians are generally more interested in avoiding and deflecting blame than in claiming credit, blame shifting is the central communication strategy directed at the public sphere and the most likely way to publicly engage in the debate about responsibility (Weaver 1986, p. 385; Schwarz 2013).

This assumption applies to all actor categories alike but based on the positions that actors take in the political process, different logics result in different patterns of attributing responsibility. When breaking down the scope of domestic contributions to political conflicts, two broad actor categories stand out: On the one side, there are (executive) office holders, which includes government actors and government-forming parties. On the other side, there are political challengers from within the political system (oppositional parties) and from outside of it (civil society).

While both actor groups seek influence, their functional positions in the political process and in the public sphere are diametrically opposed. This is particularly true for the antagonism of the government and the party opposition. Oversimplified, keeping power is opposed to seeking power; while the government deploys its strategies in order to secure its position in power, oppositional challengers seek to gain power by overthrowing the government or at least by strengthening their position in

upcoming elections. This basic difference has implications for attribution strategies; while so far, the addressees of responsibility attributions were neglected, the distinction of office holders and challengers hints at the direction of political conflict or in the language of responsibility attributions, the (blame) addressees: From the attribution of responsibility perspective, challengers seek to strengthen their position by weakening the position of the political opponent in power; hence, responsibility for negative developments is predominantly attributed to the government. In this sense, blame shifting takes the form of blame directed at the domestic government (Gerhards et al. 2009).[35] Especially oppositional parties seek to "frame policy failures as the responsibility of current officeholder" (Weaver 2018) and, moreover, "[b]y generating blame, opposition parties also signal to their constituents that they fulfil their main task of holding public officials accountable and that they possess superior problem-solving competence" (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020, p. 87). While these arguments touch upon the role of political challengers from the party opposition, challengers from outside the political system are expected to share this focus on the government when entering public debates.

Scholars of blame avoidance, however, are less interested in the role of challengers. Blame avoidance is mainly understood as a tool of office holders to avoid electoral punishment in times of crisis or when pursuing unpopular policies. For office holders, strategic choices of attributing responsibility are more complex. Given their factual competences, mere blame shifting to the opposition is not enough. Instead, government actors engage in the debate about responsibility by claiming credit for what they portray as positive developments (self-attribution of success). They emphasize positive impacts of their policies. However, in times of crisis especially, the public debate about responsibility is mainly about negative outcomes. Blame shifting becomes an essential tool in an attempt to maintain political legitimacy and office holders are expected to shift blame to others. But while for the opposition the central addressee of blame is the government, the direction of attributing blame in the case of the government itself is less straightforward. Irrespective of party ideology or the specific problem at stake, the government will try to disperse responsibility to as many different actors as possible. The aim is to blur public perceptions of responsibility and to keep the government off the hook. This implies blaming the opposition and former government parties, and it implies blaming actors from the economy or other tiers in the political system. At the same time, the engagement in blame games at home is risky, sometimes leading to "reverse effects" (Hood 2011, p. 65) when blame further attracts public attention and escalates into a "blame showdown" (Boin et al. 2009, p. 89). This riskiness of domestic blame games shifts attention to non-domestic targets and, as argued before (section 3.2.2.6), when debating European or international issues, government blame shifting to 'Europe' is

[35] This argument is obviously oversimplified. It describes the dominant expectation for responsibility attributions expected for this actor category.

likely. Other European governments and especially, EU institutions are ideal scapegoats in the sense that they facilitate blame shifting for governments who claim credit for positive European policy outcomes while attributing responsibility for unpopular outcomes to Brussels (Gerhards et al. 2007).

This latter point leads over to a short review of the role of European actors as contributors to public blame games. Apart from the European Parliament, EU institutions are not directly accountable to the voter and therefore, less driven by the logic of political competition. Consequently, they are unlikely to interfere in domestic debates and to take sides (Greuter 2014). Moreover, EU actors consider political constellations in 27 EU member states and, therefore, interventions in public debates are expected to be more balanced and moderate. Therefore, vertical blame games between domestic and European institutions should be tendentially one-sided. Other European governments, instead, are directly accountable to their domestic voters. Therefore, they are more likely to reverse blame and horizontally Europeanized blame games are expected to be more reciprocal.

These assumptions about the role of actors in the debate on responsibility are basic premises that derive from functional positions within the political process. They apply irrespective of the domestic context in which actors operate. However, actors do not navigate in a void which leads to the next section and the mitigating role of macro factors.

5.2 The Macro Perspective: Political Opportunities as Conditioning Factors

The last section introduced the micro perspective as the starting point of the theoretical framework and suggested basic assumptions about actor strategies from the attribution of responsibility perspective. I now argue that these strategies are conditioned by political opportunities at the macro level. In that sense, I corroborate Grande and Hutter's (2016a, p. 40) assumption that "it seems as if variation in the level of conflict depends not so much on the source of conflict but on different political opportunity structures and actor constellations" (see also: Rittberger et al. 2017).

Originating in social movement studies, the political opportunity approach assumes that political institutions shape emergence and forms of collective mobilization. Tarrow defines political opportunities as the "[c]onsistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action" (Tarrow 2011 [1994], p. 32) and for Kitschelt, political opportunity structures are the "filters between the mobilization of groups and their choice of strategies and actions" (Kitschelt 1986, p. 59). In social movement scholarship, the political opportunity approach has been applied for two central research interests. Firstly, scholars analysed how institutional changes and an expansion of political opportunities gave rise to

the emergence of certain social movements[36]. Secondly, and by now more importantly, scholars utilized the approach for comparative purposes. McAdam, McCarthy and Zald argue (McAdam et al. 1996, p. 18) that the political opportunity approach is particularly suited to explaining cross-national variation. It provides a context-sensitive framework to explain variance in collective mobilization. Explanations for diverging movement strength and success were no longer traced in movement-specific characteristics, such as their resources and organization, but rather in the different political environments in which they operate and which enable, incite or restrict collective mobilization.[37]

5.2.1 Political Opportunities, Europeanized Public Spheres and Politicization

Going beyond the focus on political institutions, Koopmans and others (Koopmans and Olzak 2004; Koopmans and Statham 2010b) later advanced this perspective to the discursive elements of the opportunity structure. Bridging the political opportunity approach and the framing approach in social movement studies, they define "*discursive opportunities* as the aspects of the public discourse that determine a message's chances of diffusion in the public sphere" (2004, p. 202). They draw attention to the question of how far social movements successfully exploit (national) narratives and discursive formations. This adaptation shifted the focus from the street to the public sphere and suggested that the general line of argumentation could not only be applied to political *mobilization* but also to political *communication* more generally. The object of mobilization was no longer participants in protests and contentious action but rather public opinion in the public sphere.

Koopmans further advanced this understanding of the opportunity-approach as a broad theoretical perspective rather than a rigorous analytical approach.[38] This change of perspectives paved the way for further adaptations and an extension of the concept beyond its original object of investigation. Again, Koopmans and Statham's work is exemplary; leaving aside the original focus on social movements and collective mobilization, they draw on the approach to make sense of public claim-making in the "European Public Sphere" (Koopmans and Statham 2010a). They show how the process of Europeanization implies a shift of power for collective actors by opening up opportunities and access to resources for some and by constraining opportunities for others. These changing opportunities translate to diverging degrees of visibility in Europeanized public spheres. In particular, Europeanization favours executives that are close to Brussels-based negotiations and decision-making, whilst

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[36] An example of these, often long-term historical research endeavours is McAdam's study of the US-civil rights movement (1982).

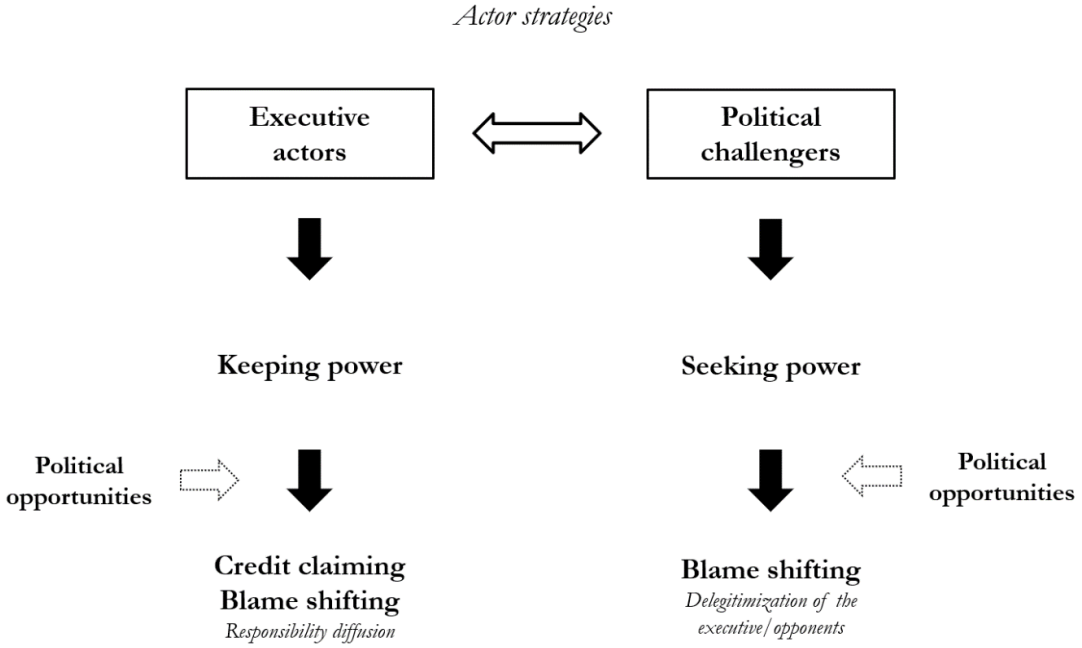
[37] An example is Kitschelt's study of the emergence of the anti-nuclear movement in four countries (1986).

[38] At the same time, this opening up of the perspective is paradigmatic for the general critique of the political opportunity approach as being too vague, as a "sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment" (Gamson and Meyer 1996, p. 275) or a "simple structural answer to complex political problems" (Tarrow 2011 [1994], p. 94).

constraining the potential for civil society actors to be heard (Gerhards 2000; Koopmans 2007). Their work contrasted both the social movement-focus of the original political opportunity approach as well as the government-focus of the political science perspective on European integration; this opened up a political sociology perspective of European integration. They summarize that "a political opportunity approach does not focus primarily on states as the crucial actors within the European policy process; instead it focuses on collective actors within states – governments, political parties, interest groups, social movements, national and regional actors, and so on – and analyses their responses to European integration by asking how the integration process alters the set of opportunities and constraints for each of these collective actors" (Koopmans and Statham 2010b, p. 44).

I adapt this public sphere perspective on political opportunities to the study of politicization. Variation in intensity and shape of politicization is traced in the diverging opportunities for actors to engage in the contentious debates around responsibility. This framework accommodates context conditions on a macro level with the micro perspective on actor strategies. After all, opportunities are *potentials* which need to be exploited. Like Koopmans and Statham, I extend this theoretical perspective to understanding the role of all kinds of collective actors in the public sphere. Whereas, in principle the political opportunity framework is applied to the analysis of challengers and their opportunities to *seek power*, the perspective on responsibility attributions adds executive actors and opportunities to *keep power* by means of public communication strategies. The integration of the attribution of responsibility perspective into the political opportunity framework allows combining the focus on challengers with that on office holders. Figure 7 summarizes this idea.

Figure 7: Strategic Goals, Responsibility Attributions and Political Opportunities



All in all, I argue that political opportunities influence actor strategies to engage in debates about responsibility and, consequently, influence the macro pattern of politicization as its aggregate outcome. In the following section, I specify two core dimensions of the political opportunity structure.

5.2.2 Two Dimensions of the Political Opportunity Structure

In social movement research, there is a long-running debate about the constitutive dimensions of the political opportunity structure (McAdam 1996). This dissensus makes sense since "in understanding what such dimensions refer to it is important to note that dimensions are not definitions" of political opportunity structures (Opp 2009, p. 172). Dimensions are forms of operationalization or empirical propositions that are expected to affect political opportunities and, hence, collective behaviour.

Existing operationalizations of the political opportunity structure oscillate between an emphasis on institutionalized context conditions and more conjunctional opportunities. Kriesi et al. (1995) for instance, stress the former side and the stable character of the institutional structure of the political system. They do not neglect changes in the institutional arrangement but argue that "actors cannot anticipate such shifts at the time when they engage in collective action, which means that they have to take the political opportunity structure as a given in their short-term strategic calculations" (1995, p. 168). Tarrow (2011 [1994], pp. 86–88) instead emphasizes the latter side and the dynamic aspects of political opportunities, which he understands as changes in the political and social environment. Social changes "render the established political order more vulnerable or receptive to change" (McAdam et al. 1996, p. 8). These dynamic opportunities can be shifts in ruling alignments, the opening up of access to political participation, or the emergence of cleavages between ruling elites.[39] Most approaches, however, combine stable and dynamic political opportunities (Tarrow 1996, p. 42). In the following, I pursue this middle approach. But what are central dimensions of the political opportunity structure that influence configurations of public conflicts in the Eurozone Crisis?

Many existing operationalizations are evidently restricted to the analysis of social movements and, therefore, too specific for the holistic framework of this study. The inclusive actor perspective requires more abstract explanations that influences all actor strategies alike. Yet, there are countless elements of the political opportunity structure that are potentially relevant for a comparative study of politicization. I reduce some of this complexity by focusing on two dimensions which are expected to have an important impact on the ways in which actors contribute to public conflicts about responsibility. Along the distinction of stable and dynamic elements, I distinguish 1) the institutionalized openness of the political system and 2) socio-economic and political impacts of the Eurozone Crisis.

[39] Further dimensions mentioned in the literature include repression or informal strategies of the elites.

5.2.2.1 Institutionalized Openness of the Political System

Against their assumption, Grande and Hutter (2016a) find that it is not the source of conflict – sovereignty, identity or solidarity – that structures politicization patterns, but rather domestic context factors. Following this insight, I argue that the politicization of European affairs is embedded in domestic conflict structures; therefore, in order to explain diverging patterns of politicization, the mechanism of dealing with conflict in domestic political settings need to be accounted for. Like most scholars using the political opportunity approach in the social movement field (McAdam 1996, p. 27), I expect the institutionalized openness of the political system to play a crucial role in the structuration of political conflicts. This dimension describes a set of institutional factors of the political system that define the accessibility to the political process and to collective decision-making. These institutional arrangements structure the forms of interaction between challengers and executive actors and opportunities to articulate, organise and mobilise collective preferences. The ways in which political conflicts develop in societies are dependent on the ways in which these institutional arrangements facilitate or constrain the representation of diverging interests.[40]

In the comparative politics literature, these institutional arrangements form the central elements of what Lijphart (1999/2012) called the different "patterns of democracy", oscillating between the two poles of the open consensus or consociational type and its closed, majoritarian counterpart. Lijphart and other scholars in this field ultimately compare the quality of democratic political systems. This culminates in the assessments that consensus democracies are the "kinder, gentler" form of government – they tend to be more equal and inclusive, show higher levels of minority protection and citizens tend to be more satisfied with democracy (Lijphart 1999/2012, p. 274). In the social movement literature, these normative assessments are less central. Instead, scholars focus on the openness or closeness of the political system and they compare the extent to which this affects the emergence, strategies and success of collective actors.

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[40] Whereas the political opportunity approach is originally applied to explain the collective behaviour of political challengers, the literature on blame avoidance provides further support for why institutional features of the political system should also influence the political communication of political authorities in power. Already Weaver (1986) discussed institutional features of the political system and its influence on blame avoidance behaviour and the ease of assigning responsibility in the public sphere. When, for instance, in social movement studies, a decentralized political system implies sub-national access points for social movements, scholars of blame avoidance stress how decentralized political systems provide opportunities for executives to avoid blame by dispersing responsibility to different tiers of the political system (Mortensen 2013). The more actors are involved in institutionalized decision-making, the lower 'the clarity of responsibility' for the public. Another example is the role of the party system. Weaver and others argue that in "parliamentary systems where the personalization of politics is comparatively lower, individual actors have fewer incentives to blame others and deviate from the party line in order to appeal to their voters. Instead, strong party images and party discipline result in more government- and party-centred BAB [Blame Avoidance Behavior]" (Hinterleitner and Sager 2015, p. 146).

Particularly in times of crisis, the openness of the political system is an important object of study. Crises are prone to increased levels of conflict and hence, the institutionalized ways of dealing with conflict deserve attention. This is true for the study of how different systems manage to cope with crises[41] but it is also true for the particular ways in which institutional arrangements influence how conflicts are played out in times of crisis. Kovras and Loizides conclude that "in times of crisis, a significant variable that often goes unnoticed is the institutional structure of democracy" (2014, p. 8). For the specific context of EU politicization, Grande and Hutter add that institutional factors of the political system are often discussed as conditioning factors of politicization but they are "hardly ever tested" (Grande and Hutter 2016a, p. 28).

While possibilities of operationalization are many, I follow Kriesi's adaptation of Lijphart; in a research proposal entitled "Strategic Political Communication", Kriesi (2004) lays out some basic ideas to bring together Lijphart's "patterns of democracy", the political opportunity perspective, expectations for strategies of political communication and the structural constitution of (national) public spheres. Divided into two sub-dimensions, this operationalization[42] of the institutionalized openness of the political system includes, first, the concentration of political power and, second, the institutional accessibility of state actors. Regarding the superordinate dimension, a high concentration of power and a low accessibility of state actors imply closed political opportunities at the institutional level of the political system. Vice versa, a low concentration of power and a high accessibility of state actors imply open political opportunities. Later, in section 5.3.1, I argue that both criteria, the concentration of power and the accessibility of state actors, combine structural features that influence whether and how actors are expected to engage in public sphere conflicts over responsibility.

5.2.2.2 Socio-economic and Political Impact of the Eurozone Crisis

The second explanation points to the dynamic or situational opportunities emerging out of the country-specific position in the Eurozone Crisis. The underlying argument is straightforward. It follows from the idea that crises trigger the collective quest for responsibility (see section 3.3.3). The uncertainty in times of crisis unveils new political opportunities to influence public debates. Essentially, I assert that the more a society is directly affected, the more salient, broad and controversial the public debate about responsibility for the crisis, its consequences and the ways to contain it. Later, in section 5.3.2 , I argue in detail how the impact of the Eurozone Crisis structures opportunities for collective

[41] An example is the argument that executives in majoritarian systems can react more quickly and more decisively since they are not restricted by the need of incorporation and consensus finding.

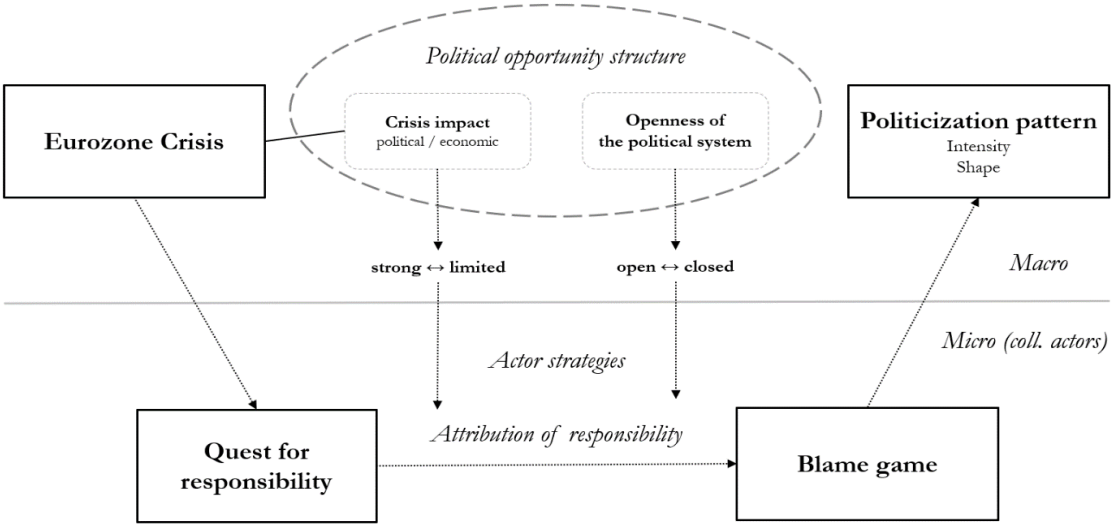
[42] The more specific, empirical operationalizations of both explanatory dimensions are introduced in the case selection in section 6.1.2.

actors to engage into the debate about responsibility. This meta-dimension is again divided into two interrelated elements: Firstly, the socio-economic crisis impacts and secondly, the political crisis impact which covers the degree of political stability and the country position in the Eurozone Crisis with regards to the dependence on Eurozone bailout loans, the exposure to authority transfer or, in short, the central distinction of debtor and creditor countries.

5.3 General Expectations for Politicization Patterns

In the previous sections, I have presented central ideas on actor strategies from the attribution of responsibility perspective (micro level) and specified two central dimensions of the political opportunity structure (macro level) that are expected to influence these strategies. Figure 8 summarizes these ideas and adds the political opportunity structure to the analytical framework.

Figure 8: Analytical and Explanatory Framework



According to the logic of comparative social research, this framework is designed to explain country variance in politicization. It structures the empirical research and the analytical leitmotif and suggests the direction of expected outcomes. Combining the micro perspective on actor strategies of attributing responsibility with the macro perspective on political opportunities, the aim is not to test whether either actor-specific or country-specific factors are better suited to explaining politicization patterns. Instead, they are complementary. And rather than providing a detailed list of hypotheses, the arguments are subsumed in an ideal type set into which the countries are located. Based on this, expectations for the politicization pattern for each country are formulated. This ideal-model approach leaves leeway for empirical exploration and it "avoids presenting politicization as a one-dimensional variable of which there is either 'more' or 'less'" (de Wilde and Lord 2016, p. 149).

5.3.1 Institutionalized Openness and Patterns of Politicization

Based on arguments from the political opportunity perspective in social movement scholarship and public sphere research as well as to the blame avoidance literature, this section argues that the institutionalized openness of the political system influences whether and how actors engage in public sphere conflicts over responsibility. I first discuss expectations for closed political systems.[43] The antithetic arguments refer to open political systems, and are summarized at the end of the section.

5.3.1.1 Salience and Actor Participation

From the political opportunity perspective, closed political systems in which executive power is concentrated and the accessibility of state actors is low, provide fewer access points for collective actors to influence the political process than open systems (Kriesi et al. 2010, p. 240). This lack of formal access points – such as consensus-oriented committees, public fora, or elements of direct democracy – enhances the incentive to fight for visibility in other arenas.[44] When access to institutional politics is closed, political communication in the public sphere gains in importance and oppositional challengers seek to assert influence by going public, voicing criticism and raising attention for their concerns.[45] At the same time, media privileges those in charge of political decisions and, therefore, the concentration of power tendentially favours the visibility of executive actors. This interplay of the strategic use of the public sphere as a counterbalance for the lack of institutional access points, on the one hand, and the structural advantage of executive actors, on the other, suggests intense debates between executive actors and their domestic challengers. This leads to a generally high salience of responsibility debates in closed systems compared to open ones. The confrontation between the government and the party opposition is expected to dominate the public sphere and to reduce the (comparative) visibility of other voices. This applies to other domestic actors such as civil society actors as well as to the role of European actors. Overall, this suggests a domesticized actor composition, with a predominance of government actors and political challengers.

5.3.1.2 Actor Polarization and Conflict

So far, the arguments for closed political systems have suggested highly salient public debates and a narrow range of domestic, political actors (participation). Closely connected to these arguments are

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[43] Here and in the following, the expected intensity of politicization is formulated in relative terms on a continuum from close to open political systems.

[44] Many arguments in this section are not specific to the debate about responsibility. Instead, they often relate to the structure of public debates more generally.

[45] This emphasis on the public debate in closed systems is illustrated by the Weberian (Weber 2011 [1918]) distinction between 'talking' parliaments in closed, majoritarian systems and 'working' parliaments in open, consensual systems that emphasize the resolution of conflict.

expectations for the sub-process of polarization and conflict. In general, institutional structures in closed, majoritarian systems are expected to leave their imprint on the way of *doing* politics. Kriesi et al. (1995, p. 44) show how closed systems provoke confrontational strategies, whereas open structures invite more cooperative approaches. This difference is expected to be applicable for discursive strategies and the ways of *debating* politics, too. Earlier, it was argued that in closed systems, where the action space of politics is limited to few executive actors, the public sphere gains in importance as an arena of political encounter. In order to attract public attention and counterbalance the structural advantage of executive actors, non-executive challengers need to generate a certain news value, which is inter alia defined by the disruptiveness of the intervention, such as direct attacks and scandalization (Eilders 2006).[46] For the specific perspective on public debates about responsibility, this suggests a frequent use of blame shifting vis-à-vis other forms of attributing responsibility.

Moreover, whereas in open political systems, institutional involvements and mutual dependencies contain the blame game in the public sphere, collective actors in closed systems are less restricted. They are less considerate of possible partners or allies, so that direct blame becomes a likely strategic choice. This further relates to the argument that underlines the expectation of an intense blame game; majoritarian decisions do not secure consent. The wide range of executive power in closed systems allows for neglect of diverging societal interests. Especially in times of crisis and far-reaching reform, this creates distrust and frustration among the affected segments of the population and their political representatives. This distrust is articulated in the public sphere and blame directed at those in charge is likely to be its form of articulation. Altogether, these arguments underline the expectations of strongly blame-oriented debates and a high polarization intensity in closed systems. In the following, I take a closer look at the direction of political conflict in closed systems.

In general, the earlier arguments suggest a narrow, domesticized blame game with a dominant conflict line between the government and the party opposition. However, the blame-oriented nature of the debate is not expected to stop for European actors, who will be drawn into existing conflict dynamics. Europeanized conflict lines will not be dominant but they will be more pronounced in closed systems than in open systems. To structure the arguments that substantiate this claim, it is helpful to distinguish public sphere links between the government and European actors (1) as well as those between political challengers and European actors (2).

(1) Government vs. European actors: The literature on blame avoidance offers some hints for government relations with European actors in responsibility debates. In general, the European multi-

[46] This follows the common idea that 'only bad news is good news'. For this so-called negativity bias in newspaper reporting, see also: Bohle (1986).

level framework provides governments with new opportunities for blame avoidance. To recall the above, other European governments and supranational actors are ideal scapegoats; EU institutions especially are less driven by vote-seeking objectives, they have few incentives to interfere in contentious debates (Hoesch 2003) and the risk of discursive backfire is limited. Therefore, in European policy fields, governments will disperse blame to European actors whenever possible (Gerhards et al. 2009). These general assumptions hold for executive actors in closed and open systems alike but this tendency should be more pronounced for governments in closed political systems: Executive actors in the public sphere seek to disperse responsibility to as many actors as possible (Weaver 1986). This possibility to disperse blame is conditioned by the fragmentation of power in political systems which structures the 'clarity of responsibility' for the public. The more political competencies are dispersed to coalition actors, social partners of subnational units, the less clear the distribution of responsibility for the public and the easier it is for executive actors to blur responsibility in cases of unpopular outcomes and to diffuse blame to other tiers of the political system (Mortensen 2013; see also: Hinterleitner 2018)[47]. In closed systems, however, these opportunities for governments to shift blame are constrained. European integration, then, provides the de-centralization that is missing in domestic context but needed to deflect responsibility for unpopular outcomes. Building on that, I expect blame shifting to European actors to be a universal tendency, but this tendency should be stronger in closed systems than in open ones. Given that it is less risky to blame EU institutions than other European governments, I expect vertical blame shifting to be more important than horizontal blame shifting.[48]

(2) Political challengers vs. European actors: Recalling the above (section 3.2.2.2), the attribution of responsibility perspective suggests that blame shifting for political challengers is mainly directed at the government. As the name implies, these actors *challenge* executive actors in power and in general, this challenge is still overtly confined to the realm of domestic politics. This argument is obviously simplistic and blind concerning the role of actor configurations such as party ideology, and yet it points to the central directions of conflict from the attribution of responsibility perspective. The argument itself is valid for the party opposition but also for actors from civil society. Hence, I expect less pronounced conflict lines between political challengers and European actors as compared to those between executive actors and European actors. This argument again applies irrespective of the

[47] One of the few empirical studies in this field by Mortensen finds that "decentralisation of formal authority to the regional level of government also functions as a deflection of public responsibility in newsmedia coverage" (Mortensen 2013, p. 176).

[48] Leaving the field of attribution theory, Della Porta (2003, p. 15) adds a further argument for the structuration of Europeanized public spheres and the role of government-EU relations. Following the so-called fits/misfits-hypothesis (Börzel and Risse 2000), she argues that public sphere conflicts with EU actors occur when the EU institutional design clashes with domestic designs. Given the proximity of the EU institutional structure to the consensual model (Lijphart 1999/2012, p. 40), this reasoning also suggests that the domestic-European blame game is more pronounced in majoritarian systems.

political context but the institutionalized openness of the political system is expected to mitigate the relationship between challengers and European actors in the following ways.

Considering that the blame avoidance literature has little to offer when it comes to theorizing the role of political challengers in responsibility debates, I return to social movement theory. The literature suggests that the domestic political system plays a central role in structuring the behaviour of political challengers vis-à-vis Europe (Reising 1998; Roose 2003; Poloni-Staudinger 2008; Della Porta and Caiani 2011). Reising argues that "a more closed political structure is more likely to lead to an expansion of domestic protest, to include European issues, policies and targets" (Reising 1998, p. 10). While in principle this argument is applied to social movement, it can be adapted to the role of the party opposition. The general assumption is that European integration opens the political space for political challengers in several ways. First, supranational institutions provide new political opportunities for non-executive actors to influence decision-making processes when channels at home are closed. Second, the EU institutional setting provides an alternative forum to articulate concerns when voices at home are marginalized. And third, European integration offers opportunities to "pressure domestic governments from the outside" (Poloni-Staudinger 2008, p. 535). In a nutshell, European access compensates for the lack of domestic access (Kriesi et al. 2010, pp. 53–54). To sum up, communicative links to European actors in the public sphere should be more frequent for political challengers in closed systems when compared to open ones. It should be noted those references are not necessarily always negative. Next to blame, attributions of responsibility to European actors will often take the form of requests. Overall and in relative terms, however, blame shifting from political challengers to European actors will be more pronounced in closed than in open systems.

5.3.1.3 Summary: Institutionalized Openness and Patterns of Politicization

i. Closed Political Systems

Before turning to the second dimension of the political opportunity structure, I sum up the aforementioned arguments. Translated into the politicization pattern, they suggest an overall high politicization intensity for systems with closed institutional structures. The sub-processes of politicization will feature a) strong public sphere activity and highly salient responsibility debates, b) a domesticized actor participation dominated by government actors and their challengers from the party opposition, c) high degrees of polarization and an intense blame game between the government and the opposition. Further conflict lines will arise between the government blaming European actors and, albeit less contentious, between political challengers and European actors.

ii. Open Political Systems

The reference point for the expectations for closed systems were open political systems. Expectations for open systems can thus be deduced by reversing the arguments. In political systems with open institutional structures and an inclusive political process, I expect fewer incentives to go public for political challengers, and when power is spread, media attention is less focused on the government. All in all, less salient responsibility debates are expected. Since more actors are involved in decision-making processes and given that the public sphere is less dominated by the government and main actors from the party opposition, actor participation will be broader. The inclusive character of consensual systems suggests easier access and a more pluralistic actor presence, which also extends to European actors. As for the polarization of public debates, the public blame game will be less pronounced in the light of large coalitions and bi-partisan agreements. In general, Europeanized blame games will be marginal for several reasons: Given that executive actors will be less exposed to public blame and given that they have more opportunities to disperse blame for their part, European actors are less relevant as scapegoats for blame shifting. Given the range of opportunities to participate at home, political challengers have less incentives to turn to European actors.

Translated into the politicization pattern, open political systems will show a generally lower politicization intensity. I expect a more Europeanized actor participation in public debates and a limited public blame game, including a limited presence of European addressees of blame. Table 3 summarizes main expectations for the sub-processes of politicization. Given that the institutionalized openness does not offer cues for issue framing, this dimension remains open.

Table 3: Summary of Expectations – Institutionalized Openness and Politicization

CLOSED SYSTEMS	**OPEN SYSTEMS**
1) Salience *Intensity*: high	**1) Salience** *Intensity*: low
2) Actor participation *Intensity (actor range)*: narrow-moderate *Shape (actor composition)*: low Europeanization	**2) Actor participation** *Intensity (actor range)*: broad *Shape (actor composition)*: strong Europeanization
3) Actor polarization *Intensity*: low-moderate *Shape (direction of conflict):* a) Domestic blame game: strong b) European blame game: moderate (vertical)	**3) Actor polarization** *Intensity*: low *Shape (direction of conflict):* a) Domestic blame game: low b) European blame game: low

5.3.2 Eurozone Crisis Impact and Patterns of Politicization

This section now turns to the second dimension of the political opportunity structure. Distinguishing again between two ideal types with limited and strong Eurozone Crisis impact, I formulate expectations for actor behaviour and the resulting politicization pattern in terms of intensity and shape.

5.3.2.1 Salience

In general, I expect that crises trigger intensive public debates in a collective quest for responsibility. By definition, crisis situations spread uncertainty and a search for sense-making. The real or threatening breakdown of the established order questions taken for granted routines and formerly stable structures of meaning (see section 3.3.3). As matters of public concern, crises demand interpretation and causal attributions of responsibility in the public sphere. Moreover, political challengers in crisis-affected countries will do everything to *politicize* crises; they will ensure that the crisis remains high on the public agenda "in their efforts to weaken or remove their office-holding rivals, and […] to exploit crises to discredit and dismantle well-entrenched policies and institutions" (Boin et al. 2009, p. 100).

Based on this general argument, I assume that severely affected societies are more inclined to engage in responsibility debates about the Eurozone Crisis than societies in which the crisis has had a less significant impact in socio-economic or political terms. As for the politicization shape, the issue focus is likely to vary, depending on whether a country is primarily involved in Brussels-based negotiations on bailout schemes and crisis management (creditor countries) or whether, in addition, it deals with the domestic implementation and the socio-economic consequences of these policies (debtor countries). In the Eurozone Crisis, unsustainable levels of public debt were answered by fiscal austerity and welfare state retrenchment, structural reforms and privatization. These measures led to increases in unemployment and economic inequality. Relative deprivation has put redistribution and socio-economic issues high on the public agenda (Della Porta 2015). By contrast, in the countries at the other end of the Eurozone Crisis continuum, the larger population was less affected and socio-economic issues will therefore feature less prominently in public debates. Here, the crisis manifested itself as a perceived threat for the stability of the common currency, contagion effects in the Eurozone, a possibly extensive writing off of bailout loans and in general, a potential destabilization of financial markets and the European economy. All in all, responsibility debates in creditor countries will predominantly feature issues in relation to the European crisis management whereas the issue focus in debtor countries will be more diverse and put an emphasis on the domestic implementation of Eurozone Crisis politics and their social and economic consequences.

5.3.2.2 Actor Participation

i. Strong Crisis Impact[49]

Directly related to the question of salience and issue framing is that of actor participation. Following from the above, I expect that the range of participating actors increases with the crisis impact. There are two central reasons for this claim.

First, crises do not only destabilize established structures of interpretation, they also question the authority of their 'authors' or, in others words, that of political decision-makers. The Eurozone Crisis is a striking example of how a financial and economic crisis turned into a crisis of the political status quo. Together, these disruptions impose opportunities for lasting transformations and "render the established political order more vulnerable or receptive to change" (McAdam et al. 1996, p. 8). Uncertainty and the void of authority provide opportunities for a potentially broad range of formerly marginal voices to gain access to the public debate, to challenge established ideas, to redefine issues and to offer alternative ways of interpretation (Keeler 1993). The crisis does "not only feature a broad public outcry but also an intense competition among political entrepreneurs to define it" (de Wilde 2014a, p. 8). Public sphere dynamics in lasting moments of crisis are a framing contest between the many actors that seek to take advantage of this crisis-induced opportunity space. This is what Boin et al. call "crisis exploitation" (2009). Closely related to this general possibility of change and to the decreasing authority of office-holders is a further point which social movement scholars mention as a key moment of dynamic change in the political opportunity structure. Crises, and especially those which expand into the political realm, boost dissent among the governing elites and these splits further weaken their position relative to their political challengers.

Second, the more different parts of society are affected, the more actors will try to participate in the public debate. The stakes are high and, therefore, incentives to go public are high. When the newly emerging possibility for change functions as a pull-factor for actors to participate in public debates, the level of strain is the push-factor.

Applying these two arguments to the Eurozone Crisis debates, I assume that in debtor countries where new political opportunities emerge and where many parts of society are affected, a wide variety of actors will come forward to make their voices heard in the public debate. To specify expectations about the shape of the actor composition, it is again useful to distinguish political challengers (1) and executive actors (2) in the domestic realm, as well as European actors (3).

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[49] Given the broad range of arguments, this and the following section present the argument for countries with high and limited crisis impact separately.

(1) Domestic political challengers: As argued above, the blurring of formerly taken for granted power structures opens up opportunities for political challengers to enter the public stage, to push their agendas and to advocate change. The party opposition will try to exploit political instability and the public delegitimization of the government. Moreover, unpopular policy measures, perceived injustice and the lack of democratic legitimacy in the Eurozone Crisis and its management provide incentives for civil society actors to challenge established elites.

(2) Domestic executive actors: The role for executive actors in the crisis debate is more ambiguous. On the one hand, executive actors could decide to keep a low public profile and remain silent in the hope of riding out the storm. On the other hand, situations of crises put decision-makers under scrutiny. Especially in cases of large and ongoing crises, the critical public demands answers. "When crises occur, something or somebody must be blamed – for causing the crisis, failing to prevent it, or inadequately responding to it" (Boin et al. 2010, p. 706). Public framing contests concentrate on crisis causes and the responsibility for its occurrence. As the central targets of these blaming impulses, government actors are pushed to justify their role in the outbreak of the crisis and its management. When economic crises turn into political ones, the public sphere becomes a central arena for legitimacy contestation and staying silent and 'dodging' is no longer an option. Governments come under "legitimation pressure" (Sommer and Roose 2015). To cope with this pressure and the risk of electoral punishment, they engage in public debates, try to claim credit when things improve and to shift responsibility for failures to others.

Given that in times of crises, the room for manoeuvre in the political process, such as reactive policy changes to conciliate voter groups, is constrained, strategies of blame avoidance in the public sphere become the last resort in averting electoral defeat.[50] Here, the case of the Eurozone Crisis is telling; in the Southern European countries most affected by the crisis, the leeway for policy options was severely constrained by the imperatives of 'the markets' and by the strict conditionality and supervision by the 'troika' (e.g. Featherstone 2015). As a consequence, political communication in the public sphere gains in importance. Finally, the nature of the Eurozone Crisis underlined the general expectation that crises are "moments of executive". Bailout negotiations on European level were held between governmental actors which is expected to boost their visibility in the public sphere (see below).

(3) European actors: The factual competences of EU actors in Eurozone Crisis politics suggest a strong presence as senders of responsibility attributions in domestic crisis debates (vertical Europeanization). This applies to creditor and debtor countries alike. When it comes to the presence of actors from other European member states, I expect a stronger horizontal Europeanization of the

[50] See section 3.2.2.3 on the distinction of blame avoidance strategies in different arenas.

actor participation in crisis-affected countries. In these countries, the bailout negotiations appear as "decisions imposed by executives and civil servants from other countries" (Statham and Trenz 2015, p. 21). Mirroring this influence, especially executive actors from creditor countries will appear in crisis debates in debtor countries.

Summing up, responsibility debates in crisis-affected countries are expected to feature a broad range of attribution senders from the domestic and the European realm. This includes executive actor, political challengers, civil society and other domestic actors representing the crisis-affected parts of the population as well as EU actors and actors from European (creditor) countries.

ii. Limited Crisis Impact

In less affected countries, expectations for actor participation are different. In general, the crisis-specific opportunities for political challengers to change the status quo are absent. Hence, the range of actors participating in the public sphere will be limited. Apart from this perspective on general crisis situations, I expand on the earlier point that the nature of the Eurozone Crisis boosts the presence of executive actors and argue that this tendency is stronger in less affected countries.

The Eurozone Crisis is profoundly European. It has engulfed most or even all European countries, it involves all central EU institutions, it has stressed the established rules of European decision-making and its overall management is situated on a European level. As I have previously argued, I expect that crisis debates in creditor countries will have a stronger focus on the European dimension of the Eurozone Crisis management than debates in crisis-hit countries. From research on the Europeanization of public spheres it is know that "executive actors are by far the most important beneficiaries" (Koopmans 2007, p. 183) of debates on European issues. EU summits put executive actors in the spotlight and those who are further away from EU decision-making lose ground. In the Eurozone Crisis, the bailout negotiations favoured the visibility of governmental actors and side-lined voices of non-executive actors. According to White, political decision-making in the Eurozone Crisis "has relied heavily on executive discretion[51], exercised at speed and rationalised with reference to the pressing demands of emergency" (White 2014, p. 87). The ongoing rhetoric of emergency and the deviation from procedural norms in the European management of the crisis has created a "politics without rhythm", "in which those who would contest decision-making are perpetually liable to be left harried, disorganised, and caught by surprise" (White 2014, p. 88). While these arguments apply to creditor and debtor countries alike, the stronger focus on the European management of the crisis will create stronger asymmetries between decision-makers and voices of the (political) opposition in less affected

[51] Understood as "decision-makers' willingness to act independently of rules and norms" (ibid.).

countries. Apart from these structural constraints, the lack of immediate affectedness for most actors and their constituents in creditor countries translates into comparatively limited incentives to engage in crisis debates about responsibility. There is simply little to gain.

Overall, this suggests a strong presence of executive actors in creditor countries and a weak presence of political challengers and other domestic actors. Instead, the focus on Eurozone Crisis management and the structural advantage for executive actors suggests a strong presence of EU actors in the debate (vertical Europeanization). Governments from debtor countries will also appear in the debate but their spectator role in the crisis management will tendentially side-line their voices in public debates, too; horizontal Europeanization will be weaker in comparison. Summing up, domestic actor participation in less affected countries will be less diverse and more clearly dominated by the executive. Vertical Europeanization of the actor composition is expected to be similarly high in both country groups, while horizontal Europeanization will be higher in countries strongly affected by the crisis.

5.3.2.3 Actor Polarization and Conflict

i. Strong Crisis Impact

Regarding the third sub-process of politicization, the situation in highly affected countries suggests a high polarization intensity. Crises trigger blame (Bovens and t'Hart 1996, p. 129) and they function as external shocks to political systems. The crumbling of traditional power structures unveils opportunities for domestic power shifts, and political actors will try to discredit any potential rivals in order to maintain or to strengthen their own position in the view of radical change. Overall, political opportunities in crisis-hit countries are conducive to intensely polarized debates.

The polarization shape describes the direction of public blame games. In general, the broad framing contest suggests a manifold pattern of multiple conflict lines but it is unclear whether blame games are shaped in domestic or European conflict dynamics. In the following, I first present general expectation with regards to the European character of the crisis (1), as well as more specific ones for the role of domestic challengers (2), executive actors (3), and the role of European actors as attribution senders in the debate (4). Finally, I assess dominant issue dimensions of public blame games (5).

(1) General expectations: On a general level, the European character of the Eurozone Crisis is expected to set the scene for a Europeanization of the blame game, especially in crisis-hit countries. The central argument in support is that the attribution of responsibility and blame "travels with policy-making authority" which "shapes public responsibility attributions: political actors with superior policy-making authority tend to be made publicly responsible" (Rittberger et al. 2017, p. 911). While empirical confirmations of this trend tend to focus on the attribution of responsibility among the

population (Rudolph 2003; Mortensen 2013; Hobolt and Tilley 2014), the attribution of responsibility in the public sphere is expected to follow the same logic.

Applied to the Eurozone Crisis, the increasing authority of European institutions in managing the crisis suggests blame to be directed at Europe. This argument is in line with the core explanation in politicization studies, according to which supranational authority transfer is the underlying explanation for the universal trend of the politicization of European affairs (see section 3.1.3.1). However, in the Eurozone Crisis, authority transfer was far from being evenly spread. Instead, the intensity of the authority transfer itself turns into an explanation of country differences in politicization patterns. Assuming with Statham (2010, p. 295) that "the more decision-making power shifts to the European level […], the more attention for and criticism of the EU rise", this tendency should be higher in crisis-affected countries in which more and more power was shifted to European institutions (Schimmelfennig 2014). While some of the universal changes in the European polity affected all member states alike, other crisis-specific authority shifts only restricted political sovereignty in crisis-affected countries. The clearest evidence of this selective authority transfer is the strict European fiscal supervision and the conditionality for European loans in the so-called Memories of Understanding (Featherstone 2015; Turnbull-Dugarte 2020). The frequent negotiations on European level and several EU summits then provided viable opportunities to shift blame to the European level.

While this primarily suggests a vertical dimension of the European blame game in debtor countries, horizontal blame shifting to other European countries is likely, too. In general, European governments are common scapegoats in European policy fields, too (Gerhards et al. 2009), and the Eurozone Crisis is expected to foster this trend. The crisis touches upon core state powers including questions of national community and democratic self-determination which is likely to pitch national publics against each other, especially creditor countries vs. debtor countries (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018, p. 182). Creditor countries, especially Germany, have pushed for strict supervision and austerity, which is likely to be responded by blame shifting on behalf of debtor countries. All in all, and on a general level, I expect that in the crisis-hit countries, the strong shift of authority to European actors provokes a highly Europeanized blame game in vertical but also horizontal dimensions.

(2) Domestic executive actors: For governments, politics of crises are politics of blame avoidance. In situations of crises, public blame puts governments under legitimation pressure and in the Eurozone Crisis, this pressure was intensified by European demands to comply with the bailout agreements, as well as threatening the withdrawal of trust in the financial market. Moreover, apart from justifying their role in the outbreak of the crisis, parties in power had to justify their role in combatting it, which for the most part meant justifying austerity. Between 2010 and 2016 incumbent parties in the crisis-hit countries from all ideological backgrounds implemented harsh and unpopular austerity

measure that encountered fierce resistance among the population and contributed to a further erosion of trust (e.g. Monastiriotis et al. 2013). In the Eurozone Crisis, governments had to cope with this double risk of electoral punishment. Given the limited space of politics under bailout conditions, they are expected to resort to blame shifting in their political communication. Again, the directions of blame depend on the opportunities at play, and executive actors under stress will try to blur responsibility by dispersing it to many different actors. Moreover, the political crisis impact is expected to extend to internal conflict dynamics, too; opportunities for change do not only emerge for political challengers but also for internal critics and contenders, especially when governments pursue unpopular reforms. This will result in visible internal blame games.

In terms of the European dimension of the public blame game, the multi-level framework of Europeanized politics offers viable opportunities for governments to shift blame to Brussels and other European governments. Irrespective of crisis position, I expect higher levels of blame shifting to European actors among governments than among challengers. In the Eurozone Crisis, government blame shifting to European actors is expected to be strongest in debtor countries where governments had to cope with shrinking levels of public support and blame from the opposition. Governments in crisis-affected countries have not only high incentives but also conducive opportunities to deflect blame. In terms of blame avoidance, European supervision and the lack of political manoeuvre are a curse and blessing at the same time; a curse since it forces governments to pursue unpopular reforms and austerity measures irrespective of their preferences, a blessing since the lack of agency and the externally-imposed conditionality allow blame for the social consequences to be deflected. To sum up, blame shifting from governments to EU institutions and to European creditor countries is expected to increase with the severity of the Eurozone Crisis impact.

(3) Domestic political challengers: With the basic insights of attribution theory, I argued that political challengers will predominantly address responsibility to the domestic government. Situations of crises will not change this pattern. On the contrary, crisis volatility increases the relevance of domestic rather than European perspectives (Poloni-Staudinger 2008). The argument that crises destabilize power structures suggests that challengers will exploit the crisis and intensify their attempts to delegitimize the opponent in power. Therefore, politicization patterns in crisis-affected countries will feature intense blame shifting from the opposition to the government. Apart from this, the crisis broadens the range of political opponents and, therefore, challengers will also blame each other to prevail in the public framing contest. Hence, apart from blame directed at the government, the debate in 'crisis countries' will feature an inner-oppositional conflict line between challenger parties. Civil society actors will continue to focus their attribution activity on political office holders.

Following from this, blame directed at European actors will be less relevant. But still, political

challengers must react to the influence of European actors in the Eurozone Crisis and they are expected to exploit the growing public distrust of EU institutions by blaming Europe. Moreover, the authority shift to European actors diminishes domestic opportunities for all those actors who had previously obtained access to the political process. For oppositional parties and civil society alike, this provides material for Europeanized blame shifting. All in all, blame shifting to the EU and to other European actors will be visible but of secondary importance for political challengers in crisis-affected countries.

(4) European actors: So far, the role of European actors has been limited to that of blame addressees. In terms of their role as attributions senders, EU actors and especially other European governments are expected to voice criticism of governments of crisis-affected countries and to react to blame shifting on behalf of domestic actors. At the same time, the earlier argument that European institutions are considered as ideal scapegoats qualifies this assumption. The most directly involved institutions in the Eurozone Crisis management, the European Commission and the European Central Bank are unelected and, therefore, not directly accountable or driven by the logic of political competition. Consequently, incentives to engage in blame games are less pronounced.

Unlike supranational actors, other European governments are directly accountable to their domestic voters and they are more likely to reverse blame. Moreover, the diametrically opposed policy preferences in the Eurozone Crisis strengthen the expectation of a reciprocal blame game between European governments of creditor and debtor states. The conflict between domestic challengers and European actors is instead likely to remain one-directional, since European actors are expected to focus on those holding factual competencies in the crisis setting.

(5) The issue dimension of public blame games: So far, polarization shape was hypothesized with respect to the actor level and the extent to which blame games will be Europeanised. Earlier arguments suggested general differences in the framing of the crisis debates. This perspective can be expanded to the issue dimension of public blame games. Kriesi and colleagues (Kriesi et al. 2008; Kriesi et al. 2012) have argued that the process of European integration has transformed the political space. With the growing authority of the EU, they argue, a cultural dimension of political conflicts over national belonging and identity gained prevalence and shook the dominant role of the socio-economic cleavage. The Eurozone Crisis, however, challenges this assumption. Otjes and Katsanidou (2017), for instance, argue that in Southern European debtor states economic and European issues are merging into one 'super issue' due to the strong interference of EU actors in economic and social policies. For them, European integration is no longer primarily a question of cultural values and national belonging; instead, the socio-economic consequences of European crisis politics have the effect that European issues are rather contested on economic grounds (Statham and Trenz 2015,

p. 16). Absolute and relative deprivation among large parts of the population have put redistribution high on the public agenda (Della Porta 2015; Bremer 2018). And election scholars have shown how concerns about the state of the economy and the decline of individual living standards have led to a widespread return of economic voting (Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2012) and to a general mobilization to defend distributive interest in the most affected countries. Therefore, I expect that crisis debates in debtor states are more polarized on socio-economic issues than in creditor states.

To sum up, for polarization dynamics in crisis-hit countries, I expect a strongly Europeanized shape, with a European blame game unfolding between domestic governments and those of creditor states (horizontal Europeanization) and domestic governments blaming EU actors (vertical Europeanization), as well as domestic challengers blaming both types of European actors.

i. Limited Crisis Impact

I have so far discussed expectations for intensity and shape of polarization for crisis-affected countries in detail. Again, the expectations for the opposite case can be deduced from the above and will only briefly be summarized. In less affected countries, polarization is expected to be weaker, given the limited impact on the population, the economy and political stability. In general, the situation is less negative and, consequently, the use of blame is less likely. The lack of crisis-induced opportunities and the aforementioned side-lining of the domestic opposition in the crisis management result in a marginal role of domestic challengers in the debate, which leads in turn to a less polarized debate and to a weaker blame game between the government and the opposition in particular. Legitimation pressure for governments in creditor countries is lower, and therefore, blame shifting less urgent.

In general, the relative absence of domestic conflicts and the European character of the Eurozone Crisis are expected to contribute to a highly Europeanized debate in creditor countries. However, given the lesser degree of authority transfers in the crisis years when compared to debtor countries, I expect only limited blame shifting from domestic to supranational actors. Especially for the executive, shifting blame to EU actors will be less likely than in crisis-hit countries, given the similarity of interests and the interconnectedness between creditor governments and EU institutions in the Eurozone Crisis management. When governments engage in Europeanized blame shifting in the crisis debate, they will mainly focus on 'crisis countries'. Firstly, they are expected to react to blame from those actors. Secondly, governments in debtor countries remain the only viable targets for blame when creditor governments have to defend their crisis policies. Overall, the debate in creditor countries will be strongly Europeanized, with weak vertical and strong horizontal blame games. Rather than on socio-economic issues, blame games will be strong in debates on bailout negotiations.

5.3.2.4 Summary: Eurozone Crisis Impact and Patterns of Politicization

This section briefly sums up the major expectations for the economic and political crisis impact on the attribution behaviour and the resulting patterns of politicization (see Table 4 below).

I argued that the politicization pattern in crisis-affected countries will be composed of a high salience of responsibility debates focusing on crisis impacts and austerity, a broad participation of domestic as well as European actors in the crisis framing contest, and strong polarization. The domestic blame game will be very strong and also extend towards European actors. Especially government actors will drive conflicts with European actors by deflecting blame. Overall, I expect a high intensity, Europeanized politicization pattern.

In less affected countries, the salience of the Eurozone Crisis will be moderate and the debate is expected to focus on the European management of the crisis. Actor participation will be dominated by few actors, in particular the domestic government and EU institutions. Given the moderate presence of oppositional actors in the debate, polarization will be rather limited in the domestic arena and take the shape of a blame game between governments in creditor and debtor countries.

Table 4: Summary of Expectations – Eurozone Crisis Impact and Politicization

STRONG CRISIS IMPACT	**LIMITED CRISIS IMPACT**
1) Salience *Intensity*: high *Shape (issue framing)*: domestic implementation and consequences	**1) Salience** *Intensity*: moderate *Shape (issue framing)*: European regulation
2) Actor participation *Intensity (actor range)*: broad *Shape (actor composition)*: low Europeanization	**2) Actor participation** *Intensity (actor range)*: moderate *Shape (actor composition)*: strong Europeanization
3) Actor polarization *Intensity*: strong *Shape (direction of conflict)* a) Domestic blame game: strong b) European blame game: strong (vertical & horizontal) c) Dominant issue dimension: economic	**3) Actor polarization** *Intensity*: low *Shape (direction of conflict)* a) Domestic blame game: low b) European blame game: moderate (horizontal) c) Dominant issue dimension: European regulation

5.4 Politicization Patterns in Ideal Type Constellations

The last sections presented in detail the expectations for politicization patterns in closed and open systems and for contexts with a limited and strong Eurozone Crisis impact. On this basis, I can now combine these expectations for ideal type constellations in Table 5. I limit the display to the two contrasting cases of closed systems with strong crisis impact and open systems with limited crisis impact. The following section 6 further expands on this comparative design. It is important to note that all expectations are not absolute but relative with respect to the respective other constellations.

Overall, I expect a low intensity, strongly Europeanized politicization pattern in open systems with limited crisis impact and a high intensity Europeanized politicization pattern in closed systems with strong crisis impact.

Table 5: Combined Expectations – Institutionalized Openness and Eurozone Crisis Impact

OPEN SYSTEM – LIMITED CRISIS IMPACT	**CLOSED SYSTEMS – STRONG CRISIS IMPACT**
1) Salience *Intensity*: low *Shape (issue framing)*: European regulation	**1) Salience** *Intensity*: high *Shape (issue framing)*: domestic implementation and consequences
2) Actor participation *Intensity (actor range)*: moderate *Shape (actor composition)*: strong Europeanization	**2) Actor participation** *Intensity (actor range)*: moderate-broad *Shape (actor composition)*: mod. Europeanization
3) Actor polarization *Intensity*: low *Shape (direction of conflict)* a) Domestic blame game: low b) European blame game: moderate (horizontal) c) Dominant issue dimension: Eu. regulation	**3) Actor polarization** *Intensity*: high *Shape (direction of conflict)* a) Domestic blame game: strong b) Eu. blame game: strong (vertical & horizontal) c) Dominant issue dimension: economic
Low intensity, strongly Europeanized politicization	**High intensity, Europeanized politicization**

6 COMPARATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN

Two interrelated arguments lie at the heart of this thesis. Firstly, I argue that intensity and shape of politicization processes in the public sphere depend on the way in which political actors engage in the public attribution of responsibility. Secondly, I argue that political opportunities mitigate the attribution of responsibility, and therefore, structure the country-specific politicization pattern. In the last section, I integrated both, the micro perspective on actor strategies and the macro perspective on country-specific context conditions, into a holistic explanatory framework that suggested expectations for differences in politicization patterns. Building on these discussions, this section presents the comparative research design. Section 6.1 presents the case selection, including commonalities (section 6.1.1) and differences (section 6.1.2) with respect to the two explanatory dimensions of the political opportunity structure. In section 6.2, I qualify the research design with respect to case limitations (section 6.2.1) and the mutual influence of both explanatory macro dimensions (section 6.2.2). Section 6.3 formulates expectations for politicization patterns in each country on the basis of the arguments presented above. In section 6.4, I present expectations for temporal changes with respect to general (section 6.4.1) and country-specific trends (section 6.4.2) during the Eurozone Crisis.

6.1 Case Selection

To answer the research questions and to test the theoretical expectations, this thesis follows a comparative research design which varies the two overarching independent variables on country level – the institutionalized openness of the political system and the Eurozone Crisis impact. In the empirical analysis, I trace the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis in public debates about responsibility in Germany, Greece and Spain. The juxtaposition of Germany and Greece, in particular, represents a comparative design with two very different cases. In the following, I argue that both countries differ fundamentally in both explanatory macro dimensions, and therefore, I expect strong differences in the way in which the Eurozone Crisis is politicized. I also show that Spain serves as an intermediary case in both dimensions and that all three cases together form a gradual continuum.

The comparative design provides evidence for the context-specific nature of politicization patterns. It also helps to solve a measurement problem, since the selection of the specific timeframe of the analysis, the period between 2009 and 2016, does not allow a comparison of the politicization of European affairs over different periods of time, e.g. with respect to pre-crisis levels. The comparative analysis thus assesses politicization in relative terms across countries rather than in absolute terms.

6.1.1 Commonalities

Before turning to differences of the three cases, it is worth highlighting important commonalities. To assess the explanatory power of the political opportunity structure, the case selection aims to hold other potentially intervening contextual factors constant. This is particularly relevant for two factors that are expected to influence politicization patterns:

Firstly, Europeanized conflict constellations are influenced by traditional polarization around and national narratives about European integration, defining discursive opportunities which favour or inhibit publicly voiced EU criticism (Medrano 2003). In Greece, Spain and Germany, at least up until the outbreak of the crisis in 2009, European integration traditionally had a positive connotation with comparatively large public support in all three countries and a long-standing pro-European elite-consensus (Medrano 2003; Verney 2011; Bremer and Schulte-Cloos 2019).[52]

Secondly, and now focusing on partisan politics, scholars have argued that "in the electoral arena, the main path towards the politicization of Europe is dominated by Eurosceptic parties of the right" (Grande and Hutter 2016b, p. 24, see section 2.1.3). Before the outbreak of the crisis in 2009, party-based Euroscepticism was generally low in all three countries and all three were largely immune to a strong anti-European party on the populist or radical right (Lees 2002; Ignazi 2003, pp. 187–195; Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015; Vasilopoulou 2018).

6.1.2 Differences

Now focussing on differences, the following locates the three countries along the two explanatory macro dimensions.

6.1.2.1 Institutionalized Openness

As described earlier, scholars disagree about the dimensions of the political opportunity structure in general; similarly, there is no agreement on key indicators to measure these dimensions. This also applies to the openness of the political system, and, moreover, in many studies the measurement remains vague and abstract. Aiming to explain country differences in "strategic political communication" Kriesi (2004) referred to Lijphart's work (1999/2012) to suggest a set of more specific indicators to operationalize the institutionalized openness of the political system. The following operationalization is based on both scholars' work. I separate the institutionalized openness of the political system in two dimensions, the concentration of power and the institutional accessibility of state actors.

[52] In September 2007, 62 per cent of the population in Greece, 68 per cent in Spain and 67 per cent in Germany said that EU-membership is 'a good thing'. EU-27 average: 59 per cent. Eurobarometer online available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinionmobile, checked 8/12/2019.

a) The concentration of power is operationalized by five indicators[53]: I) the relative number of minimal winning cabinets[54] or one-party cabinets; II) cabinet durability; III) average number of parties in parliament; IV) electoral disproportionality; V) interest group system.

b) The institutional accessibility of state actors is measured by four indicators: VI) government centralization/federalism; VII) bicameralism; VIII) elements of direct democracy; IX) openness of civil service career systems.[55] Here, the assumption is that the accessibility of the state actors increases with the number of institutional access points.

Together, these indicators provide a good overall measure for the institutionalized openness of the political system. While the first set of indicators is closely connected to political decision-makers and their scope of power, the second set is closely bound to political opportunities for political challengers to influence political decisions via institutionalized channels. As the more 'static' dimension of the political opportunity structure, the openness of the political system describes established and institutionalized forms of political interaction; therefore, all variables are generally measured for the years preceding the crisis.[56] More dynamic changes in the political opportunity structure are part of the second explanatory macro dimension, the Eurozone Crisis impact. Later, I argue that, to a certain extent, crisis impact and institutionalized openness are mutually influential. Based on this, I formulate expectations for temporal changes (section 6.4).

i. Germany

Regarding both, the concentration of power and the institutional accessibility of state actors, the German political system is considered as open. Lijphart locates Germany not far away from the ideal type of federal-consensus democracy. Compared to other European countries, Germany is located at the open side of the spectrum for all indicators: Between 1949 and 2010, only 37.8 per cent of all cabinets were minimal winning or one-party cabinets – all others were larger coalition governments (I). Average cabinet duration is 3.8 years (II), average number of parties in parliament is 3.09 (III). The score for electoral disproportionality is 2.67 per cent indicating a rather weak centralization of power in this dimension (IV). Germany has a strong corporatist interest group representation (index

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53 Measures I and II are indicators of executive dominance.

54 Minimal winning cabinets contain only those parties necessary to achieve a majority in parliament.

55 Measures VI and VII are identical with Lijphart's operationalization. VIII and IX stem from Kriesi's adaptation. Both provide a closer approximation to the idea of political opportunities compared to Lijphart's original criteria of central bank independence and constitutional rigidity. Data for component III are taken from the IDEA Direct Democracy Database (https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/direct-democracy); data for component III are gathered on the basis of an updated version of Schnapp's (2000) index on the openness of ministerial bureaucracy recruitment schemes.

56 Most prior-crisis data is taken from the 2012-edition of Lijphart's 'Patterns of Democracy' (1999/2012).

of interest group pluralism: 0.88) (V). Overall, compared to the other 35 democracies investigated by Lijphart, Germany is situated at the open edge. All measures point to a very low concentration of power in the institutional system. In terms of the institutional accessibility of state actors, Germany is the incarnation of a federal and decentralized political system with a strong separation of powers (V); it has strong bicameralism with symmetrical and incongruent chambers (VI). Whereas for the latter two dimensions, Germany scores highest on institutionalized accessibility, the country occupies a middle position for elements of direct democracy[57] as well as for the openness of the civil service career system (Schnapp 2000). The position on these two measures is the only deviation from the ideal of the open, decentralized and accessible consociational democracy.

ii. Greece

In many regards, Greece is located at the opposite of Germany, as the "closest approximation of the majoritarian model" (Lijphart et al. 1988, p. 20) – and, writing 24 years later – still a "rather surprising presence among the British-heritage countries at the majoritarian end" (Lijphart 1999/2012, p. 101). Since the end of the dictatorship in 1974 almost all cabinets have been minimal winning or one-party cabinets (I). The average duration of cabinets is only slightly higher than that of Germany (4.45 years) (II) but the average number of parliamentary parties is very close to the two-party-system ideal (2.27) (III). The Greek electoral system is among the most disproportionate (score: 7.88) (IV) and the system of interest group representation is clearly pluralist and only exceeded by Canada (score: 3.12). With reference to the inclusiveness of collective bargaining, Ancelovici remarks that "Greece has a long tradition of excluding labour from the policymaking process" (Ancelovici 2015, p. 202). These indicators and further characteristics of the Greek political system, such as first-party bonus of 50 parliament seats, point to a very high concentration of power (Altiparmakis 2019, p. 98).

When it comes to the accessibility of state actors, Greece is again close to the majoritarian end of the spectrum: Greece has a unitary and very centralized political system (VI) with an ideal-type unicameralism (VII). Elements of direct democracy are largely missing and there is an extremely closed civil service recruitment system (Schnapp 2000, p. 38). Overall, there is a very low accessibility of state actors and, together with a high concentration of power, the institutionalized openness of the political system is very low.

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[57] The direct democracy-score is calculated on the basis of twelve items focusing on legal provisions for referendums at national, regional and local level in 2013. The assessment was conducted in relative terms, comparing the legal situation in the three countries. Here, Spain shows more and stronger elements of direct democracy including mandatory referendums at national level than the two other countries. Greece has almost no legal provisions for referendums or initiatives. Germany is in between with several legal provisions on local level.

These structural features of the political system have a direct impact on the political culture in the country: In particular, the strong polarization of the party system results in an adversarial political culture which Pappas refers to as "populist democracy" (Pappas 2014). This contentious tradition dates back to Greece's transition to democracy in the 1970s; in contrast to contemporaneous developments in Spain or Portugal, "Greece's democratization featured widespread dissent, adversarial politics, and ideological polarization" (Pappas 2015, p. 7) which still structures the political day-to-day business. The population, too, is highly polarized and this not only in ideological terms. Comparing affective polarization in Europe, Reijlan (2020) shows extremely negative attitudes between supporters of the main political parties in Greece. Finally, the strong presence of social movements in the political landscape is a further indicator of the contentious tradition in Greece (Pappas and O'Malley 2014). For Andronikidou and Kovras (2012, p. 707) the "Greek transition to democracy shaped a political 'culture of sympathy' to acts of resistance against the state" and to a very strong and confrontational presence of protest actors in the public arena.

iii. Spain

Spain is an intermediary case, located between Germany at the open end and Greece at the closed end of the spectrum. Whereas the concentration of power is closer to majoritarian Greece, the institutional accessibility of the state is closer to decentralized Germany. Although Greece and Spain (and Portugal) are often subsumed under the label of Southern European or "Mediterranean democracies", and although they share important cultural and historical characteristics, Lijphart and colleagues already noted in 1988 that "when their democratic regimes are compared with the world's other democracies in terms of the contrasting majoritarian and consensus models, they turn out not to form a distinctive and cohesive cluster" (Lijphart et al. 1988, p. 7). As the indicators for the institutionalized openness of the political system show, this verdict remains true over thirty years later. Whereas Greece is among the "most eccentric" approximations of the closed, majoritarian model, Spain combines majoritarian and consensual features (Kovras and Loizides 2014).

The following data for the Spanish case are measured for the period following the end of the Franco Regime in 1977. Indicators for the concentration of power locate Spain at the (moderately) closed end of the spectrum: Between 1977 and 2010, 69.3 per cent of all cabinets were minimal winning or one-party cabinets which is almost exactly midway between the scores for Germany and Greece (I). With an average of 8.62 years, Spanish cabinets are more long-lasting than those in Germany and Greece (II). The average number of parties in parliament is again located in the middle of the three cases (2.66) (III). Almost reaching Greek levels, the Spanish electoral system is very disproportionate (score 7.28) (IV) and the system of interest representation is clearly pluralist (score 3.04) (V).

The difference between Spain and Greece becomes most visible in the accessibility of state actors. In contrast to centralized Greece, Spain is a semi-federal system (I) with a medium-strength bicameralism with asymmetrical and incongruent chambers (II). Elements of direct democracy are stronger than in Greece or Germany[58] and the openness of the civil service career system is comparable to that of Germany (Schnapp 2000, p. 38).

Similar to the Greek case, a short overview of the political culture helps to further contextualize this intermediary position between the consensual and majoritarian poles. In contrast to the adversarial tradition in Greece, Spain's political culture is more consensual and moderate. This difference becomes evident in the transition to democracy; whereas in Greece the period after the end of the dictatorship was marked by polarization, "Spain's process of democratic consolidation was marked by political temperance and consensus" (Pappas 2015, p. 6). The experience of the civil war and the instability of the second Spanish Republic (1936-39) convinced political elites of the virtues of consensus. The so-called Moncloa-Pact in 1977 – described as "the culmination of moderation" (Preston 1987, p. 102) – is paradigmatic for this cultivation of negotiated pacts, consensus building and historical forgetfulness. "In decades to follow, both the constitution and the practice of consensus seeking would remain widely acknowledged conventions by the Spanish political elites and the Spanish voters alike. The "'pacted' nature of the transition shaped the basic features of Spanish political culture, especially its propensity for consensus and ideological moderation" (see also: Martín 2005; Andronikidou and Kovras 2012, p. 711). Also, while in Greece the adversarial political climate promoted a "culture of resistance", the institutionalization of consensus in the Spanish transition contributed to a more moderate endorsement of contentious mass politics, despite the militant activism of ETA.

Overall, mapping these three countries in terms of their institutionalized openness shows that the open German system and the closed Greek system are located at opposite ends of the spectrum, whereas Spain occupies an intermediary position with majoritarian as well as consensual features.

6.1.2.2 Eurozone Crisis Impact

In this section, I examine how the three cases fit into the second macro dimension of the explanatory framework. First of all, in order to analyse the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis, it needs to be a salient issue in all cases. With Germany, Greece and Spain, the analysis comprises three Eurozone member states which are centrally involved in the crisis setting, albeit in different roles. Germany is the principal representatives of the creditor side, while especially Greece but also Spain are central representatives of debtor states. This selection allows comparison between donor and debtor

[58] See footnote 58.

countries but also between two representatives of the Southern European 'crisis countries', which are too often lumped together. In the following, the overall variable Eurozone Crisis impact is divided into two sub-dimensions, the socio-economic crisis impact and the political crisis impact.

a) The socio-economic crisis impact is measured by unemployment levels in the crisis years and, since I want to grasp the impact of the crisis itself, by the ratio of crisis year average and pre-crisis unemployment rate (I), as well as by the magnitude of the economic recession in terms of average annual GDP growth between 2009 and 2016 (II).

b) The political crisis impact covers two interrelated factors: First, the political crisis impact is defined by the level of political stability in the crisis years. Indicators are I) the number of cabinet changes between 2009 and 2016[59], II) the number of defections and III) the net electoral volatility.[60] Secondly, the political crisis impact is defined by the country-specific transfer of authority to European and international institutions within the context of the bailout agreements (IV) and the conditionality of loans, or in other words, the country position on the Eurozone Crisis map, as creditor or debtor state.

i. Germany

Germany is the most prominent case among the creditor countries. It guaranteed the largest share of loans and since 2009, German government representatives have most firmly advocated for strict austerity in crisis-affected countries. While the direct crisis impact on the German population was limited, media debates about the German taxpayer's contribution to the bailout schemes, the repayment of debts and potential risks were widespread. Given its political and economic weight in the Eurozone, Germany is a central case for studying politicization dynamics in the Eurozone Crisis.

The specific measures suggest a very limited socio-economic crisis impact in Germany. Between 2009 and 2016 the unemployment rate declined continuously from 7.7 per cent to 4.3. per cent. The crisis average is 1.7 percentage points below pre-crisis levels (I). While the German GDP declined in 2009 because of the global financial crisis, it grew in the years from 2010 to 2016 with an overall average of 1.2 per cent annual growth between 2009 and 2016 (II).[61]

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[59] Cabinet changes are government changes or changes in the governing party coalitions.

[60] For a further justification of this choice, see Kovras and Loizides (2014). Data for defections are available from the ministries of the interior. Data for the electoral volatility are taken from (Emanuele 2015). The electoral volatility score describes the "electoral volatility caused by vote switching between parties that enter or exit from the party system. A party is considered as entering the party system where it receives at least 1% of the national share in election at time t+1 (while it received less than 1% in election at time t). Conversely, a party is considered as exiting the part system where it receives less than 1% in election at time t+1 (while it received at least 1% in election at time t)" (Emanuele 2015, p. 1, Codebook).

[61] Data taken from the Eurostat Online Database, available online at: epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu, checked 8/12/2019.

The political crisis impact in Germany is also limited. Despite the emergence of the bailout-critical party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in 2013, the party system and the entire political system in the country remained highly stable during the crisis years. Since 2005, the conservative CDU/CSU and chancellor Merkel have headed the government. The three cabinet changes (I) were rather due to the changing strength of the junior coalition partners – the liberal FDP failed to pass the five per cent-electoral threshold in the 2013 parliamentary elections – than due to any crisis-induced political instability. There were no defections in the Bundestag between 2010 and 2012 (II) and the average score for electoral volatility was 1.92 (III). Overall, the numbers suggest a negligible impact of the Eurozone Crisis on political stability in Germany. Concerning the role of Germany in the Eurozone Crisis management, it is the most exposed representative of the creditor countries (IV). While the deepening of European monetary integration over the crisis years equals a general transfer of authority to Brussels for all Eurozone Countries, Germany has rather exercised than lost authority in the crisis setting; providing the largest shares of bailout loans, the country took a central role in defining the conditions of the bailout programmes under the supervision of the 'troika'.

ii. Greece

Greece is the primary case among the so-called 'crisis countries'. Since late 2009, the crisis has shaken the country. What started as a crisis of public debt, has resulted in a tremendous social, economic and political crisis affecting all parts of society. While the years preceding the crisis were marked by economic growth, increasing prosperity and high levels of political trust (Verney 2014), this progress had since been obliterated. Especially since the takeover of the Syriza government in January 2015, the possibility of 'Grexit' – a Greek exit from the Eurozone – was an omnipresent threat. Eurozone Crisis policies, primarily austerity and economic liberalization, provoked heated debates, massive protest and popular resistance (Rüdig and Karyotis 2013; Diani and Kousis 2014).

The following measures document the socio-economic crisis impact: Between October 2009 and March 2016 unemployment rates rose from 10.2 per cent to a peak of 27.8 per cent in 2013 and staying at a high level of 24.0 per cent at the end of the period in 2016. Youth unemployment levels reached a peak of 60.3 per cent in February 2013. The average unemployment rate during the crisis was 21.8 per cent which is 12.7 percentage points higher than the pre-crisis levels in January 2009 (I). GDP declined by almost 30 per cent with an average annually growth rate of -3.7 per cent[62] (II).

Moreover, the Greek political system proved to be highly unstable, with rapid government changes and a collapse of the traditional party system (Verney 2015; Tsakatika 2016; Tsatsanis 2018;

[62] Data taken from the Eurostat Online Database, available online at: epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu, checked 8/12/2019.

Altiparmakis 2019). Between 2009 and 2016, Greece was governed by five different governments and witnessed seven cabinet changes (I). For the 2009-16 period, the average score for net electoral volatility (5.92) (II) and the number of defections[63] (75) (III) is by far the highest among all countries in the Eurozone (Kovras and Loizides 2014, p. 9). Whereas in other crisis-affected countries like Spain and Portugal the far-right had entirely failed to profit from the crisis, in Greece rightist nationalist parties (ANEL) and openly fascist parties (Golden Dawn) have gained momentum, at least in the early years of the crisis (Ellinas 2015).

Alongside the crisis-induced political instability in the country, the political crisis impact is also manifest in the heavy dependence on bailout loans (IV). Unsustainable debt levels between 126.7 per cent of GDP in late 2009 to a record of 181 per cent of GDP in second quarter of 2014 represented a continuous threat of bankruptcy with the risk of contagion. The European Commission and the IMF reacted with a total of three bailout packages. Starting with the first loans in 2010, Greece was subjected to the strict conditionality of its creditors and the political authority was constrained by the supervision of the 'troika' representatives in the country. Essentially, the bailout packages resulted in an unprecedented transfer of authority to supranational institutions. All in all, both the socio-economic impact and the political crisis impact have been tremendous.

iii. Spain

After Greece, Spain is one of the principal countries affected by the Eurozone Crisis. In contrast to Greece, the exit from the Eurozone or a Spanish bankruptcy were not on the table. Its relevance in the Eurozone Crisis setting was mainly due to its overall economic weight as the fourth largest economy in the Eurozone. Whereas in Greece, the crisis was closely connected to unsustainable levels of public debt, Spanish debt levels were lower than on Eurozone-average at the eve of the crisis in 2009 (Euro area: 79.2% of GDP; Spain: 52.8% of GDP) and did not exceed the Eurozone average until 2013 (Euro area: 91.7%; Spain: 92.1%) until finally reaching a peak in 2015 with about 100 per cent government debt in relation to GDP. In the first place, the unfolding of the Eurozone Crisis in Spain was related to the exuberant banking sector and a massive real estate bubble. But like in Greece, the crises spread to other parts of society and eventually resulted in a deep economic recession. The socio-economic impact of the crisis is documented by the rise of unemployment from 18.6 per cent at the beginning of the crisis to more than 26 per cent in 2013 and around 20 per cent at the end of the time period in March 2016, with devastating numbers of around 55 per cent in 2013 for youth unemployment rates in particular. Given the comparatively high unemployment rates before the

[63] The number of defections refers to the 2010-2012 period only. No data were available for the later crisis periods in Greece.

crisis, the crisis-average documents an increase of 'only' 6.9 percentage points (I). As in Greece, Spain had a negative growth rate in the crisis years (-0.1% yearly average) (II) but the economy started to grow again from 2014 onwards with more than 3 per cent GDP growth in 2015 and 2016.

While the socio-economic impact of the Eurozone Crisis is high and at least in parts comparable to that of Greece, the political crisis impact is less severe in relative terms and kicks in later: From 2011, the movement of the 'indignados' challenged the political elites in the country, but it was not until the rise of the leftist party Podemos in 2014 that the traditional party system started to destabilize. The 2015 Spanish general elections put an end to the two-party system that had existed since the country's transition to democracy (Vidal 2018). But while the populist left gained ground in the political turmoil, parties from the populist or radical right failed to profit from the Eurozone Crisis altogether (Alonso and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015). The following indicators further put the level of political stability into perspective: Between 2009 and 2016, Spain witnessed only two government changes (one cabinet change) (I) and the score for electoral volatility is very low (0.55) (II). The number of defections between 2010 and 2012 is zero (Emanuele 2015) (III).

The final indicator of the political crisis impact is the role in the Eurozone Crisis setting (IV). Like Greece, Spain needed a bailout package but the supervision of the 'troika' was restricted to the banking sector, and in 2013 Spain left the rescue scheme altogether. In sum, the transfer of authority to supranational institutions in the Spanish case is less severe and less visible than in the Greek case. To sum up, the crisis impact in Spain is strong, which is particular due to a strong socio-economic crisis impact. In comparative terms, the political crisis impact was moderate.

6.1.3 Summary: Case Overview and the Political Opportunity Structure

Table 6 and Table 7[64] summarize the indicators for both explanatory dimensions. At first sight, the research design seems to suggest a classical two-by-two-design and a comparison of four countries, each varying in at least one of the explanatory dimensions (Table 8, below). However, whereas Greece and Germany can be located within this design, Spain is missing. In the following section, I argue that the two-by-two-design is misleading and I present arguments to justify the three-case selection.

[64] The values for the crisis impact indicate averages in the crisis period between 2009 and 2015.

Table 6: Overview of Indicators, Institutionalized Openness of the Political System

	GERMANY	**GREECE**	**SPAIN**
Inst. openness of the political system (until 2009)	**High**	**Low**	**Moderate**
Concentration of Power	*Low*	*Very high*	*Moderate-high*
I) Minimal winning cabinets	37.5%	100%	69.3%
II) Cabinet durability	3.8 years	4.45 years	8.62 years
III) Average number of parties	3.09	2.27	2.66
IV) Electoral disproportionality	2.67	7.88	7.28
V) Interest group system	Corporatist (index 0.88)	Pluralist (index: 3.12)	Pluralist (index: 3.04)
Institutional accessibility of state actors	*High*	*Low*	*Moderate*
VI) Government centralization	Federalism	Centralized unitarism	Semi-federalism
VII) Bicameralism	Strong	Unicameralism	Medium
VIII) Direct democracy	Weak-moderate	Low	Moderate
IX) Openness of civil service career system	Moderate	Extremely closed	Moderate

Table 7: Overview of Indicators, Eurozone Crisis Impact

	GERMANY	**GREECE**	**SPAIN**
Eurozone crisis impact (2009-2016)	**Low**	**Very high**	**High**
Socioeconomic crisis impact	Low	Very high	High
I) Unemployment, change to pre-crisis	-1.7%	+12.7%	+6.9%
II) Economic growth, GDP growth/year	1.2%	-3.7%	-0.1%
Political crisis impact	Low	Very high	Moderate-high
III) Cabinet changes	3	7	1
IV) Defections (2010-2012)	0	0	75
V) Electoral volatility score	1.92	5.92	0.55
VI) Authority transfer/ Position Eurozone Crisis	Low/ Creditor	Very high/ Debtor	High/ Debtor

Table 8: Institutionalized Openness and Eurozone Crisis Impact

CLOSED SYSTEMS – LIMITED CRISIS IMPACT	**CLOSED SYSTEMS – HIGH CRISIS IMPACT** Greece
OPEN SYSTEM – LIMITED CRISIS IMPACT Germany	**OPEN SYSTEM – HIGH CRISIS IMPACT**

6.2 Qualifications of the Research Design

This section qualifies and adapts the research design. With respect to case limitations (section 6.2.1) and the argument that both explanatory dimensions potentially influence each other (section 6.2.2), I argue that the three cases can be located on a continuum between two poles (section 6.2.3).

6.2.1 Limitations of the Case Selection

The first qualification of the research design relates to a limited pool of available cases. The explanatory dimensions of the political opportunity structure plotted in Table 8 above produce ideal-typical macro constellations, but the juxtaposition of countries in one field or another often does not do justice to the fact that these country-specific variables are gradual rather than absolute. Reality is usually more complex, especially when it comes to a comparison on abstract country level. Spain, in this case, combines majoritarian as well as consensual features of the political system and can therefore not clearly be placed in any of the four fields at all. Moreover, the case of the Eurozone Crisis is challenging for case selection; while Germany and Greece occupy clearly set positions in the templet – with opposite values on both explanatory macro dimensions – the other fields are more difficult to fill in, at least not with the same distinctness as Germany and Greece. More specifically, there is no country that combines a consensual system with a strong Eurozone Crisis impact. The only candidate, Portugal, is slightly more on the consensual side than Spain but overall, the country is characterized by a similar combination of majoritarian and consensual elements (Lijphart 1999/2012).

6.2.2 Mutual Influences of the Dimensions of the Political Opportunity Structure

The second reason for adapting the research design is connected to the relationship between both explanatory dimensions. Again, a two-by-two-design is over-simplistic in that it presents both dimensions – openness of the political system and crisis impact – as independent of each other. However, this is not necessarily the case and there are arguments for mutual influence. These arguments do not alter the general line of reasoning nor do they reverse the direction of the analysis, but they offer some cues for explaining dynamic changes in the politicization pattern.

6.2.2.1 Influence of Institutionalized Openness on Eurozone Crisis Impact

Lijphart (1999/2012) has shown how the model of democracy effects its quality with his famous verdict that consensual systems are "nicer and gentler". Majoritarian systems, on the other hand, enable quick decision-making and are said to be more effective in generating economic growth. Studying the effect of the political system on government performance in the crisis years, Kovras and Loizides (2014) argue that the strength of majoritarian norms in Greece impeded the necessary reforms to alleviate the impact of the crisis: they argue that until 2008 "Greece appeared as a stellar example of the merits of majoritarianism" with "a remarkable level of economic and political stability" but, during the crisis, majoritarian solutions failed to deliver. For them, the dramatic developments in Greece "highlight the paradox of majoritarianism in times of crisis: the more urgent the calls are for fundamental institutional reform, the more polarized and fragmented party systems and society become, diminishing the credibility of political elites and making every suggested reform more costly and less likely to be accepted by the public" (Kovras and Loizides 2014, p. 17). In short, the closed, majoritarian decision-making failed to secure societal consent, which worsened the situation. The case of Greece shows that the institutionalized openness of the political system, potentially influences the second macro variable, Eurozone Crisis impact.

6.2.2.2 Influence of Eurozone Crisis Impact on Institutionalized Openness

The argument for the reverse direction is straightforward. In general, the institutional openness of the political system was presented as a rather static dimension of the political opportunity structure. And yet, the Eurozone Crisis impact, as the second and dynamic dimension of the political opportunity structure, influences these institutional arrangements. Firstly, the rhythm of crisis politics, the state of permanent emergency and the Brussels-based decision-making side-lined oppositional actors. Social partners and civil society actors were excluded from the political process in the crisis management; "National executives have provided very little formal access to the public in their decisions to ratify their respective national commitments to 'bailout packages'" (Statham and Trenz 2015, p. 20). Secondly, the conditionality for bailout loans imposed by external creditors is a case in point: if government choices are constrained, political opportunities to assert influence on these policies are closed for all other actors, too. Consensus seeking and the participation of different societal interests goes missing. Thirdly, the general rescaling of the welfare state in 'crisis countries' took away political opportunities to influence policies in the respective areas. Bailout agreements and reforms instructed by the 'troika' requested a hollowing out of existing forms of social dialogue (Petmesidou and Glatzer 2015). Finally, the tremendous levels of unemployment and diminishing union membership decreased the direct political influence of Unions, which were instead forced to turn to the streets. All

these arguments indicate a tendency towards closure of the political system and, therefore suggest a gradual intensification of public sphere conflicts in crisis affected countries.

To be clear, the argument that the crisis influences the openness of the political system does not render this dimension irrelevant. In order to understand politicization patterns in the Eurozone Crisis, it is necessary to take into account how these patterns are linked to historical, country-specific ways of dealing with conflict in public; this handling of conflict becomes manifest in the institutionalized openness of the political system. The impact of the crisis alone does not offer this background.

6.2.3 Adaptation: Locating the Three Cases on a Continuum

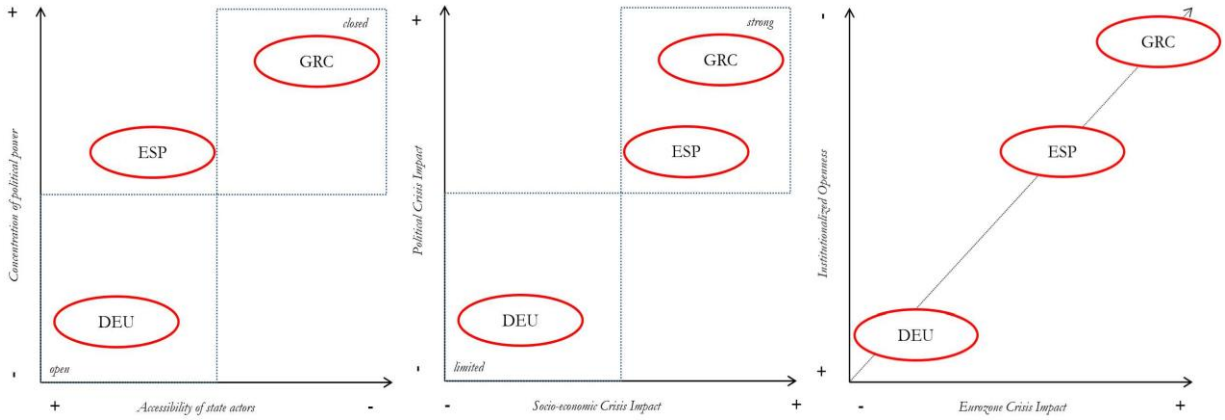
Overall, the aforementioned qualifications call for a partial adaptation of the research design.

Firstly, the argument that the crisis impact potentially closes institutionalized political opportunities entails that the analysis has to account for these changes over the crisis years. In section 6.4, I specify expectations for temporal changes in the institutionalized openness of the political system and their impact on the expected politicization patterns.

Secondly, the qualifications underline that a classical two-by-two design is not well suited for this study. The limited pool of cases and the partial convergence of the two explanatory dimensions suggest a continuum rather than a static model. Figure 9 displays this adaptation. Figure 9 a) and b) locate the three cases along the two explanatory dimensions. Figure 9 c) combines both dimensions. The interplay of institutional openness and crisis impact draws a continuum between two poles.

Figure 9: Country Positions on a Continuum

a) Institutionalized Openness *b) Eurozone Crisis Impact* *c) Adaptation/Summary*



As far as the expectations for politicization patterns are concerned, the juxtaposition suggests an approximation of the ideal types for Germany (institutional openness + limited crisis impact) and Greece (institutional closeness + severe crisis impact). Spain occupies an intermediary position.

Finally, it should be noted that the argument that both explanatory dimensions are potentially interrelated does not challenge the overall research design. The goal is not to test whether it is one or the other dimension of the political opportunity structure that explains politicization patterns. Rather than understanding both dimensions as competing with each other, I treat them as complementary – integrated into one holistic framework to explain different patterns of politicization.

6.3 Expectations for Politicization Patterns in Germany, Greece and Spain

Based on the adaptation of the research design in the last section, I can now formulate expectations for politicization patterns in all three cases. Again, expectations are formulated in relative terms, benchmarked against the other two cases.[65]

In general, Germany and Greece represent approximations of the ideal cases in both explanatory macro dimensions and, as such, they represent two opposing poles in the continuum presented in Figure 9c above. The Spanish case occupies a middle position. Drawing on the general expectations presented above, this translates into the following expectations (overview in Table 9 below).

Germany comes close to the ideal representation of the constellation with an open system and a limited direct crisis impact, yet with high stakes in the Eurozone Crisis. Overall, I expect a comparatively low issue salience with a focus on European regulation. I expect a moderately broad range of domestic actors but a comparatively strong participation of European actors. Finally, actor polarization will be low, including a horizontally Europeanized conflict structure with domestic actors blaming actors in 'crisis countries'. Overall, I expect a low but strongly Europeanized politicization pattern.

With a very closed system and an extremely intensive crisis impact, Greece represents an antithetical case to Germany. I expect a high salience of the debate and a focus on domestic implementation of European regulations and crisis consequences. The participation of European actors will be moderate. Actor polarization will be very strong with intense domestic blame games but also Europeanized conflicts. Overall, I expect a high intensity, moderately Europeanized politicization.

For Spain, I expect a moderate to high salience of the debate, with a focus on domestic implementation and crisis consequences, a moderately broad actor Europeanization of the actor composition and a moderate to high polarization and high importance of Europeanized blame games.

[65] The expectation of a moderate salience of the crisis debates in Spain, for instance, means that in comparison with the expectations of a very high salience in Greece, the Spanish crisis debate will be less salient.

Table 9: Summary of Expectations for Politicization Patterns in Germany, Greece and Spain

POLITICIZATION PATTERN		**GERMANY**	**GREECE**	**SPAIN**
SALIENCE	*Intensity*	Low	High	Moderate-high
	Shape (issue framing)	European regulation	Domestic implementation and consequences	Domestic implementation and consequences
PARTICIPATION	*Intensity (actor range)*	Moderate	Moderate-broad	Moderate
	Shape (actor composition)	Strong Europeanization	Moderate Europeanization	Moderate Europeanization
POLARIZATION	*Intensity*	Low	High	Moderate-high
	Shape (direction of conflict)	a) Dom. blame game: low b) Eu. blame game: strong (horizontal) c) Dominant issue dim.: European regulation	a) Dom. blame game: strong b) Eu. blame game: strong (vertical & horizontal) c) Dominant issue dim.: economic	a) Dom. blame game: moderate b) Eu. blame game: strong (vertical & horizontal) c) Dominant issue dim: economic
Summary		**Low intensity, strongly Europeanized politicization**	**High intensity, moderately Europeanized politicization**	**Moderate intensity, moderately Europeanized politicization**

6.4 Expectations for Temporal Changes

The qualification of the research design in the last section suggested an additional focus on temporal changes. Rather than providing in-depth arguments concerning detailed changes in the crisis constellation, the analysis is located at a broad and general level, focusing on larger developments and trends.

6.4.1 General Trends

This section formulates expectations for general trends and changes in politicization dynamics. First of all, events trigger politicization. Events attract attention to the policy issue at stake, which increases the chances for political challengers to be heard. Therefore, political challengers have strong incentives to use crucial events to trigger debates. With that in mind, during the Eurozone Crisis, I expect general increases in politicization intensity in times of important parliamentary decisions or referenda connected to the Eurozone Crisis and, moreover, a more strongly Europeanized conflict

constellations around European summits.[66]

Secondly, the political and economic impacts of the Eurozone Crisis are not stable over time but subject to changing intensity. In general, most of these dynamic changes emerge out of specific country situation. On this abstract level, I expect that the politicization dynamic intensifies with the intensification of the crisis impacts. One example of changes in the political impact are discontinuous steps towards supranational fiscal supervision. The concession of competences to the 'troika' or the establishment of new supranational institutions such as the European Stability Mechanisms are such cases. With growing levels of authority transfer throughout the crisis, the contestation of this authority and consequent blame shifting to EU actors are likely to follow. The expectation of a positive association between crisis impact and politicization intensity is underlined by the earlier argument that the crisis impact is negatively correlated with the openness of the political system; in other words, the greater the crisis impact, the more closed the political system becomes. An example of changes in the economic crisis impact are improving macro-economic conditions towards the end of the crisis. In the language of responsibility attributions, with the decreasing intensity of the crisis, I expect a less salient and less contentious debate and a shift from blame and demand attributions to attributions of success (credit). And while in the first years after its outbreak, public debates will concentrate on causes of the crisis, later periods will rather focus on remedies.

6.4.2 Country-Specific Trends

The following country trends and the respective expectations for politicization patterns are selective. Rather than presenting detailed information about changing values for indicators of the macro explanations, they provide general insights into the crisis courses in Germany, Greece and Spain.

6.4.2.1 Germany

With regards to first explanatory dimension – the institutionalized openness of the political system – there are no significant changes over the course of the Eurozone Crisis in Germany. The crisis impact was too limited to change institutionalized arrangements and since the beginning of the financial crisis and throughout the Eurozone Crisis, German social partners have worked closely together, in what has been described as "crisis corporatism" (Lehndorff 2011; Herzog-Stein et al. 2013). Similar things can be said about the socio-economic crisis impact. All economic indicators remain stable or even improve over the course of the crisis. In fact, unemployment rates even declined as exemplified in

[66] For an overview of central events in the Eurozone Crisis, see the timeline in Figure 3 in section 2.1.

Figure 10[67] below. Neither indicator for the political crisis impact suggests fundamental changes between 2006 and 2019. This also applies to the change of the government coalition in autumn/winter 2013 from the conservative-liberal coalition of CDU/CSU and FDP to the 'grand coalition' of CDU/CSU and SPD. More closely related to the Eurozone Crisis itself is the emergence of the Euro-critical AfD in 2013. Its electoral gains at federal level, however, were soon attributed more to their stance on migration policy than on their positions on the Eurozone Crisis (Arzheimer 2015).

Overall, given the relative stability of both macro dimensions of the explanatory framework, I do not expect any fundamental changes in the development of politicization patterns between 2009 and 2016 in this regard. Given the close entanglement with the crisis management at European level, I expect the German debate to be largely driven by the rhythm of the European crisis management, with peaks corresponding to the respective EU summits in the first years of the crisis.

6.4.2.2 Greece

The Greek case is different. As argued before, the conditionality of the bailout programmes further restricted political access in the already closed system of political representation. Social dialogue has always been weak, but throughout the crisis, its substance has further weakened. According to an ILO report (Dedoussopoulos 2013, p. 40), "the troika considered social partners part of the problem, not part of its solution", and pushed for reforms that turned social dialogue and collective negotiations "into an empty shell" (Petmesidou and Glatzer 2015, p. 173). In other words, the crisis led to a hollowing out of the social dialogue, which diminished institutional accessibility with every bailout programme and thus pushed Greece further towards the closed end of the continuum. Also, the general intensity of the political crisis intensified over the course of the crisis. With every new bailout programme in 2010, 2011 and 2015 and the conditionality attached to it, authority over budgetary decisions was transferred to the 'troika'. Greece witnessed five general elections in the crisis period and especially the elections in 2012 and 2015 fundamentally changed the domestic political landscape. Before this background, the political crisis impact can be considered as particularly strong in the first half of the crisis-period from 2009 to 2012 and in the last period, starting with the election of the Syriza government in January 2015.

The socio-economic crisis impact in Greece significantly increased in the early years and then slowly went down after 2013 and towards the end of the period in 2016. The unemployment curve in Figure 10 above documents this trend. To be sure, however, for large parts of the society as well as for the economy, these small improvements since 2013 should not be confused with overcoming the crisis;

[67] Data taken from the Eurostat Online Database, available online at: epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu, checked 8/12/2019.

the socio-economic consequences of austerity remained high throughout the entire crisis period.

Overall, the socio-economic crisis impact remains high, at a relatively stable level throughout the crisis. The political crisis impact also remains high, with peaks around the elections and the debates around the first two bailout schemes in the first half of the crisis period and in the last crisis period around the 2015 elections and the referendum about the third bailout agreement. In terms of politicization patterns, I expect particularly salient and intense debates during these two periods.

Figure 10: Unemployment Rates During the Eurozone Crisis, 2009-2016

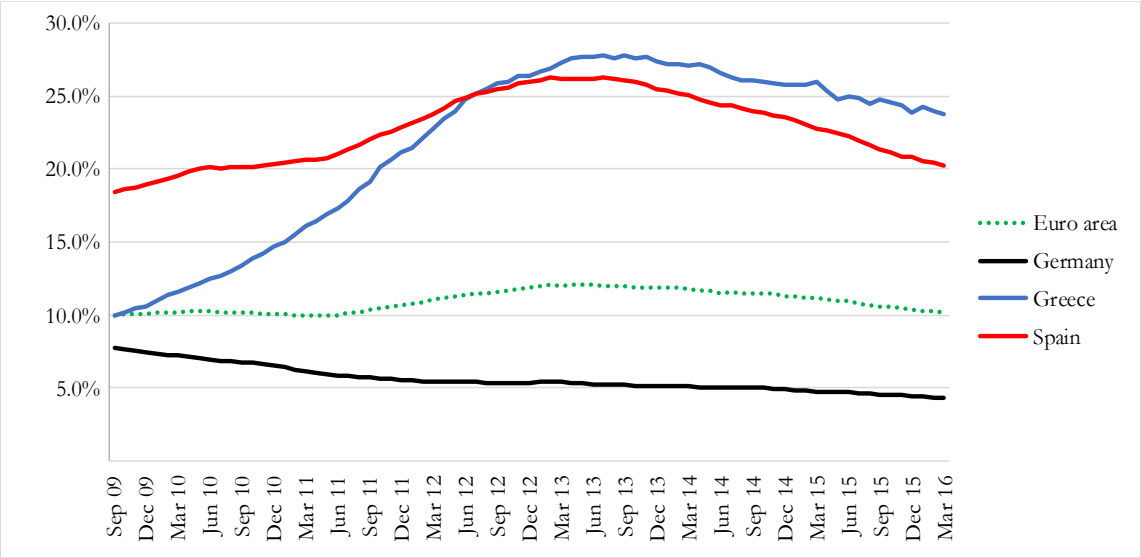
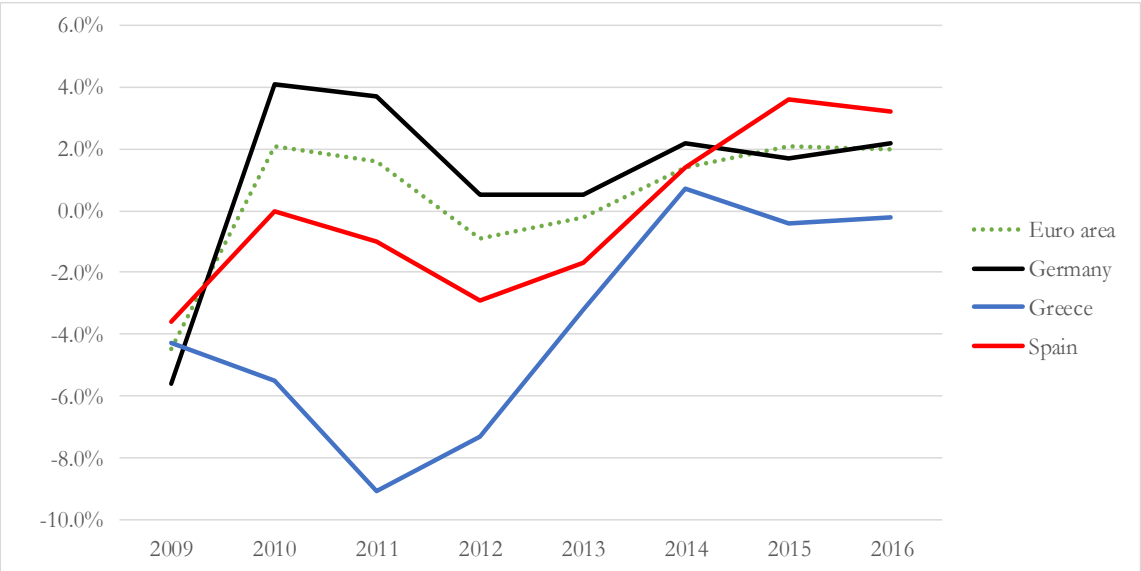


Figure 11: Annual Economic Growth During the Eurozone Crisis, 2009-2016



6.4.2.3 Spain

The Spanish case is less straightforward compared to the other ones. Emergency politics and the bailout programme tended to close opportunities for non-executive actors, too, but again, the comparison with Greece reveals some differences.

At the height of the global financial crisis and at that time when the Eurozone Crisis erupted in Greece in 2009, Spain did not immediately impose austerity measures. Instead, the socialist government engaged in expansionary fiscal policy, what Armingeon and Baccaro (2012, p. 172) call Spain's "Keynesian moment". Moreover, "the government coupled this Keynesian moment with institutional access". As it had done during the 2000s, it relied on social dialogue in the attempt to find a relatively consensual way out of the crisis (da Campos Lima and Artiles 2011). Therefore, at least in the early years of the crisis, the institutionalized openness of the political system remained relatively stable. This is expected to delay more contentious responses to the crisis. The situation changed with the electoral landslide of the November 2011 elections that resulted in the largest victory of the conservative Partido Popular in Post-Franco Spain. From 2012 onwards, institutional channels began to close, and the government took unilateral decisions. For Ancelovici, this was "the perfect mix for a resurgence and intensification of contention" (Ancelovici 2015, p. 202) in public debates and on the streets. Overall, Spain witnessed a partial closure of the political system from 2012 onwards. From 2012, the political crisis impact became manifest in the growing influence of the indignados, large anti-austerity protests and more militant trade union activism. With Podemos, a new populist challenger emerged on the left and mobilized on the crisis management. Moreover, the controversial bailout for the Spanish banking sector was discussed and agreed upon in that year. Altogether, the political closure, increasing instability of the political system and the partial loss of sovereignty over the banking sector from 2012 onwards pushed Spain closer to the Greek case.

The socio-economic crisis impact was visible later and it began more slowly than in Greece (see Figure 10 above) and, in contrast to Greece, the relative change to already high pre-crisis unemployment rates was less severe. Starting from 2012, Spain experienced slightly reduced levels of unemployment and the economy started to grow again in 2014 (Figure 11 above).

Overall, the expectations for temporal changes in Spain are mixed. The arguments presented above suggest an overall moderate politicization of the Eurozone in the first crisis years, an intensification in 2012 and a calming down starting from 2014.

6.4.2.4 Summary: Changes in the Political Opportunity Structures, 2009-2016

Table 10 below summarizes temporal changes in the two explanatory macro dimensions of the political opportunity structure. Translated into expectations for politicization dynamics, I expect no significant changes in Germany. For Greece, I expect a gradual increase from 2010 onwards, a partial calming down between 2013 and 2015, and a re-intensification of politicization intensity in 2015. For Spain, I expect an intensification of politicization dynamics and a partial shift towards inner domestic conflicts since 2012 and a calming down of politicization intensity towards the end of the time period.

Table 10: Temporal Changes in the Political Opportunity Structures, 2009-2016

CHANGES 2009-2016	GERMANY	SPAIN	GREECE
INST. OPENNESS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM	Stable	Closing since 2012	Closing since 2010
EUROZONE CRISIS IMPACT	Stable	Increasing since 2012, decreasing since 2015	Increasing since 2010, slightly decreasing since 2013/2014, further peak in 2015
EXPECTED DYNAMICS OF THE POLITICIZATION PATTERN	Stable	Intensification and domestication since 2012, calming down since 2014	Intensification since 2010, calming down between 2013 and 2015, re-intensification and domestication in 2015

7 METHOD AND DATA

After presenting the theoretical framework and the research design of this study, this section presents the methodology and data of the analysis. Earlier in section 4, I presented my understanding of politicization as a discursive phenomenon. I argued that the public sphere and, more specifically, its mass-mediated manifestation is the central arena to study politicization in modern democracies. For political challengers and decision-makers alike, the public sphere provides the stage for gaining resonance, presenting and justifying positions, and engaging in debates about responsibility. "Politicisation requires the expansion of debates from closed elite-dominated policy arenas to wider publics, and here the mass media plays an important role by placing the contesting political actors in front of a public" (Statham and Trenz 2013, p. 3). Functioning as a transmission belt between political actors and the larger population, it is through the mass media that the strategic dimension of political communication becomes most visible. Moreover, in the Habermasian understanding the public sphere is the arena in which arguments are exchanged from a wide range of perspectives (Habermas 1981). An analysis of mass media debates then allows to examine an, at least potentially, the full picture of actors in political conflicts (Roose et al. 2017). Therefore, the focus on the mass-mediated public sphere allows salience, participation and polarization in public debates and, thus, the full picture of the politicization pattern to be grasped (Dolezal et al. 2016a, p. 44).

Moreover, as I argued previously, the importance of mass-mediated public spheres rises in times of crisis. Crises are "prone to symbolic politics" in the sense that they "catch the public eye" and "provide a strong incentive for challengers to choose public strategies and forces decision makers to do so, too" (Kriesi 2004, p. 206). When in crises "the substantive action space of politics is diminishing and the need for legitimacy is rising in a context of intense political competition" (Pfetsch 1998, p. 249, translated in Kriesi 2004), political communication in the public sphere becomes key.

While there are various types of news media, most research on politicization in the public sphere or the Europeanization of public spheres relies on quality newspaper reporting (Trenz 2015). Despite declining circulation numbers, quality newspapers are still a particularly rich source of information and a central channel for public debates; they are published on a regular basis, they provide detailed information on a large set of different actors and their discursive relationships, and they report on all kinds of political news (Koopmans and Statham 2010b, pp. 50–53). The selection of comparable outlets across countries facilitates comparative research purposes and, for practical reasons, newspaper issues are more easily accessible via electronic databases than, for instance, TV news.

7.1 Discursive Actor Attribution Analysis

There are different empirical methods for grasping structure and content of public debates, among which are political claims analysis (Koopmans and Statham 1999), frame analysis (Benford and Snow 2000) and others. Recently, the analysis of responsibility attributions has been suggested (Gerhards et al. 2007) and applied (Gerhards et al. 2013; Greuter 2014; Rittberger et al. 2017). In the research project 'GGCRISI – The Greeks, the Germans and the Crisis' this approach was further developed into Discursive Actor Attribution Analysis (DAAA) (Roose et al. 2014; Roose et al. 2015).[68]

DAAA is a standardized, quantitative content analysis focusing on public interpretation processes in which actors evaluate other actors in the sense of assigning responsibility for policy outcomes, issues or other social, political or economic developments. In contrast to more qualitative discourse analysis and frame analysis, DAAA aims to limit conceptual openness and interpretational work by the researcher. By definition, a crisis is marked by fundamental questioning of routines and standard interpretations of reality. With that background in mind, the analysis of crisis discourses has to account for this openness. Consequently, rather than providing a confined set of arguments or frames beforehand, DAAA provides extensive lists of actors and issues. For the manual coding process, contexts of meaning in the coding material can be represented in a broadly differentiated list of variables.

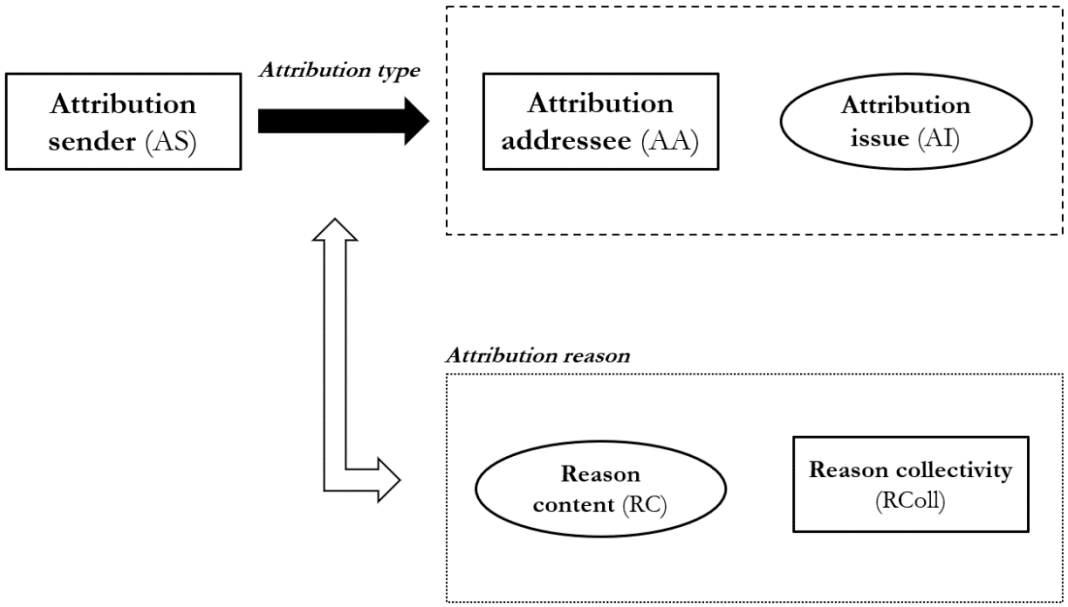
7.1.1 Attribution Triad

For all coding instances, the core and at the same time the basic unit of analysis is the actor attribution, the combination of an attribution sender (AS) stating the attribution, an attribution addressee (AA) to whom the attribution is directed, and the attribution issue (AI), the addressee is evaluated for. These three parts are linked in the guiding question: "*Who (AS) makes whom (AA) publicly responsible for what (AI)?* The upper part in Figure 12 illustrates this triad of sender, addressee and issue[69]. Attribution reasons are justification frames that qualify the responsibility attribution (see below).

[68] The author was centrally involved in the development of the codebook, which is available online at: http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~jroose/ggcrisi/Codebook-GGCRISI-final.pdf. The codebook is supplemented by the list of actors (available at: http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~jroose/ggcrisi/Actorlist-GGCRISI-final.pdf) and the list of issues (available online at: http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~jroose/ggcrisi/Issuelist-GGCRISI-final.pdf, all checked 8/12/2019). For this dissertation, codebook and actor lists were further adapted in order to include the Spanish case. The DAAA codebook profits from the codebook of the project "The public attribution of responsibility in EU politics" by Jürgen Gerhards, Jochen Roose, and Anke Offerhaus (Gerhards et al. 2007) and codebooks for political claim analysis in projects conducted by Ruud Koopmans and Paul Statham (e.g. Koopmans and Statham 1999).

[69] The core idea of the attribution triad was presented up in section 4.2 on the operationalization of politicization from the attribution of responsibility perspective.

Figure 12: Attribution Triad and Attribution Reason



7.1.2 Coding Process

Each report, in which a sender (AS), an issue (AI), an addressee (AA) and an evaluation of the addressee's behaviour (Attribution Type) can be identified, results in an actor attribution. Cases in which any of these elements is missing are not coded. Whenever one element of the attribution triad or the attribution type changes, a new attribution is coded. Coding was performed manually by student assistants and the author with the help of a coding interface (Angrist.py[70]). In the coding process, a large set of variables was coded, providing information on both actors involved (party membership, time reference etc.), on the attribution issue (geographic reference, reference to causes or responses to the crisis etc.), on the attribution type (form, event context etc.) and others.[71] In the empirical part of this research, I mainly focus on actor-centred variables, attribution types, attribution issues and (partly) on attribution reasons. Moreover, some contextual variables on article level such as the article date are used. In the following, I provide more information on central variables.

7.1.3 Attribution Types

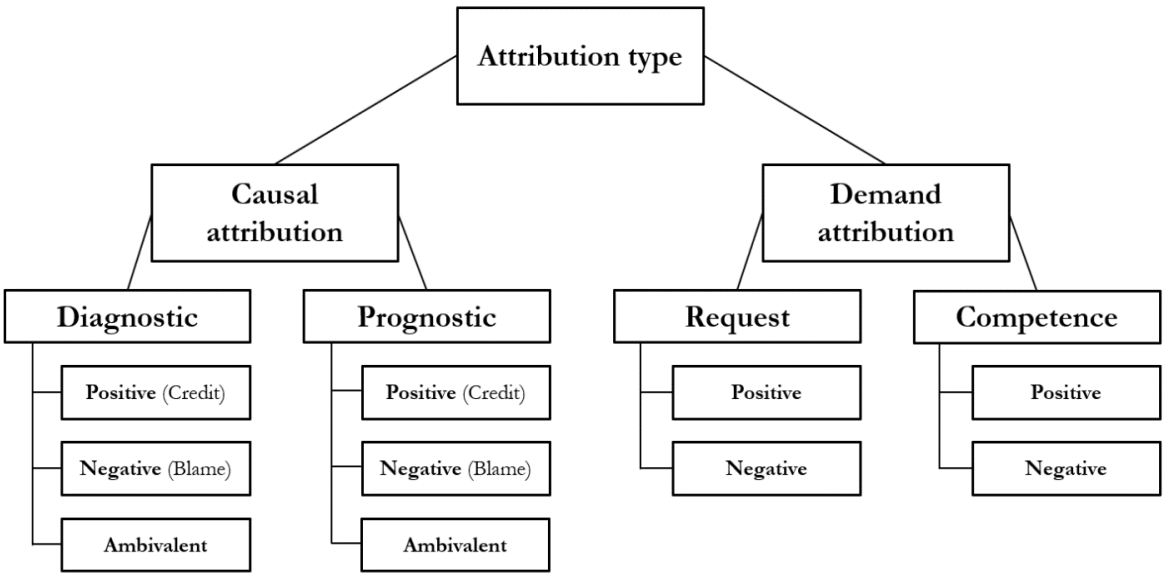
The attribution type ties the three elements of the attribution triad together. The type of responsibility attribution describes the sender's evaluation of the addressee's handling of the attribution issue. These

[70] The Python-based coding interface Angrist was designed by Martin Wettstein from the University of Zurich. I am very grateful for this support, which has facilitated the coding process tremendously.

[71] See codebook (Roose et al. 2015).

evaluations of responsibility appear in different forms. The first distinction is that between causal and treatment responsibility or demands. While causal attributions establish a causal link between addressee and issue, demands or treatment responsibility focuses on who should act and "who […] has the power to alleviate […] the problem" (Iyengar 1991, p. 8). Demand attributions stress other's responsibility to act (request attributions) or they ascribe a general competence for action (competence attributions). Both forms of demand attributions can appear as negative ('shall not act' or 'shall not be in charge') and positive variants. The evaluation of the causal link between the addressee's action and the attribution issue can be either negative, positive or ambivalent. Blame establishes a negatively evaluated causal link between addressee and issue. In the same sense, praise or credit imply a positive evaluation. Both forms can appear in a *prognostic* variant directed at the future in the sense of anticipations or predictions or as *diagnostic* variants directed at past developments. Figure 13 gives an overview of the attribution types coded in this research.

Figure 13: Attribution Types / 'The Attribution Tree'



Attributions can be self-directed when sender and addressee are identical or directed at others. This results in five central patterns of attributing responsibility a) *credit claiming* – the self-attribution of perceived success, b) *credit granting* – the attribution of perceived success to others, c) *blame internalization* – the self-attribution of perceived failure and d) *blame shifting* – the attribution of perceived failure to others. Since demands are usually directed at others, e) *demanding or requesting others* is the fifth central way of debating responsibility in the public sphere.

7.1.4 Attribution Actors

DAAA belongs to the realm of actor centred content analytical approaches. In this respect it deviates from other approaches in discourse analysis where the discursive arena is regarded as a social reality sui generis, which is often analysed without direct relation to actors contributing to the discourse (Keller 2011). Instead, Discursive Actor Attribution Analysis focuses on actors and their behaviour rather than the content of the discourse as a whole. Actors in the debate on responsibility are not necessarily individuals; collective actors, like institutions and organizations, can be senders or addressees as soon as they appear as such in the newspaper reporting. In the coding process, coders selected attribution senders or addresses among a wide range of actors from a comprehensive list.[72]

7.1.5 Attribution Issues

The attribution issue is the topic at the core of the responsibility attribution for which the addressee is evaluated. The overall issue or the politicization object in this research is the Eurozone Crisis and Eurozone Crisis politics defined as political measures designed and implemented to target the causes and consequences of the crisis on a domestic or European level. In the coding process, this overall topic was divided into sub-issues[73]. In order to guarantee adequate representation of the responsibility attributions identified in the news reporting, coders selected from among more than 200 different sub-issues. In contrast to traditional frame analysis which predefines theoretically justified frames before the coding process, this approach allows an inductive reconstruction of the issue framing on the basis of detailed coding. In the analysis, these issues were again subsumed in broad categories.

7.1.6 Attribution Reasons

The coding also covers attribution reasons given for responsibility attributions ("Who makes whom publicly responsible for what, *based on which reason?"*). Attribution reasons are justification frames that qualify the responsibility attribution. The reason refers to a cause-effect chain where the cause is the

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[72] Available online at: http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~jroose/ggcrisi/Actorlist-GGCRISI-final.pdf, checked 8/12/2019. The coding logic assigns to each actor a six-digit number where the first two digits define the geographic unit (e.g. 12 → Greece), the third digit the nature of the functional sub-system (2 → Politics) and the last three digits the specific function of the actor (100 → Executive; e.g. the Greek foreign minister is coded as 122103). In the actor list of the codebook, several hundred codes are predefined; further codes can be constructed by analogy.

[73] Available online at: http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~jroose/ggcrisi/Issuelist-GGCRISI-final.pdf, checked 8/12/2019.

addressee's handling of an issue which has an effect on a further issue, the reason content.[74] The reason content is coded in analogy to attribution issues. Moreover, the coding of attribution reasons entails the level at which the effect is expected to be located at, in the sense of broad communities of reference the justification/reason refers to. In the coding process, this is the 'affected collectivity'.

7.1.7 Article Selection

Attributions or responsibility are reconstructed in newspaper reporting on the Eurozone Crisis. All articles containing relevant information on the Eurozone Crisis, its management and its consequences are selected.[75] A crisis is "an unusual situation which is temporarily limited in which societal structures of general impact are perceived to be unstable and questioned" (Koselleck 2001; Roose et al. 2014, p. 2).[76] Following this definition, the Eurozone Crisis refers to a societal crisis of the Eurozone or parts of the Eurozone with a perceived link to the Eurozone (Roose et al. 2015). Hence, the Eurozone Crisis includes, for instance, parts of the 'Greek state-debt crisis' but it is not limited to this. The definition also covers all those aspects of the Eurozone Crisis which are discussed in a larger European framework, including crisis contexts in Spain, Ireland or other countries, as well as European negotiations to handle and contain this multiplicity of crises in and of the Eurozone.[77]

Newspaper articles were included in the sampling if the headline, subtitle or the first two paragraphs indicated a connection to the Eurozone Crisis. Within these all crisis-relevant responsibility attributions in direct or indirect quotes were coded. The main body of the data stems from domestic and international politics, and economy news sections but editorials, interviews, reportages, societal and cultural sections were included. Business and stock exchange news and athletics were excluded.

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[74] Attribution sender X blames Attribution addressee Y for his/her handling of an issue (Attribution Triad) because this issue handling is expected to have (negative) consequences (causal effect) on a further issue (e.g. employment) which effects a particular community of reference (society in country A). See coding example in the appendix. In analogy with the attribution issue, the reason content is coded on the base of the issue list. The affected collectivity is a broad actor category and coded on the actor list.

[75] Due to limited resources and the vast number of articles in Greece, only two out of three relevant articles per sampling day were coded in the Greek as well as the Spanish newspapers (two-third sample). In Germany, all relevant articles were coded (full sample). Especially for the section on salience, where absolute attribution numbers are analyzed, this disequilibrium should be kept in mind.

[76] The basic elements of this definition are 1) An unusual situation that deviates from taken-for-granted norms; 2) temporal limitation which underlines the understanding of a crisis as a decisive moment or critical juncture; 3) an impact on societal structures of general impact, hence an impact on the structure of society as a whole as well as on its larger subsystems, in this case especially the economic and political subsystem; 4) the common perception of a crisis, hence the idea of a crisis as a social construction (Roose et al. 2015).

[77] This broad understanding of the Eurozone Crisis resulted in a very inclusive keyword-search – including all Eurozone countries and the Eurogroup – to identify potentially relevant articles. For the Süddeutsche Zeitung, for instance, the search-string was as follows: *"EU oder Euro* oder Grie* oder Portug* oder Spani* oder Italie* oder Irland oder Irisch* oder Zyp* oder Frankreich oder Französisch* oder Österreich* oder Belgi* oder Estl* oder Estnisch* oder Finland oder Finnisch* oder Deutschland oder Deutsch* oder Lett* oder Luxemburg* oder Malta oder Maltesisch* oder Niederlande oder niederländ* oder Holländ* oder Slowak* oder Sloven*".*

7.1.8 Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability tests were performed on two levels: the first level concerned checks for the agreement on the number of responsibility attributions in given newspaper articles. This initial identification of responsibility attributions is the greatest challenge for intercoder reliability. The level of agreement was checked on three different points in time on the basis of 12 articles in each round among a total number of 12 coders and two coding instructors. In order to ensure comparability among all coders, reliability tests were conducted on the basis of English articles from Reuters news agency. In these articles, the coding instructors identified a total number of 108 attributions of responsibility. All coders but one identified at least 75 per cent of these attributions. Compared with earlier analyses of responsibility attributions, these are satisfying results (Gerhards et al. 2007).

The second dimension of reliability tests concerned the coding of core elements of the responsibility attribution. Here, the level of agreement was higher. Measured against the overall number of coding decisions made by the coding instructors – most importantly, the coding of the sender, the addressee, the issue and the evaluation of their relation – the level of agreement among coders was more than 91 per cent. For those variables which are used in this research, the coders showed a match of roughly 90 per cent for all possible coding decisions.[78]

7.2 Sampling and Newspaper Selection

The sample is taken from quality newspapers between September 2009 (general elections in Germany) and March 2016 (the originally planned month of the general elections in Spain, later changed to June 2016) which were available in Lexis Nexis and Factiva or in Greek archives.

In order to balance the political leanings of the newspapers involved, two leading newspapers for each country were selected, one located on the centre-left and one on the centre-right. The selection of newspapers in each country follows three criteria: a) relevance as measured by distribution numbers and general standing in the mediated public sphere, b) practical accessibility of newspaper archives, c) comparability with existing content analyses. Moreover, I focus on quality newspapers which promise to cover the Eurozone Crisis in detail and covering a broad range of issues and actors. In Germany I focus on Süddeutsche Zeitung and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, in Greece on Kathimerini and Eleftherotypia[79], and in Spain on El País and ABC[80]. The sampling relies on a

[78] Further results of all reliability tests are available in the final report of the GGCRISI project and the "Deliverable D4.1 on the 2nd Reliability and Validity Check".

[79] F following its bankruptcy in 2012, Eleftherotypia was substituted by Ta Nea and Efimerida ton Syntakton.

[80] The newspaper selection for the three countries is identical or similar to recent cross-country analyses of public debates (Salgado and Nienstedt 2016, p. 466). See also Hutter and Gessler (2019).

rotating weeks design with changing week days covering every seventh publication issue and covering the two national newspapers, in turn. This sampling design results in 291 sampling days between September 2009 and March 2016. For the analysis, the coding of all publication days produced a dataset of 11,079 attributions of responsibility.

8 INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning, I asked how different trajectories of politicization of the Eurozone Crisis can be explained. In the preceding sections, I suggested answers to this overall question and formulated expectations for the comparative analysis of politicization patterns in Germany, Greece and Spain. Before empirically testing these expectations in the next sections, I sum up the main argument.

Reviewing dominant strands of the politicization literature and the blame avoidance literature, I made the case for a theoretical and analytical merger of both perspectives. The public attribution of responsibility is at the heart of politicization processes in the public sphere, especially in times of crisis. In particular, an understanding of the rules of the blame game at the micro level of actor behavior is crucial for explaining the macro patterns in which politicization unfolds. Here, the starting point is the idea that responsibility attributions are strategic choices corresponding to an actor's interest in the public sphere. Strategic interests, and therefore, attribution strategies and blaming targets, differ according to their functional position in the political process. This focus on actor behaviour, however, is not enough to explain diverging patterns of politicization. Adding a macro perspective, I argued that these strategies are conditioned by political opportunities on country level. Firstly, the openness of the political system and, secondly, the Eurozone Crisis impact influence form and direction of public responsibility attributions and, consequently, intensity and shape of the politicization pattern. This includes the question of whether politicization unfolds on domestic or European lines. Overall, politicization patterns change with country-specific contexts that influence the public blame game.

Concerning the first explanatory dimensions, I expected a high intensity, domesticized politicization with a strong blame game between the government and the opposition in closed systems and more moderate but more Europeanized politicization patterns in open systems. Concerning the second explanatory dimension, I expected a high intensity politicization and a broad, Europeanized actor participation in crisis-affected countries and, vice versa, a Europeanized politicization shape but comparatively limited politicization intensity in less affected countries.

Locating the three countries on a two-dimensional map of these explanatory variables, I argued for a high intensity, Europeanized politicization pattern in Greece with peaks towards the beginning and the end of the crisis period and an overall stable, limited and Europeanised politicization intensity in Germany. Between these two extreme cases, Spain represents an intermediate position with the expectation of an intensification of politicization dynamics between 2012 and 2013. The case selection promises to provide evidence for the context-specific nature of the politicization pattern that challenges the linear understanding of politicization.

9 ANALYSIS

In the previous sections, I made the case for an attribution of responsibility perspective on the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis from a theoretical and conceptual point of view. In this section, I now follow this focus to provide empirical evidence for politicization patterns in Germany, Greece and Spain during more than six years of crisis from 2009 to 2016. In doing so, the structure parallels the earlier conceptualization of politicization, distinguishing salience, participation and polarization, as well as intensity and shape for each of these three sub-processes.

9.1 Salience of Eurozone Crisis Debates

I first turn to the salience of the Eurozone Crisis in public responsibility debates. To recall the main expectations for this dimension, I firstly expected responsibility debates to be more salient in closed political systems where the public sphere gains in importance as a counterbalance for the lack of institutional access points. Secondly, I expected the salience of the debate to be positively correlated with the crisis impact in the respective country. Here the main argument is that crises trigger the public quest for responsibility. Applied to the three countries under investigation, I expected responsibility debates to be most salient in Greece, followed by Spain and Germany. In terms of issue framing (shape), I expected debates in creditor countries to predominantly feature attributions of responsibility related to the European crisis management, whereas the focus in debtor countries was expected to be more diverse, with an emphasis on domestic implementation and the socio-economic consequences of the crisis and its management. In terms of changes over time, I expected a less salient debate with the decreasing intensity of the crisis from 2013 onwards, especially in Spain. In Greece, I expect particularly intense debates during the episodes of the bailout negotiations in the early phases of the Eurozone Crisis until 2011 and in the latest stage from 2015 onwards.

Issue salience describes the visibility of an issue in public debates. Without salience, there is no politicization. The intensity of this sub-process is measured on the basis of the total number of responsibility attributions. The shape describes the specific issue framing of the crisis debate. Building the starting point of the analysis and providing a first overview of responsibility debates in the Eurozone Crisis, the following section also pays attention to the overall data structure, to the evolution of the debate over time and to the inductive identification of different crisis phases .

9.1.1 Intensity

Table 11, Table 12 and Table 13 in the following provide a comparison of the salience of the Eurozone Crisis in responsibility debates in Germany, Greece and Spain. At the same time, the numbers introduce the general data basis for the entire empirical analysis to come. Overall, the Eurozone Crisis

is clearly most salient in Greece. Here, the crisis triggered far more attributions of responsibility than in Germany or Spain (Table 11). Throughout the complete sample of 291 publication days between September 2009 and March 2016, the number of coded attributions in the Greek media is double the number in the German media and three times that in the Spanish media (GRC: 6,011; DEU: 3,052; ESP: 2,016). For the country comparison, it is important to remember that in the Greek and Spanish cases only two-thirds of all relevant articles were coded. Hence, the estimations for the full sample add up to about 9,000 responsibility attributions in Greece and about 3,000 cases in Spain. When considering these estimates for the comparison, the overall salience of the debate in Germany and Spain is on a similar level, while the debate in the Greek media features triple the number of responsibility attributions. By this measure, the results confirm the expectations of a very salient and intense debate in Greece. The expectation for Spain as an intermediary case between Greece and Germany is not confirmed; instead, Spain and Germany are almost equal.

Table 11: Total Number of Responsibility Attributions

	DEU	GRC	ESP	N
Attributions, coded	3,052	6,011	2,016	11,079
%	27.5	54.3	18.2	100.0
Attributions, estimated*	**3,052**	**9,017**	**3,024**	**15,093**
%	**20.2**	**59.7**	**20.0**	**100.0**

Source: Own calculations
* Coded*: DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

A supplementary measure is the number of relevant articles in which attributions of responsibility were coded (Table 12).[81] The results by and large underline those of the earlier comparison. Again, resorting to the estimations for the full sample, the Eurozone Crisis was covered by roughly three times as many articles in Greece as compared to Spain and Germany. In contrast to the number of attributions, however, the Spanish media appear to cover the crisis in slightly more articles than the German one (ESP[82]: 1,239; DEU: 953). Here, the expectation of the Spanish middle position seems slightly more accurate; however, the differences from the Greek case are still greater than expected.

[81] To be sure, both measures are related – the more articles report on the crisis, the more attributions of responsibility are to be expected. However, media practices may vary and as a secondary measure, the article level helps to get an overview of the data structure in this first part of the analysis. In the following, however, all further analyses build on responsibility attributions as the basic unit of analysis.

[82] The asterisk in Table 12 and in the following always refers to estimated numbers based on the 67 per cent-sample of coded responsibility attributions.

Table 12: Total Number of Coded Articles

	DEU	GRC	ESP	N
Articles, coded	953	2,225	826	4,004
%	23.8	55.6	20.6	100.0
Articles, estimated*	**953**	**3,337.5**	**1,239**	**5,529.5**
%	**17.2**	**60.4**	**22.4**	**100.0**

Source: Own calculations
* Coded*: DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

To complete this first overview, Table 13 presents relative measures for both indicators.

Table 13: Relative Measures of Salience

	DEU	GRC	ESP
Articles/day	4.99	11.65	4.32
Articles/day, estimated *	**4.99**	**17.47**	**6.49**
Attributions/day	15.98	31.47	10.55
Attributions/day, estimated*	**15.98**	**47.21**	**15.83**
Attributions/article	3.20	2.70	2.44

Source: Own calculations
* Coded: *DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

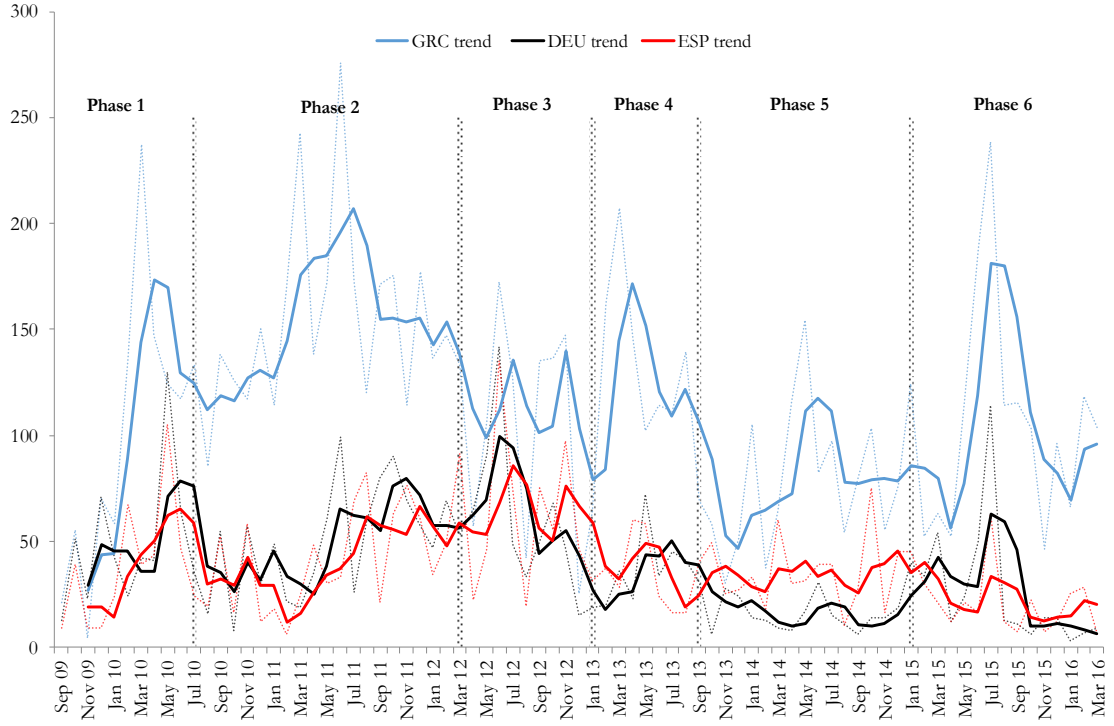
Overall, the analysis of salience only partly confirms the expectations. In comparative terms, throughout the entire period, the Eurozone Crisis triggered the highest number of responsibility attributions in the Greek debate, and the debate is least salient in Germany. But contrary to the expectation of an intermediary position for Spain, the intensity of the Spanish debate is similar to that in Germany and the gap to Greece is large.

Whereas these measures indicate overall salience levels throughout the entire crisis period, I now turn to changes over the course of the crisis. This serves a triple purpose. Firstly, the timelines allow the extent to which the inferences hold throughout the crisis years to be checked. Secondly, the analysis allows an inductive classification of Eurozone Crisis phases. Thirdly, the timelines will be juxtaposed with the expectations for crisis trends (see section 6.4). Overall and due to the steadily increasing impact of the Eurozone Crisis and the many crisis summits on European level, I expected more intense responsibility debates in the first years of the crisis and a gradual calming down with the decreasing crisis intensity from 2013 onwards. When it comes to country-specific developments, for Greece, I expected a particularly salient debate during the period of the first and second bailout negotiations between Spring 2010 and Winter 2011, and a further increasing salience during the third bailout negotiations with the newly elected Syriza government in 2015. The developments in Spain suggested a particularly strong salience in 2012 and a slowly decreasing attribution activity with the macro-economic improvement starting in 2013/2014. The German responsibility debate was

expected to be largely driven by the rhythm of the European crisis management, with peaks corresponding to the respective EU summits.

Figure 14 shows the development of salience over time. The graphs display the three-months moving trend for the number of responsibility attributions, using predicted numbers for Greece and Spain.

Figure 14: Attributions of Responsibility, Development Over Time



First of all, a comparison of the timelines shows that the inference of the highest salience of the Greek debate holds over the entire course of the crisis. Only in what is indicated as phase 3 (see explanations below), does the attribution intensity in the Spanish and German crisis debates approach that in Greece. Phase 2 shows the largest differences between Greece on the one hand and Spain and Germany on the other. Interestingly, the finding of a similar overall salience in Spain and Germany applies throughout the crisis timeline. Only in phase 5 is the Spanish debate constantly higher, whereas in phase 6 the order changes and the German debate is more salient with a clear peak in the summer of 2015. Finally, whereas the rhythm of the Greek debate seems to follow its own domestic logic during several episodes of the crisis (e.g. the peaks in phases 4 and 5), Germany and Spain show similar trends and, especially in the first half of the crisis, periods of decreasing and increasing attribution intensity run parallel.

Secondly, the results largely confirm the expectations for general trends as well as country trends. Overall, the crisis debate becomes less salient in the second half of the crisis period with the start of the (economic) recovery. As expected, the Greek debate witnesses clear peaks in the number of

responsibility attributions during the time of the first two bailout negotiations in Spring 2010 and autumn/winter 2011, a period of relative calm in 2014, and a further increasing salience towards the end of the crisis in 2015. The peak in spring 2013, however, comes unexpectedly and demands further substantiation (see below). In Spain, the graph shows the expected increases in the attribution activity in late 2011 and 2012, times when the political crisis intensified and European rescue loans were negotiated. Moreover, while the developments in the German and Spanish debate are similar, the last stage of the Eurozone Crisis triggers a more visible reaction in attribution activity in Germany.

Thirdly, Figure 14 above helps to distinguish different crisis phases. With recourse to the specific developments in Germany, Greece and Spain and the evolution of the attribution activity in the three countries, I distinguish six different phases that help to structure the empirical analyses in the following sections. The distinction of phases results from the combined perspective on general crisis developments and the salience of the debate, understood as mediated crisis intensity and public attention.[83]

Phase 1: October 2009 to July 2010 – Fear of Contagion

The Greek public debt problem became apparent, leading to fears of contagion and the spread of a sovereign debt crisis all over the Eurozone. In February and March 2010, the Greek parliament passed the first two austerity packages to cut public spending, which is mirrored by a first boost of the responsibility debate in Greece. Around the same time, the Spanish government introduced its first round of austerity, which also triggered the attribution activity in Spain, albeit on a lesser level. As Greece's problems on the financial markets persisted, the country passed its third austerity package and asked for European assistance in April 2010. Greece received a first bail-out package from the 'troika' in May 2010, which visibly intensifies the attribution activity in Germany and Spain, too. With the institutionalization of the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) in May 2010, responsibility debates calm down in all countries.

Phase 2: August 2010 to March 2012 – Austerity and Steps towards Containment

Throughout this second phase, attribution activity in Greece remained on a very high level, with peaks especially around two new austerity packages leading to large protest events between spring and autumn 2011. After further peaks connected to the introduction of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), the second bail-out package for Greece and the resignation of prime minister Papandreou in Winter 2011, the debate briefly calms down. Attribution activity in Germany intensified during spring/summer 2011 when the strength of the EFSF was perceived as insufficient. In autumn/winter 2011, the German parliament approved the extensions of the lending power of the

[83] It should be clear, however, that the following distinction is just one among many possibilities to distinguish the crisis debate in different phases.

EFSF, and EU leaders agreed on further measures to tighten fiscal discipline which calmed down the German debate. In Spain, the debate intensified in spring 2011 and reached peaks with the general elections and the dramatic defeat of the socialist party in November 2011 and the announcement of a new round of austerity by prime minister Rajoy as well as the second Greek bailout in early 2012.

Phase 3: April 2012 to January 2013 – A Deepening Crisis

Phase 3 displays two major peaks that are paralleled in all three countries. The first peak in spring/summer 2012 mirrors a further intensification of the crisis all over the Eurozone. Moreover, double elections shook Greece in summer 2012 which intensified responsibility debates. In Spain, the largest national bank, Bankia, was effectively nationalized and Rajoy asked for a 'soft' bailout, restricted to the banking sector in order to recapitalize its banks in June 2012. The debate was temporarily silenced by ECB President Draghi's speech promising to defend the Euro "whatever it takes" (Draghi 2012) in July 2012, only to intensify again some months later. This second peak in autumn/winter 2012 mirrors the introduction of new austerity measures in Greece and Spain, as well as growing anger among the public as reflected by massive protests all over Europe.

Phase 4: February to September 2013 – Diminishing Crisis and Continuous Conflict in Greece

Whereas the evolution of the debate in Spain and Germany in this phase seems to reflect the general calming down of the Eurozone Crisis, attribution activity in Greece re-intensified over the parliamentary approval of another set of budget cuts and over lasting protests in the spring of 2013.

Phase 5: September 2013 to January 2015 – Deceptive Calm

The debate visibly calmed down in Greece and all three countries show a moderately salient debate when benchmarked against the earlier crisis periods. While for many observers, the Eurozone Crisis seemed to have come to an end, the debate in Greece soon revived with an important peak around discussions about a possible third bailout in spring/summer 2014.

Phase 6: February 2015 to March 2016 – Looming 'Grexit'

This last phase is characterized by Syriza's election victory in January 2015 and its consequences for the European crisis management. The new government's goal to end austerity and supervision by the 'troika' led to strong tensions within the Eurogroup, to a threat of 'Grexit' and to a referendum on a third bailout package, which was eventually rejected by the Greek population; only two weeks later, however, the Eurogroup and Greece agreed on a third bailout package, and the debate calmed down not only in Greece but also in Germany and Spain. The dramatic developments in Greece triggered more responsibility attributions in the German debate when compared to the one in Spain, with one of the highest peaks of the whole crisis period.

To sum up the qualification of the six crisis phases, Table 14 and Figure 15 display the average number of responsibility attributions per month for all phases. This measure helps to reduce complexity and to make sense of the general trends in the crisis debate. Overall and in line with the expectations, the debate's salience increases in the first half of the crisis, calms down in 2013 and 2014 and finally re-intensifies towards the end of the timeframe in summer 2015, at least in Greece and Germany. The increasing salience of the Greek debate in periods of bailout negotiations (phase 2 and phase 6) is in line with the general expectations, whereas the strong increase in phase 4, driven by debates over further budget cuts and widespread protests, is unexpected. As expected, the German debate seems to be driven by the overall development of the Eurozone Crisis and the rhythm of the European crisis management, with an increasing salience during the most intense periods of the crisis. Spain shows a strong intensification of the debate in phase 3 in 2012 with the start of the bailout negotiations and growing resistance to austerity. Again, the timeline confirms the impression of similar trends in Spain and Germany that deviate from the developments in Greece, with alternating periods of higher and lesser salience and partial reverse trends, such as in phase 4.

Figure 15: Attributions of Responsibility, Crisis Phases

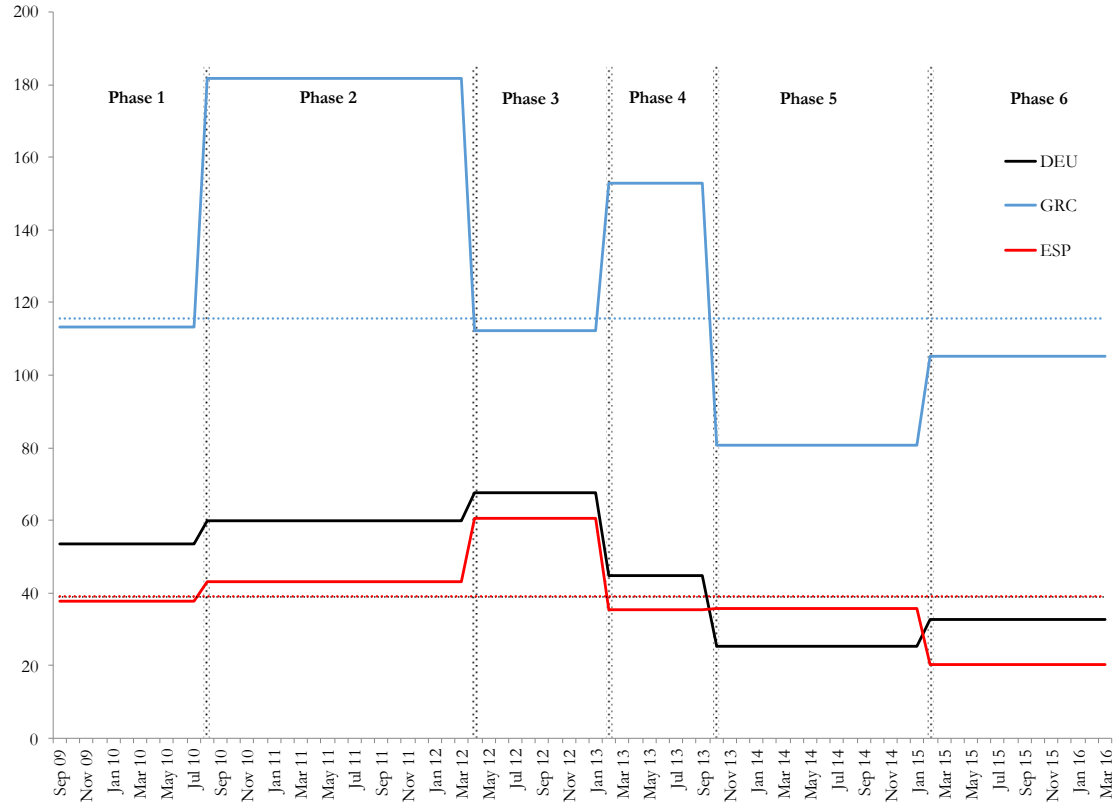


Table 14: Average Number of Attributions Per Month, Crisis Phases

	Phase 1 Oct 09 - Jul 10	Phase 2 Aug 10 - Mar 12	Phase 3 Apr 12 - Jan 13	Phase 4 Feb 13 - Sep 13	Phase 5 Oct 13 - Jan 15	Phase 6 Feb 15 - Mar 16	Total
DEU	53.6	59.8	67.5	44.9	25.3	32.8	39.0
GRC*	113.3	181.7	112.4	152.8	80.7	105.2	115.5
ESP*	37.8	43.3	60.5	35.3	35.7	20.4	39.0

Source: Own calculations
* Coded: *DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

Overall, this first analysis shows that throughout the entire crisis period, the crisis debate is clearly most salient in Greece. Against the expectations, Germany and Spain are on a similar level, overall and in terms of the temporal evolution. The debate in Germany and Spain appears to follow a similar rhythm when it comes to broad trends but also concerning the short-term ups and downs. This synchronicity could be interpreted as a sign of the European quality of the Eurozone Crisis and the Europeanization of public spheres during the crisis. This interpretation follows Eder's and Kantner's idea that meaningful cross-border debates in interconnected public spheres presuppose that the respective national publics deal "with the same topics, at the same time and with respect to similar frames of reference" (Eder and Kantner 2000, p. 315, translation by the author). At least when it comes to the temporal aspect, this seems to be the case for Spain and Germany. Despite different political positions and interests in the crisis, both publics seem to debate within a common, European framework which triggers parallel attention circles. This is in line with research from Heft (2017, p. 57), who finds a similar synchronicity of issue cycles in Spain and Germany during the first year of the crisis.[84] For Greece, this is at best partially visible. To be sure, there are peaks and trends in the debate that are visible in all countries, such as increases following the intensification of the crisis in phase 1 and 2 or the peaks connected to the threat of the 'Grexit' in summer 2015. Yet, in terms of overall salience as well as in terms of rhythm, Greece is a world of its own.

9.1.2 Shape: Issue Framing

To study the issue framing of the debate, I distinguish four broad issue categories along geographic levels and societal fields. At first, political (sub-)issues of the Eurozone Crisis are divided into those (1) referring to questions of European regulation and European crisis management and (2) those referring to questions of national efforts and domestic implementation of European regulations. The further categories cover issues connected to the (3) (financial) market and the economy and (4) cultural issues, also covering questions of sovereignty and identity. In Table 15 below, I further differentiate the second category, domestic implementation, into firstly, all issues connected to a broad

[84] For a different result, see Drewski (2015).

understanding of austerity, including privatization of public infrastructure and, secondly, all other issues dealing with the Eurozone Crisis and its domestic containment. While the two categories European regulation and domestic implementation cover policy (fiscal policy, economic policy, etc.) and polity issues (new governance arrangements on European level etc.), the 'other' sub-category also covers issues referring to the political process, political behaviour and aspects of the political culture.

In general, I expected that the specific country role in the Eurozone Crisis leaves an imprint on the issue framing of the debate. For Greece and Spain, I expected a comparatively strong focus on the domestic implementation of European policies and austerity. For the creditor country, Germany, I expected a stronger framing of the crisis with reference to European regulation. In terms of temporal trends, I expected a stronger focus on causes of the crisis at the beginning of the crisis years.

The overview of the issue framing in Table 15 displays commonalities as well as differences. As a general impression, the Eurozone Crisis and its management are primarily framed in political terms. While the crisis extends to all societal fields, the Eurozone Crisis is framed as a political crisis or, in other words, the debates stress political responsibility. In all three countries, political issues make up about 70 per cent of all attribution issues. Within this broad category, the issue framing differs. Firstly, and as expected, attribution issues connected to European regulation are significantly more salient in the German media (34.1%), as compared to Greece (23.3%) and Spain (20.1%). In these two countries, the debate is more focused on the domestic implementation of measures to contain the crisis. Within this category, issues in the broad field of austerity are relatively seen most important in Spain (37.1%), followed by Greece (31.6%) and Germany (26.3%). The position in the Eurozone Crisis defines the issue framing and whereas Greece and Spain are forced to deal with (domestic) consequences and containment of the crisis, Germany is concerned about its European regulation.

Furthermore, the results show that the specific unfolding of the crisis leaves an imprint on the domestic framing of the responsibility debate. The fact that the Spanish pattern of the crisis is closely entangled with the financial and banking sector corresponds to a larger share of attributions dealing with precisely these issues (19.2%) when compared to Greece (13.0%). In the German debate, financial issues are even slightly more central in the debate (21.7%), which underlines the broader, European and transnational perspective on the crisis beyond specific national contexts.

Finally, the greater share of financial issues in Spain when compared to Greece is mirrored by a greater share of cultural issues in the Greek debate (16.0% in Greece; 11.5% in Spain). The Greek debate paid significant attention to questions of national humiliation, dignity, and the loss of sovereignty in the face of strict conditionality for bailout loans and dependency on the good will of the European and international creditors. Moreover, this category also covers debates about question of

national identity or country characteristics that commentators consulted to make sense of the years of so-called overspending. This difference to the Spanish debate extends to the difference reported for the 'other' sub-category in domestic implementation. For the main part, this sub-category covers responsibility attributions related to questions of political behaviour, and many of these revolve around issues such as corruption or fraud. These issues are most often discussed in Greece. Here, responsibility is not only discussed in debates about the successes and failures of policies but also in terms of political behaviour and the immediate, personal responsibilities.

Table 15: Attribution Issue Framing, Percentage Distribution

		DEU	GRC	ESP
Political issues	European regulation	34.1	23.3	20.6
	Domestic implementation	34.3	47.7	48.7
	Austerity	*26.3*	*31.6*	*37.1*
	Other	*8.0*	*16.0*	*11.6*
	Financial markets, economy	21.7	13.0	19.2
	Culture, identity, sovereignty	10.0	16.0	11.5
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	N	3,052	6,008	2,016

Source: Own calculations

Figure 16: European Issue Framing ('European Regulation'), Relative Shares

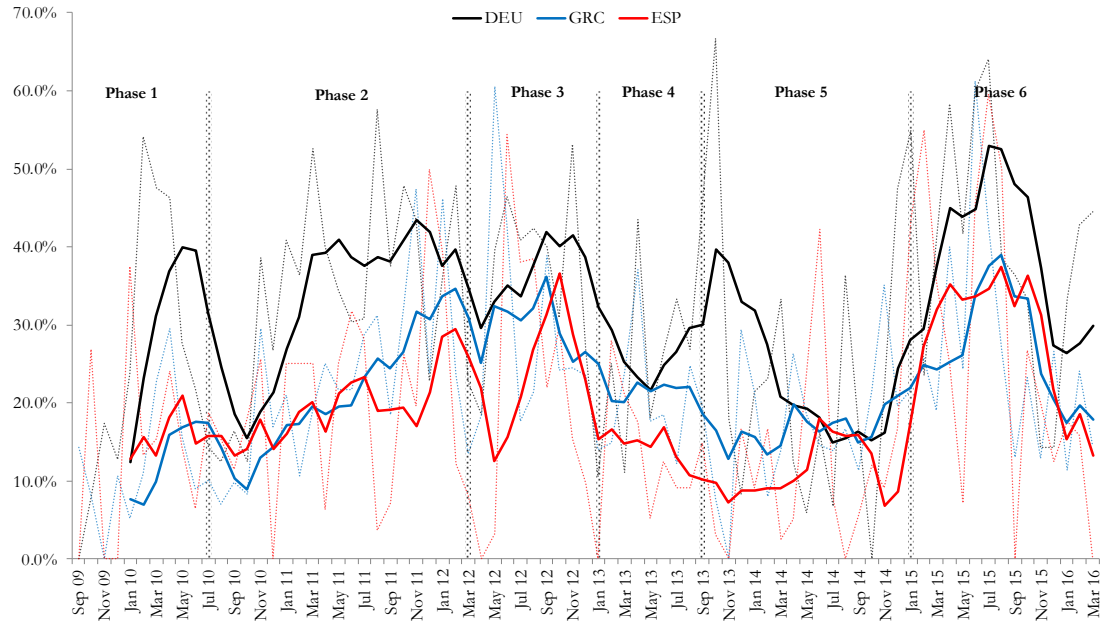


Figure 16 now shows the temporal development of the issue European regulation over time. In Germany, the European issue framing of the crisis debate is constantly more salient, with peaks

connected to negotiations over bailout programmes such as in winter/spring 2010 and in spring/summer 2015, the negotiations on the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) in 2011 and in autumn 2012. The more the Eurozone Crisis is dealt with at the European level, the more salient these supranational topics in the German crisis debate. This congruence is in line with the basic idea of the authority-transfer hypothesis that the delegation of power to supranational institutions is followed by increasing attention for this authority. The Greek and Spanish debate, however, hardly follow the German trend, apart from the negotiations around the bailout referendum in Greece in summer 2015.

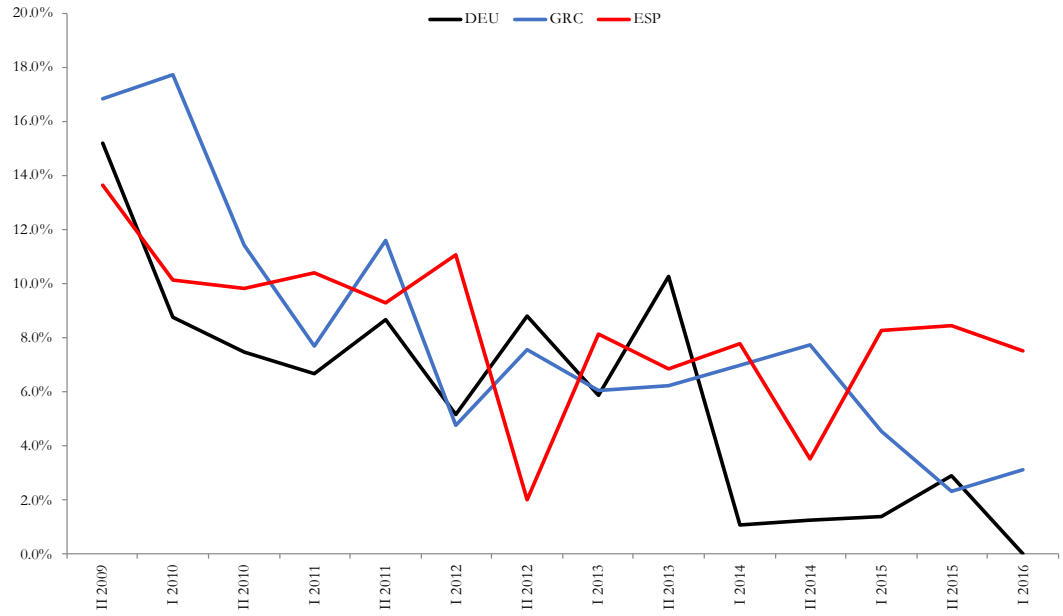
As part of the issue framing, the information about whether attribution issues referred to either causes or responses and consequences of the Eurozone Crisis was coded in a further variable. Table 16 below reveals only minor differences between the three debates. In relative terms, crisis causes are only slightly more often the issue of responsibility attributions in Greece (8.2%) and Spain (8.0%) than in Germany (6.8%). What differs in the debates, is the dominant temporal direction of responsibility attributions: In the Greek case, roughly 83 per cent of all causal attributions (*blame* or *success*) are directed at the past (*diagnostic framing*) and only 17 per cent refer to future developments (*prognostic framing*). In the Spanish case, the ratio is 79-21, in the German case 74-26 (numbers not displayed in table). In line with the above interpretation, the stronger focus on the European management of the crisis in Germany seems to correspond to a relatively stronger prognostic framing and debates about the prevention of future crises. Crisis-hit Spain and Greece are more concerned with the immediate situation and diagnostic framing; the quest for responsibility for developments in the past is more pressing. As expected for the temporal development of the issue-framing, the salience of causal explanations for the outbreak of the crisis becomes increasingly less important over the course of the crisis. Figure 17 shows declining trends for all three countries.

Table 16: Attribution Issue Context, Percentage Distribution

	DEU	GRC	ESP
Crisis causes	6.8	8.2	8.0
Responses, consequences	84.7	83.9	85.9
Other/unclear	8.5	7.9	6.1
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	3,052	6,008	2,016

Source: Own calculations

Figure 17: Attribution Issue Context, Causes of the Crisis, Relative Shares



Finally, the coding of the issue dimension included justification frames for responsibility attributions (see section 7.1) which provide insights into whether the national or the European level is used as the community of reference. Table 17 replicates findings of a more domestic orientation in the two 'crisis countries' with shares of justifications made with reference to the domestic level between 61.3 per cent in Spain and 69.8 per cent in Greece. In the German debate, the trend is reversed with more than three quarters of responsibility attributions justified with references to consequences on the European level, either supranational (44.3%) or concerning other EU member states (32.5%).

Table 17: Geographic Communities of Reference, Justification Frames, Percentage Distribution

	DEU	GRC	ESP
Domestic	14.4	69.8	61.3
EUMS	32.5	6.2	11.7
EU	44.3	19.4	21.5
Global	3.7	1.4	2.2
Unclear	5.1	3.1	3.3
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	1,126	1,698	785

Source: Own calculations

To complete the picture, the analysis of functional communities of reference allows for a check on whether responsibility attributions in the crisis setting are justified on political, economic or cultural

grounds. Table 18 shows that economic justifications prevail over cultural ones, with a particularly high share in Spain (43.2%). Interestingly, Greece shows the lowest share (29.3%) in favour of justifications made with reference to consequences in the political realm (41.2%). In the public debate on the crisis, the political turmoil and the looming 'Grexit' even seemed to eclipse arguments made in the name of the disastrous economic situation in that country.

Table 18: Functional Communities of Reference, Justification Frames, Percentage Distribution

	DEU	GRC	ESP
Political sphere	45.3	41.2	25.7
Economy	35.3	29.3	43.2
Culture/society	16.0	25.5	26.1
Other	3.4	4.0	5.0
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
N	1,126	1,698	785

Source: Own calculations

9.1.3 Interim Conclusions

Overall, the comparison showed that throughout the crisis, the salience of the Eurozone Crisis was clearly highest in Greece followed by Spain and Germany, who are unexpectedly on par. In Germany and Spain, the lower crisis impact in combination with a more open political system led to a comparatively calm debate when compared to the crisis-hit and politically closed situation in Greece. Moreover, for Spain and Germany, the common European context in the crisis scenario translates into a temporal synchronicity of the debates. In terms of salience as well as in terms of the rhythm of the debate, Greece is a world apart.

The issue-framing of the debate largely corresponds to respective country-position on the Eurozone Crisis map. The analysis revealed a strong political framing in all three countries with a continuously stronger focus on European regulation in Germany and a stronger salience of issues connected to the domestic implementation of these regulations and the domestic coping with the Eurozone Crisis, above all, austerity. This difference in issue framing is in line with differences in the scope of justification frames, be they predominantly European (Germany) or domestic (Greece and Spain). Moreover, whereas in Spain (and Germany) responsibility debates about financial issues are an important element of the crisis debates, the Greek debate places a stronger focus on cultural issues. In terms of temporal developments and confirming the expectations, not only the focus on crisis causes but the general salience of the debate decreases slightly towards the second half of the crisis period, with a

final upward turn in the final phase, especially in Greece and Germany.[85] Table 19 juxtaposes the expectations with the findings in this section, which largely match apart from the surprisingly low salience of the Eurozone Crisis in the Spanish debate[86].

Table 19: Salience – Expectations and Findings

SALIENCE		**GERMANY**	**GREECE**	**SPAIN**
INTENSITY	**Expectation**	Low	High	Moderate-high
	Finding	Low-moderate	High	Low-moderate
SHAPE *(issue framing)*	**Expectation**	European regulation	Domestic implementation and consequences	Domestic implementation and consequences
	Finding	European regulation	Domestic implementation and consequences	Domestic implementation and consequences

9.2 Participation in Eurozone Crisis Debates

Salience is the basis and the first necessary condition of politicization. With the second sub-process, actors contributing to this debate come into play. In this research, actor participation is measured on the basis of attribution senders. Every responsibility attribution starts with an actor who publicly articulates (or *sends*) an evaluation of another actor (attribution addressee) with regards to a specific issue. In the following, I take a look at these attribution senders, again distinguishing intensity – here, the range of the actor participation – and shape – here, the extent to which European actors are involved as attribution senders.

Again, recalling the main expectations for this sub-process, I argued that, on the one hand, closed political systems favour the visibility of executive actors and, on the other hand, that central challengers from the (political) opposition will also be prominent in the debate, in their attempts to counterbalance the lack of institutional access points. In open systems, the range of actors will be broader and more Europeanized. Concerning the crisis impact, I expected that the range expands with the intensity of the crisis and the newly emerging political opportunities. At the same time, I expected a strong absolute presence of governmental actors in crisis-affected countries due to increasing

[85] Given that expectations for temporal changes were mostly formulated on the overall level of the politicization pattern, the juxtaposition of expectations and findings in this regard will only.

[86] The classification as 'low-moderate' is relative to the high salience in Greece.

legitimation pressure in the public sphere. Likewise, I expected a strong role of the executive in creditor countries due to the side-lining of non-executive actors in the European crisis management. As for the presence of European actors, their factual competences and involvement in crisis politics suggest high levels of vertical Europeanization in creditor and debtor countries alike. Overall, I expected a moderately broad actor range but a strong Europeanization in Germany; for Spain and Greece, I likewise expected the actor range to be moderately broad and a moderate presence of European actors. With respect to temporal trends, I expected a generally decreasing politicization intensity in the second half of the crisis period which translates in a diminishing actor range from 2013 onwards.

9.2.1 Intensity: Actor Range

A central indicator to measure the intensity of this sub-process of politicization is the share of non-executive actors among domestic actors participating in the debate. This simple measure results from the idea that politicization describes the extension of political debates beyond executive decision makers to larger segments of the society. It is suitable for index building (see section 9.4) and for comparisons over time.

Table 20 provides the share of non-executive actors among all domestic actors in the respective country (row 1) and the share of non-executive actors, excluding journalists as attribution senders. Among domestic actors, non-executive actors are most present in the German debate, followed by Spain and Greece. Surprisingly, this first impression suggests a broader range of actors participating in the German debate than in those of the two 'debtor countries' where more parts of society are affected and where, therefore, a higher number of different actors contributing to the public quest for responsibility was expected. However, the measurement without journalists as attribution senders[87] provides similar results for all three countries.

Table 20: Share of Domestic Non-Executive Attribution Senders, Percentage Distribution

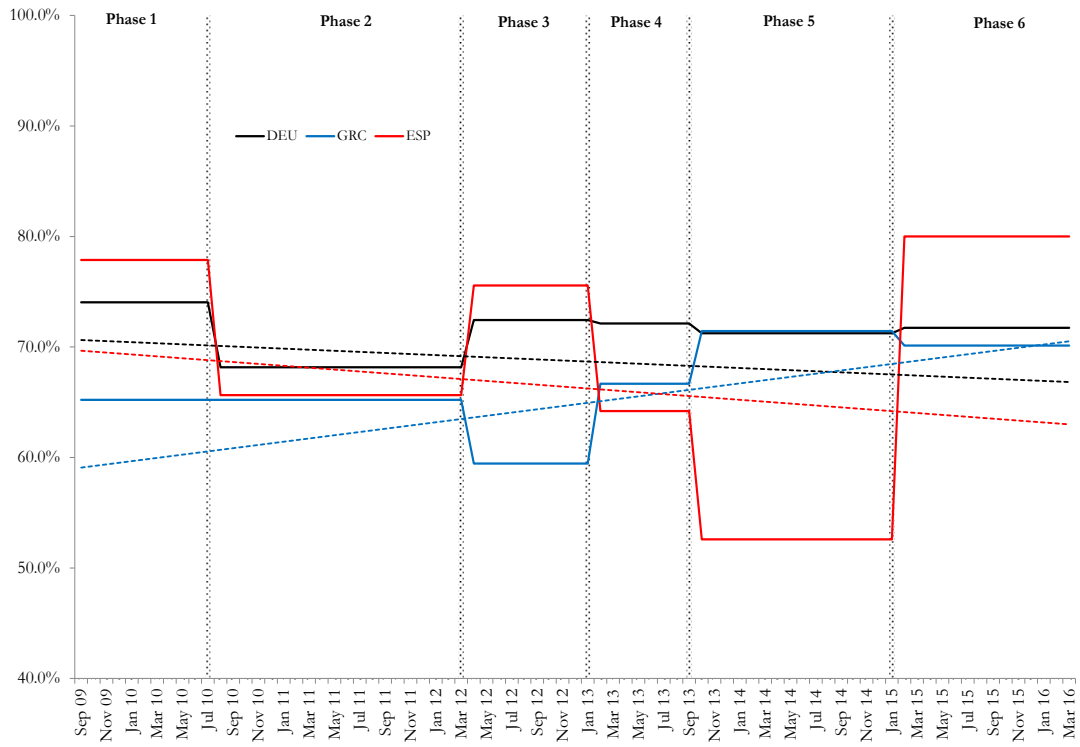
	DEU	GRC	ESP
Non-ex. actors	*82.7*	*75.5*	*80.4*
w/o journalists	71.1	66.7	68.7
N	1591	4063	1300
N, w/o journalists	*955*	*2986*	*814*

Source: Own calculations

[87] Journalists and other media actors are only coded as senders when they abandon their neutral observer position and become involved in the debate by explicitly evaluating other actors. Given that journalists do not encounter the same challenges to enter public debates, comparisons with other actor categories are not always straightforward and therefore, journalists are excluded from the analysis in some cases.

Figure 18 shows the share of non-executive actors among domestic attribution senders in the crisis debate over time as average shares for each crisis phase. The linear trends are based on one-month intervals. Whereas the analysis of the salience over time suggested some congruence of the debates (at least for Spain and Germany, see section 9.1.1), this is not the case here. The three graphs show peaks and lows at different moments in time. Overall, the German debate shows a rather constant, slightly declining share of non-executive actors. The Spanish case is somehow more volatile. Overall, the general trend points to a gradual decline in the share of non-executive actors with the exception of a sharp increase towards the end of the crisis period. This, however, is party explained by the small number of cases (coded attributions) in this final phase in Spain. Apart from that, the Spanish debate in this phase features a large share of opinion pieces that (critically) comment on the developments surrounding the threat of 'Grexit' at that time. Greece shows a different picture; there is a gradual increase in the share of non-executive actors over the course of the crisis. The low share of non-executive actors at the beginning of the crisis is especially noteworthy. It seems that it took some time for the opposition, civil society and other actors in Greece to realize the situation and only with the negotiations of the first bailout agreement did non-executive actors start to enter the debate to a considerable share. After that, their voice gained in relative importance over the course of the crisis. Overall, only the slightly decreasing shares of non-executive actors in Spain and Germany are in line with the expectation of a declining politicization intensity in the second half of the crisis. Again, the Greek case is special with an increasing share of non-executive actors.

Figure 18: Share of Non-Executive Domestic Attribution Senders, Crisis Phases



The share of non-executive actors offers an intuitive but limited perspective on politicization intensity as it remains unclear, in how far politicization remains within the spheres of politics or whether it extends to other segments of society. In order to substantiate this picture, Table 21 displays the share of non-political actors over time. Overall, all three crisis debates are very political, not only in terms of their issue framing (see section 9.1.2) but also in terms of the composition of attribution senders. Especially in Greece, actors from outside the realm of politics are less involved in the public debate over responsibility than expected. This finding holds over time; the share of non-political actors in Greece is continuously lower than 50 per cent. Phase 6 stands out with below average shares in all three countries. Here, the re-intensification of the crisis and the frequent sequence of European summits further lifted the presence of political actors participating in responsibility debates.

Table 21: Share of Non-political Attribution Senders, Percentage Distribution, Crisis Phases

	Phase 1 Oct 09-Jul 10	Phase 2 Aug 10-Mar 12	Phase 3 Apr 12-Jan 13	Phase 4 Feb 13-Sep 13	Phase 5 Oct 13-Jan 15	Phase 6 Feb 15-Mar 16	Total
DEU	57.3	60.7	55.6	55	53.5	47.1	56.3
GRC*	46.8	49.3	49	47.3	42.4	43.4	46.8
ESP*	59.9	53.7	54.6	56.9	54.1	46.8	54.7

Source: Own calculations
* Coded: *DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

To sum up, the first part of the analysis suggests the actor participation to be most diverse in Germany, when using the measure of non-executive actors participating in the debate. This is against the expectation that a lack of formal access points and a strong crisis impact drive challenger participation in public debates. Moreover, the German and Spanish debates are slightly more diverse in terms of the participation of actors from outside of politics, when compared to the very 'political' Greek debate. It seems that in Greece, the combination of a closed political system and the heavy crisis impact mainly boosted debates in the political arena which overshadowed interventions by economic actors and civil society.

9.2.2 Shape: Actor Composition

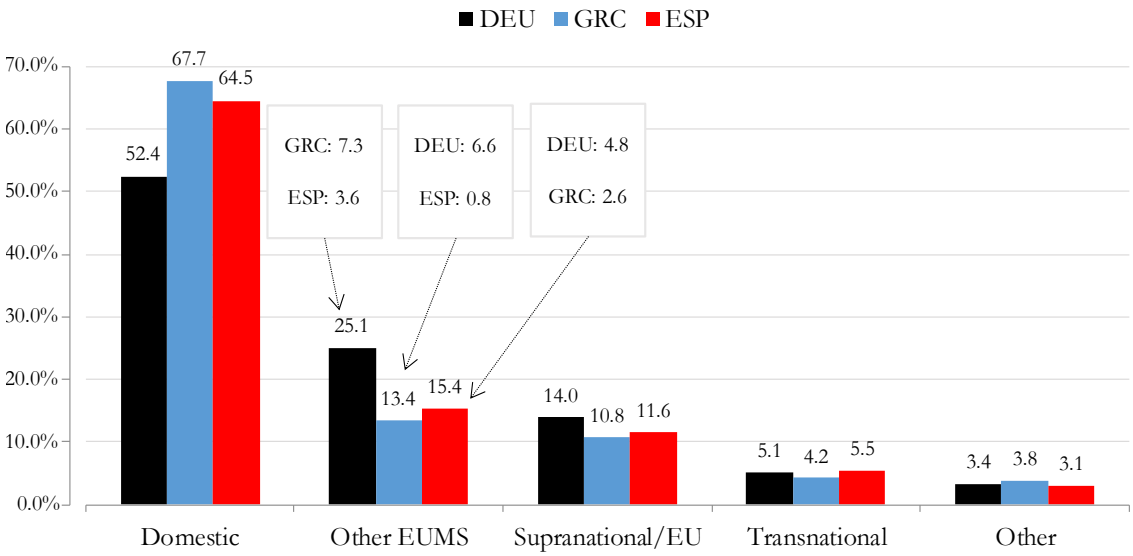
9.2.2.1 Europeanization

This section now turns to the shape of the actor participation and the question concerning to what extent responsibility debates are Europeanized at the level of attribution senders (Figure 19).

Even though the Eurozone Crisis is highly European, the majority of responsibility attributions is articulated by domestic actors, in all three countries. Given the general focus of national media outlets on domestic actors, this is not surprising. The extent, however, to which especially the Greek debate

is dominated by domestic actors is astonishing. Here, two thirds of all responsibility attributions in the crisis debate are stated by domestic actors. In Spain, this share is only slightly lower. At least when it comes to attribution senders, the Greek and Spanish crisis debates are predominantly domestic; actors from other EU member states come second with a much lower shares and EU actors such as the European Commission, the ECB or representatives of the 'troika' are responsible for only slightly more than a tenth of all coded responsibility attributions in both countries. In the German debate, domestic actors are the largest category, too, but again the debate seems to be more heterogeneous: Actors from other EU member states, especially France, Spain, Italy and Greece, contribute the considerable share of 25.1 per cent. EU actors remain surprisingly absent from the German debate, too, although at 14.0 per cent they exceed the respective shares in the Greek and Spanish debates.

Figure 19: Attribution Senders, Geographic Differentiation



When it comes to the mutual presence of German actors in the Greek and Spanish debates (see arrows in Figure 19), the leading role of the German government in the Eurozone Crisis is partially reflected in the data. Among actors from other EU member states, German actors account for more than half of all attributions in Greece (6.6% out of 13.4%). In Spain, German actors are less present as attribution senders with 4.8 per cent out of 15.4 per cent. Moreover, Greek actors are considerably more actively involved in the German debate (7.3%) than Spanish actors (3.6%) and whereas Spanish actors are almost absent in the Greek debate (0.6%), Greek actors in Spain are responsible for 2.6 per cent of all attributions. Especially the comparatively high shares for German actors in Greece and for Greek actors in Germany, respectively, reflect the prominent role of the Greek-German relationship in the Eurozone Crisis. Spain is less closely entangled with either of the other countries and, in general, the participation of actors from different European countries is more evenly split (numbers

not displayed). The absence of Greek actors in the Spanish debate and vice-versa is a first indication of a surprisingly weak discursive tie between the two Southern European 'crisis countries'.

Table 22 shows the average share of actor Europeanization for the six crisis periods. Here, Europeanization means the combined presence of supranational actors (vertical Europeanization) and actors from other EU member states (horizontal Europeanization). In all phases, the actor composition in the German debate displays the highest level of Europeanization, with an overall increasing trend towards the second half of the crisis period. The presence of European actors in the Greek debate is rather stable over time, – except for comparatively high levels of Europeanization in phase 3 and comparatively low levels in phase 6. The low share in the last phase is especially surprising. Rather than leading to a Europeanization of the actor composition, the re-intensification of the crisis and the extreme tensions between the Greek government and the European creditors resulted in a further domestication of the actors participating in the debate. In Spain, Europeanization at the level of attribution senders is more volatile and, similar to the trends in the German debate, generally increasing towards the second half of the crisis period.

Overall, the expansion of attribution senders in the German debate is not only the most diverse, but also the most Europeanized, and this finding holds throughout the crisis years. When comparing the two crisis countries, the sender composition of the Spanish debate is slightly more diverse and also more Europeanized than the Greek one.

Table 22: Share of European Attribution Senders, Percentage Distribution, Crisis Phases

	Phase 1 Oct 09-Jul 10	Phase 2 Aug 10-Mar 12	Phase 3 Apr 12-Jan 13	Phase 4 Feb 13-Sep 13	Phase 5 Oct 13-Jan 15	Phase 6 Feb 15-Mar 16	Total
DEU	32.7	33.9	40.0	44.3	48.3	46.0	38.6
GRC*	25.7	22.7	32.7	23.1	26.0	19.2	24.1
ESP*	19.1	23.7	25.8	20.7	36.0	38.4	26.9

Source: Own calculations
* Coded: *DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

9.2.2.2 Domestication

So far, the analysis has suggested that the participation in crisis debates is dominated by domestic actors rather than Europeanised, especially in Greece. At the same time, the actor composition of all debates was shown to be very political. To understand the dynamics that drive the domestication of the crisis debate, a more substantial perspective on domestic actors and especially, domestic political actors, is needed. Table 23 displays relative shares among domestic actors. Domestic political actors are further split into government, opposition and other political actors in columns 1 to 3.

Table 23: Domestic Attribution Senders, Percentage Distribution

	Govern-ment	Opposi-tion	Politics, other	Economic govern-ance	Journalists	Economy	Civil society	Other	N
DEU	17.3	11.4	7.4	3.9	40.0	6.8	11.8	1.4	1591
w/o journ.	*28.9*	*19.0*	*12.4*	*6.5*	*/*	*11.3*	*19.6*	*2.4*	*955*
GRC*	24.5	24.7	2.9	0.6	26.5	5.3	15.0	0.5	4063
w/o journ.	*33.3*	*33.7*	*4.0*	*0.8*	*/*	*7.3*	*20.4*	*0.6*	*2986*
ESP*	19.6	15.6	2.9	1.9	37.4	5.0	17.0	0.5	1300
w/o journ.	*31.3*	*24.9*	*4.7*	*3.1*	*/*	*8.0*	*27.1*	*0.9*	*814*

Source: Own calculations
* Coded: *DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

Among domestic actors in Greece, political actors are by far the most active. Taking governments[88], opposition and other political actors together, they add up to more than 50 per cent of all cases. In Spain and Germany, the combined share is considerably smaller (Germany: 36.1%; Spain: 28.1%). This difference mainly goes back to the role of oppositional parties. In Greece, the opposition's share even exceeds that of the government. In Germany, in stark contrast, the debate among domestic political actors has a much stronger focus on responsibility attributions 'sent' by governmental actors and other political actors (7.4%) are more present in the debate when compared to Spain and Greece. Spain again occupies a middle position when it comes to the share of government actors (19.6%), as well as to that of oppositional actors (15.6%).

When taking a more detailed look at the structure of attribution senders among governmental actors (*not displayed*), a strong personalization and a concentration on few personalities becomes apparent in the German debate; more than 60 per cent of all responsibility attributions in this category stem from chancellor Merkel and, to an even greater extent, from her party colleague and finance minister Schäuble, whose ministry was in charge of issues of European monetary integration and negotiations on bailout agreements. In Greece, the attribution activity in this category is more equally shared among different cabinet members and other politicians associated with the government. The Greek prime minister and finance minister add up to only a third of all attributions stated by Greek governmental actors. In Spain, the combined share is 43 percent. In both 'crisis countries', the range of different attribution senders associated with the government exceeds the range in Germany by far.

Coming back to the overall actor distribution in the domestic realm, as displayed in Table 23 above, civil society actors are slightly more present as attribution senders in the crisis countries, Greece (15.0%) and Spain (17.0%) when compared to Germany (11.8%). This matches the expectations that

[88] The category government includes members of the cabinet as well as individual party politicians representing coalition parties.

the crisis impact is positively correlated with the presence of civil society actors who come forward to voice their concern and demands. In relative terms, journalists are more actively involved in Germany (40.0%) and Spain (37.4%) when compared to Greece (26.4%). In fact, and as briefly mentioned before, the category journalists is a borderline case, one that is more complicated to compare across countries and, therefore, one that benefits from some further detail. As mentioned earlier, journalists are only included as independent attribution senders when explicitly evaluating others in responsibility attributions. The benchmark for coding responsibility attributions by journalists is higher than that for other actors. In this analysis, journalists are included in order to create a full and comprehensive picture of the debate, the conflicts and the public attribution of responsibility in the Eurozone Crisis in general. Particularly when it comes to conflict lines in the debate, journalists are an important, independent actor and one which is often neglected in actor-centred public sphere research (Adam and Pfetsch 2009, p. 563).[89] Nevertheless, using their own medium to comment and evaluate crisis politics provides them with different opportunities for accessing and shaping the debate, compared with other actors, who need to get media attention in the first place. More precisely, journalistic access does not depend on the structural and dynamic aspects of the political (and discursive) opportunity structure that I discussed earlier. Therefore, the role of journalists deserves special attention. With this in mind, in rows 2, 4 and 6 of Table 23 above, I recalculated the shares for domestic actors in all three publics, now excluding journalists; the results by and large confirm the earlier picture. When excluding journalists, the dominance of political actors and in particular, the government and the opposition, is significantly stronger in Greece than in Germany and Spain. However, this additional perspective also reveals nearly equal shares for civil society actors in the Greek and German debate.

To sum up this latter part, the debate in Germany is not only the most Europeanized but also more heterogenous in the composition of domestic attribution senders. With respect to the realm of domestic politics, however, the German debate is more heavily dominated by the head of government and the finance minister than that in Greece and Spain. Again, with respect to the domestic differentiation, Spain occupies a middle position between Germany and Greece. This applies particularly for the participation of the government and that of the opposition. Only when it comes to the presence of civil society actors, does Spain stand out with a 17 per cent share, the highest among all three countries. With an equally strong presence of the government and the political opposition, the Greek debate is the least diverse according to most measures. Beyond this rather schematic assessment, the actor composition in Greece and Spain deserves a further look; the debate in the two 'crisis countries' is indeed more strongly dominated by political actors and, in that sense, less diverse. *Within* this

[89] Kriesi (2004) suggested decision makers, challengers and media as the three main actors to be analyzed in public sphere conflicts.

category, however, the composition of attribution senders is more evenly spread, more diverse and less personalized. In particular, the strong presence of different oppositional actors in Greece is noteworthy. As expected, the closed political opportunity structure in Greece, in combination with the severe crisis impact led to a strong and heterogenous presence of attribution senders within the category of executive actors as well as that of the political opposition at the expense of all other actor categories from either Greece or abroad.

The case of Greece shows that the relation of governmental and oppositional actors is crucial to an understanding of politicization dynamics in times of crisis. In the following, I assess how this relation develops over time. Table 24 compares the ratio of domestic opposition vs. domestic government over time (crisis phases) with a score of 0 indicating an equal distribution, a score of -1 indicating total dominance of the government and a score of 1 indicating total dominance of the opposition.

For Germany, the negative values in five out of six phases and the total ratio of -0.21 point to a continuous domination of the government vis-à-vis the opposition. Only in phase 4, which prominently features the electoral campaigns in the run-up to the general elections in September 2013, do oppositional parties surpass the attribution activity of governmental actors. After the elections, in phase 5 and 6, the domination of the government is above-average, which is not least due to the formation of the 'grand coalition' of the two biggest parties CDU/CSU and SPD in September 2013. The phase with the strongest governmental domination is the long period between August 2010 and March 2012 (Phase 2). With the negotiations on the second bailout agreement for Greece, several EU summits and the re-structuration of the Monetary Union's institutional design, this phase is strongly characterized by executive crisis management which visibly translates into a stronger attribution activity of the German government. This is in line with the argument that the deviation from procedural rules in the Eurozone Crisis management created a structural asymmetry in public debates, in favour of the executive and to the disadvantage of the opposition (White 2014).

Table 24: Attribution Senders, Ratio Opposition vs. Government, Crisis Phases

	Phase 1 Oct 09-Jul 10	Phase 2 Aug 10-Mar 12	Phase 3 Apr 12-Jan 13	Phase 4 Feb 13-Sep 13	Phase 5 Oct 13-Jan 15	Phase 6 Feb 15-Mar 16	Total
DEU	-0.06	-0.49	-0.09	0.26	-0.31	-0.33	-0.21
GRC*	0.02	-0.05	-0.28	0.00	0.13	0.12	0.01
ESP*	0.22	-0.23	0.07	-0.26	-0.62	0.35	-0.11

Source: Own calculations
* Coded: *DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

The Greek debate shows a fairly constant, equal presence of government and opposition in the early years of the crisis (phase 1, 2 and 4) and a slight domination of the opposition in phases 5 and 6. In phase 5, the strength of the opposition is mainly due to the rapid rise of the far-left challengers from Syriza and the simultaneously decreasing strengths of the governing mainstream parties, in particular the decline of the social-democratic PASOK. In phase 6, then, Syriza claimed power and was challenged by the former main parties now in opposition. The exception is phase 3 in which the government clearly dominates. This is mainly due to the formation of the 'grand coalition' of PP and PASOK in winter 2011. In phase 4 and 5 the diminishing role of the governing PASOK together with the increasing strength of the oppositional Syriza absorbed this effect.

Following the trend from some earlier parts of the analysis, the Spanish case is again more volatile. Here, periods of government domination in phase 2, 4 and 5 alternate with periods in which the opposition is more actively participating in the responsibility debate (phase 1, 3 and 6). The highest deviation from the mean score (-0.11) is stated for phase 5 with a strong government domination.

This analysis of the opposition-government ratio points to the fact that it is not only crisis periods that influence the development of the actor composition over time but also government periods. Table 25 below comes back to the actor expansion among domestic actors, now distinguishing government periods in the three countries.[90] This distinctive perspective on government periods adds to a comprehensive understanding of changing actor compositions over time. Again, every second row in Table 25 displays the respective share among, excluding journalists.

Germany only experienced one government change in the crisis years as a result of the electoral defeat of the liberal FDP in the general elections in September 2013. Hence, I distinguish only two government periods. Period D1 covers the conservative-liberal coalition government of CDU/CSU and FDP between October 2009 and September 2013 and Period D2 covers the 'grand coalition' of CDU/CSU and SPD from September 2013 until March 2016. In Greece, I distinguish three central government periods in the crisis years. Period G1: the one-party government of the social-democratic PASOK between October 2009 and November 2011. Period G2: The long period between November 2011 and January 2015 mainly characterized by a coalition of the former main parties, the conservative ND and PASOK.[91] Period G3: The period characterized by the government of the socialist Syriza and the populist right junior partner ANEL since January 2015. Like Germany, Spain only witnessed one central government change over the crisis years. Period E1 covers the time of the

[90] The following distinction will be used again in section 9.3 for the analysis of polarization and conflict.

[91] The period includes: 1) the cabinet of independent prime minister Papademos (until May 2012) in which ND and PASOK ministers served, 2) the short time of a technocratic caretaker cabinet until June 2012, 3) the following ND-led coalition with PASOK and changing smaller center-left third parties.

social-democratic PSOE government from October 2009 until December 2011. Period E2 covers the conservative PP government until the end of the time period.

Table 25: Domestic Attribution Senders, Percentage Distribution, Government Periods

	Govern-ment	Opposi-tion	Politics other	Economic gov.	Journal-ists	Economy	Civil society	Other	N
DEU									
Period D1	17.3	11.8	6.9	3.5	39.7	7.6	11.8	1.5	1,327
w/o journalists	*28.6*	*19.6*	*11.4*	*5.8*	/	*12.6*	*19.5*	*2.5*	*800*
Period D2	17.8	9.1	10.2	6.1	41.3	2.7	11.7	1.1	264
w/o journalists	*30.3*	*15.5*	*17.4*	*10.3*	/	*4.5*	*20.0*	*1.9*	*155*
GRC									
Period G1	24.8	26.1	1.1	0.7	25.2	6.3	15.5	0.4	1,654
w/o journalists	*33.1*	*34.9*	*1.5*	*0.9*	/	*8.4*	*20.7*	*0.6*	*1,238*
Period G2	25.3	21.7	3.4	0.5	28.4	4.1	16.0	0.6	1,670
w/o journalists	*35.3*	*30.3*	*4.8*	*0.8*	/	*5.8*	*22.3*	*0.8*	*1,196*
Period G3	21.9	28.6	5.8	0.7	25.3	6.0	11.5	0.3	739
w/o journalists	*29.3*	*38.2*	*7.8*	*0.9*	/	*8.0*	*15.4*	*0.4*	*552*
ESP									
Period E1	18.3	17.3	3.0	1.8	37.5	3.8	18.5	0.0	504
w/o journalists	29.2	27.6	4.8	2.9	/	6.0	29.5	0.0	315
Period E2	20.5	14.6	2.9	2.0	37.3	5.8	16.1	0.9	796
w/o journalists	*32.7*	*23.2*	*4.6*	*3.2*	/	*9.2*	*25.7*	*1.4*	*499*

Source: Own calculations
DEU: Period D1: CDU/CSU/FDP-gov, 10.2009-09.2013; Period D2: CDU/CSU/SPD gov., 09.2013-03.2016. GRC: Period G1: PASOK gov., 10.2009-11.2011; Period G2: PP/PASOK-gov, 11.2011-01.2015; Period G3: Syriza gov. 01.2015-03.2016. ESP: Period E1: PSOE gov., 10.2009-12.2011; Period E2: PP gov. 12.2011-03.2016

In Germany, the government share remains stable, whereas the share of the opposition, as mentioned earlier, drops with the formation of the 'grand coalition' and the failure of the FDP to pass the five per cent threshold in the general elections. Other political actors, such as those connected to the realm of legal governance, however, are more active in the debate. Interestingly, the debate during the liberal-conservative coalition (D1) features a stronger presence of economic and financial actors whereas in period D2, actors from economic governance are more present. On the one hand, this could be due to the market-orientation of the liberal junior coalition partner which provided discursive opportunities for market actors to enter the debate. On the other hand, this difference could simply be due to the different stages of the crisis. In the early years of the crisis, the fear of contagion

was stronger and the possibility of a recession greater than in the second period when most European institutions to contain the crisis were already established.

In Greece, the changes in the third government period are most interesting. The election of Syriza and the dramatic episodes of the crisis bailout negotiation in the summer of 2015 lead to a further increasing share of oppositional actors that in this period account for an astonishing 38.2 per cent (*w/o journalists*) of all responsibility attributions sent by domestic actors. Also, other political actors are more present in this period when compared to the other two. Interestingly, the share of civil society declines to only 15.4 per cent during the Syriza government period. This is in part due to the backing of Syriza by social movements and other civil society actors and the general hope among large parts of the population that things would finally change with the new government. Thus, civil society actors had fewer incentives to participate in responsibility debates during this period.

The Spanish debate witnesses a relative increase in the presence of governmental actors in the PP government period (E2) at the expense of the presence of oppositional actors. Also, the share of civil society actors slightly decreases in this period. The generally growing importance of civil society actors in the first half of the crisis is linked to the steadily growing importance of protest actors mobilizing against austerity and for 'real democracy', with mass demonstrations of the indignados/15M in 2011 and 2012 (Flesher Fominaya 2015; Portos 2021). With the beginning recovery in 2013/2014 and the establishment of Podemos as a political representation of the anti-austerity movement, these protest activities become less and, in general, the share of civil society actors declines.

9.2.3 Interim Conclusions

Whereas the first part of the analysis confirmed the expectations by documenting by far the strongest salience of the crisis debate in Greece, the interim conclusions for the actor participation are less straightforward. Overall, the sender structure in all three countries is, first of all, very political. Government actors, oppositional actors and other actors from the political realm dominate, especially in Greece. This corresponds to the political issue framing of the crisis debate identified earlier. Economic actors and civil society actors are less actively involved. Beyond these basic similarities, however, the actor composition differs. In particular, Greece and Germany show opposing patterns. With reference to the more specific expectations for country differences, the conclusions are twofold. On the one hand and considering the broadest level of differentiation, the composition of attribution senders in the German debate is the most diverse. This applies to the share of non-executive actors and to that of actors from outside the realm of politics as well as to the Europeanization of actors participating in the debate. With few exceptions, these findings hold over the course of the crisis.

With reference to the strong domination of domestic political actors, it seems that the politicization

of the crisis debate in Greece is hardly an all-inclusive phenomenon. Given the dramatic crisis impact on all parts of society, this is unexpected. On the other hand, however, the more detailed analysis of the actor composition among the largest categories, namely domestic political actors, suggested a more nuanced interpretation. Zooming in on this category, the German debate shows the strongest bias towards governmental actors and the strongest personalization. Greece, in stark contrast, and to a lesser extent, Spain, show a continuously strong presence of the opposition. However, not only the opposition in both debtor countries is more present and diverse than in Germany; the same is true for the composition of government actors which in both 'crisis countries' is more heterogenous and evenly split when compared to Germany.

In the Greek crisis debate, it seems that the crisis impact and the closed political system triggered a two-fold process: firstly, executive actors were not only centrally involved in the inter-governmental bailout-negotiations with European creditors, but they also experienced a very strong legitimation pressure in the public. Faced with blame and a withdrawal of voter support, remaining silent was no option. Instead, the data show an active participation in responsibility debates. Secondly, the destabilization of the political system and the recurring elections provided viable opportunities for the political opposition to gain ground. In relative terms, this two-fold dynamic left little room for either non-political actors or non-domestic actors. In the Spanish debate, these dynamics are visible too, though to a lesser extent. This gradual difference between both 'crisis countries' is in line with the expectation and the classification of Spain as a more open and slightly less crisis-affected case.

When it comes to temporal changes, most findings hold over time but only the slightly decreasing shares of non-executive actors over the course of the crisis in Spain and Germany confirm the expectation of a generally declining politicization intensity in the second half of the crisis.

Summing up the findings for each country, the profiles are as follows: The German crisis debate is the most functionally diverse and the most strongly Europeanized. Especially in the earlier phases of the crisis with several EU summits and debates about the institutional design of the Eurozone, executive actors clearly dominate over the political opposition. Horizontal Europeanization is particularly strong and throughout the crisis years, the relevance of European attribution senders further increases. This could be seen as a gradual distancing of German actors from the Eurozone Crisis, which moved to the realm of foreign politics.

The Greek crisis debate is strongly dominated by domestic political actors. The Europeanization of the sender structure is equally low in its horizontal as well as in its vertical variant. Within the category of domestic political actors, however, the actor participation is diverse and almost equally distributed between executive actors and political challengers. Temporal changes in the actor composition are

closely connected to the changing political landscape and to the rise of the leftist Syriza, which explains the high share of the political opposition from 2013 onwards and the decline of civil society voices in the last phase of the crisis.

The other debtor country, Spain, is closer to the Greek case than the German one, without however reaching same levels. Again, domestic political actors prevail but not to the same extent. The executive slightly dominates over political challengers. Of all three countries, Spain shows the highest share of civil society participation. Similar to Greece, the Spanish debate is more diverse within the dominant category of domestic, political actors. The actor composition is rather volatile with a decreasing share of non-executive actors but an important role of journalistic voices commenting on the developments in Greece in the last crisis phase.

Overall, these interim conclusions suggest that the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis in Greece and, to a lesser extent, in Spain takes the form of political debates dominated by domestic political actors. Politicization in this sense does not equal a general diversification of the actor composition. Rather, actor heterogeneity is limited to the political realm. This synthesis underlines the importance of differentiating the shape of politicization processes and pursuing a nuanced perspective of the many patterns the politicization process can adopt. The rigid measures of politicization intensity in the first part of the analysis failed to grasp this difference.

Table 26: Actor Participation – Expectations and Findings

ACTOR PARTICIPATION		**GERMANY**	**GREECE**	**SPAIN**
INTENSITY *(actor range)*	**Expectation**	Moderate	Moderate-broad	Moderate
	Findings	Moderate-broad	Low-moderate	Moderate
SHAPE *(actor composition)*	**Expectation**	Strong Europeanization	Moderate Europeanization	Moderate Europeanization
	Findings	Strong Europeanization Strong personalization among domestic political actors	Low Europeanization Broad range of domestic political actors	Low-moderate Europeanization Broad range of domestic political actors

9.3 Polarization and Conflict in Eurozone Crisis Debates

Salience and the range of the actor participation are central elements of the politicization framework, and yet its essence is located in the third sub-process, which is that of polarization. It is at this stage where the conflictive nature of politics comes into play and where the perspective on the public attribution of responsibility is most promising. In the following, actor polarization is measured on the basis of sender-addressee evaluations and, specifically blame. The analysis distinguishes again intensity – here, the relative importance of blame attributions in the responsibility debates – and shape – here, the direction of blame and the extent to which the blame game is Europeanised.

On the most abstract level, I expected the polarization intensity to be negatively correlated with the openness of the political system and positively correlated with the crisis intensity; the less political conflicts in a society are embedded in institutional arrangements, the more these conflicts will be articulated in public. And the more a country is hit by the crisis, the more central the quest to identify culprits in public blame games. In terms of the polarization shape, I expected a strong domestic blame game between the government and the political opposition in closed political systems and a less polarization in open systems. In general, I expected frequent blame shifting to EU actors on behalf of governmental actors which should be particularly strong in closed systems where the obfuscation of responsibility at home is limited. For the second macro dimension, I expected multiple conflict lines with a diverse range of actors in crisis-hit countries in political turmoil. In particular, (political) challengers will blame the domestic government. Faced with this pressure, the latter will try to shift blame to different levels, including European actors that come as much-needed scapegoats in times when room for political manoeuvre is constrained. Given the strong authority transfer to European actors, I generally expected a strongly Europeanised conflict constellation in crisis-affected countries. In terms of general trends, I expected a less contentious debate and a shift from blame to attributions of success with the decreasing intensity of the crisis from 2013 onwards.

This translated into the expectation of a rather stable, comparatively low polarization in Germany, including conflicts over European regulation and a horizontally Europeanized blame game between the government and those in 'crisis countries'. For Greece, I expected the actor polarization to be very strong, including a strong Europeanized blame game and strong conflicts over austerity. Polarization intensity should be highest until 2013, calm down until 2015 and re-intensify in the last crisis phase in 2015. In Spain, I expected a moderate to high polarization and a strongly Europeanized blame game including strong conflicts over austerity. I expected an intensification and domestication of the public blame game from 2012 onwards and a calming down after 2014.

9.3.1 Intensity

Public debates can be more or less conflictual in various ways. The perspective on responsibility attributions highlights the contentious nature of actor evaluations. Among the different types of responsibility attributions, the most conflictive form is blame as it involves a direct causal link and a negative evaluation of the addressee and his or her handling of an issue. The least conflictive attribution is credit, which applauds the addressee for an action. Intermediate types are request and competence attributions (demands). In the following, I concentrate on blame and partly on credit. Demand attributions are secondary for the analysis of polarization.

Figure 20: Attribution Types, Relative Shares

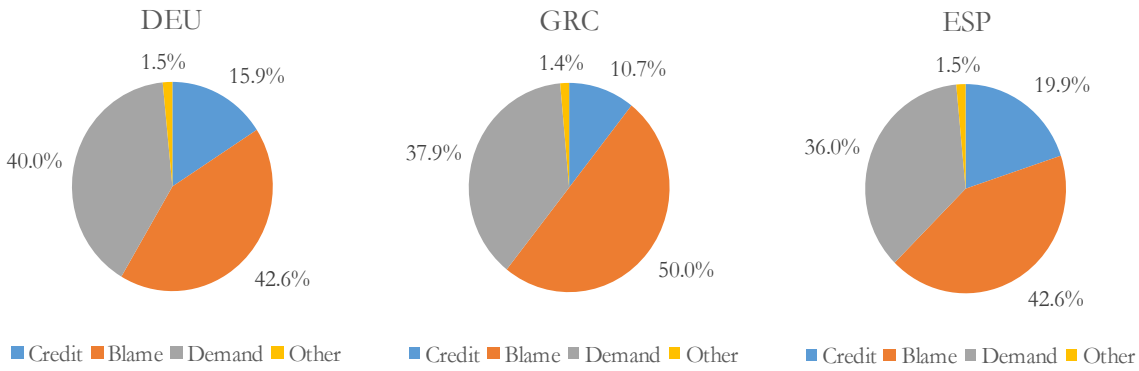


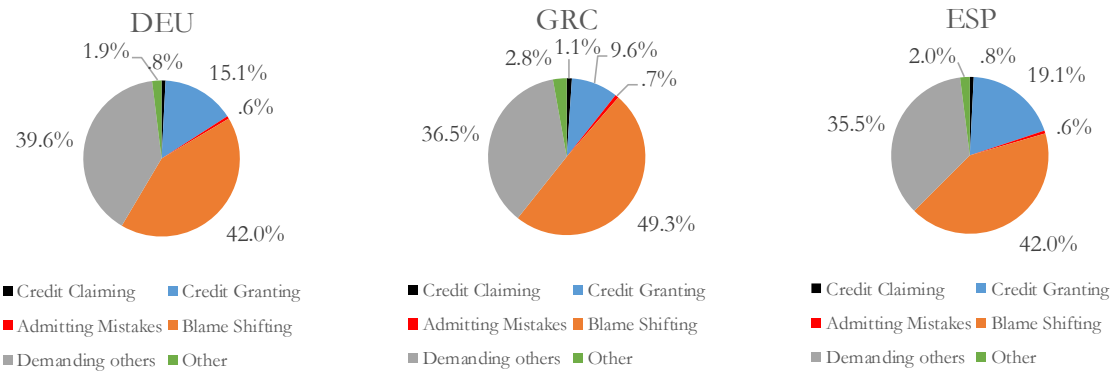
Figure 20 compares the basic attribution types between 2009 and 2016. In all cases, blame is most important, followed by demands and credit. The dominance of blame is a discursive manifestation of the negative situation in the Eurozone and, as such, hardly surprising. More telling is the comparison between the three countries. As expected, the crisis triggered most blame in the Greek debate. What is surprising, though, is that the Spanish debate is slightly less negative than the German one. Whereas the share of blame attributions is identical (42.6%), the Spanish debate features a higher share of credit. This contrasts with the expectation, given that not only the crisis impact in Spain is much greater, but also that its political system is less open compared to the German one. In Spain, every fifth attribution of responsibility focuses on what is perceived as positive developments. This is double the share in Greece (10.7%).

The attribution strategies in Figure 21 add the direction of responsibility attributions. The vast majority of responsibility attributions in the crisis debates is directed at others. On this abstract level[92],

[92] The categorization of self-attributions depends on the actor classification. In this case, the lowest actor classification on individual level is applied which means that, for instance, disputes between two ministers in the same government are classified as blame shifting. With higher aggregations on collective actor levels, this example might be classified as admitting mistakes or rather as blame internalization.

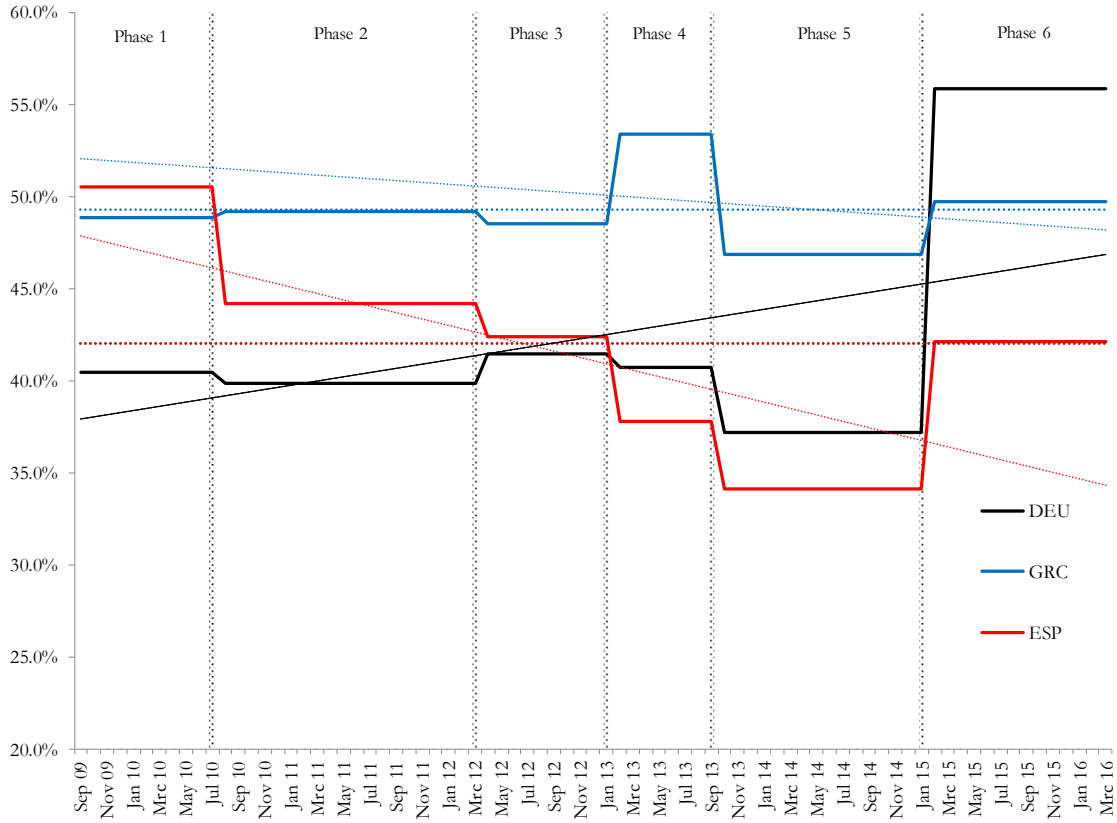
admitting mistakes but also credit claiming is negligible with no visible country differences. Underlining the earlier finding, blame shifting is most widely used in the Greek crisis debate.

Figure 21: Attribution Strategies, Relative Shares



Blame shifting is a key indicator of the contentiousness of the debate. Figure 22 depicts the relative share of blame shifting over the course of the crisis, again splitting the timeframe into the six crisis periods and displaying linear trends on the basis of one-month averages as well as the total average in dotted lines. I expected a decreasing relevance of blame over the years and an increasing role of credit, paying tribute to the efforts in combatting the crisis.

Figure 22: Blame Shifting, Relative Shares, Crisis Phases



There is no clear support for this assumption in the data; only the Spanish debate visibly calms down after the initial crisis period. In Greece, blame shifting is continuously high with only a slightly declining linear trend and compared to the debates in Spain and Germany, blame shifting gains in importance between December 2012 and December 2013. This phase in Greece is characterized by another set of budget cuts, mass protest and the growing influence of the leftist challengers from Syriza. Yet, considering the lack of immediate bailout-negotiations in this phase, the high level of polarization is surprising. One interpretation is that the crisis impact in Greece had reached such a devastating level at that time that public conflicts were less structured by EU summits or bailout negotiations and more by the structural trends of immiseration.

The contentiousness of the German debate remains relatively stable until late 2014, and while there is no common trend in the first crisis phases, things change with the election of the Syriza-ANEL government in Greece. Now a common rhythm is clearly visible with a suddenly increased role of blame shifting in each of the cases. This is explained by the re-intensification of the crisis and the recurring threat of a Greek exit from the Eurozone. The new Greek government's confrontational approach in the bailout negotiations seemed to provoke an increasing use of blame attributions in Germany but also in Spain. In the Greek debate, however, this period is not a contentious exception. In the German debate, in contrast, the level of contentiousness in this last period is far above average. What is more, the share of blame shifting in this period even exceeds that of the Greek debate by an average of five percentage points. When making inferences about the German crisis debate, this last phase is an important outlier, which should be kept in mind for the subsequent analyses.

To conclude this section, Table 27 below offers a further perspective on temporal developments. It compares attribution strategies by government periods and, in contrast to the timelines above, it allows a comparison of the frequency of blame shifting vis-à-vis other attribution strategies. Again, for Germany, the data show a significant increase in blame shifting during the time of the 'grand coalition' (D2) to about 50 per cent. Given that large coalitions tend to be associated with the marginalization of political challengers and a general containment of visible conflict, this finding is not self-evident. Recalling insights from the preceding figures, though, this change is rather explained by external factors, and more precisely by the situation in Greece after the Syriza takeover (Figure 22 above). Whereas this last phase of the Eurozone Crisis in Greece leaves a strong imprint on attribution strategies in the German debate, the Greek debate shows no change in the frequency of blame shifting in the last government period (G3). The only change in the overall attribution pattern that points to a contentious shift in this period is a slightly decreasing use of credit granting (6.1%) when compared against the first two government periods (10.6%, 10.1%). Again, however, the findings underline the earlier conclusion that the Greek debate remains on a constantly contentious level

throughout the crisis and throughout all three government periods. Finally, the data for the Spanish crisis debate underline the decreasing tendency to engage in blame shifting in the course of the crisis. Here and in contrast to the German case, the decrease of roughly eight percentage points during the PP government period (E2) is compensated by an increase in credit granting whereas the use of all other strategies is constant. This tendency towards a less contentious debate approaching the end of the crisis was expected when considering the general economic rebound in Spain since 2014. Yet, it is noteworthy that the rise of Podemos and the fragmentation of the party spectrum is not reflected in an intensification of the blame game. When it comes to the use of blame shifting, it seems that the economic stabilization overshadowed the political destabilization in the second half of the crisis.

Table 27: Attribution Strategies, Percentage Distribution, Government Periods

	Credit claiming	Credit granting	Admitting mistakes	Blame shifting	Demanding others	Other	N
DEU							
Period D1	0.9	15.0	0.6	**40.2**	41.2	2.1	2,469
Period D2	0.7	15.3	0.3	**49.7**	32.8	1.2	583
GRC							
Period G1	0.9	10.6	0.4	**50.1**	35.8	2.3	2,345
Period G2	1.5	10.1	0.9	**48.4**	36.5	2.6	2,663
Period G3	0.4	6.1	1.1	**49.8**	38.2	4.5	1,003
ESP							
Period E1	1.1	13.8	0.5	**47.1**	35.3	2.2	731
Period E2	0.6	22.1	0.6	**39.1**	35.6	1.9	1,285

Source: Own calculations
DEU: Period D1: CDU/CSU/FDP-gov, 10.2009-09.2013; Period D2: CDU/CSU/SPD gov., 09.2013-03.2016. GRC: Period G1: PASOK gov., 10.2009-11.2011; Period G2: PP/PASOK-gov, 11.2011-01.2015; Period G3: Syriza gov. 01.2015-03.2016. ESP: Period E1: PSOE gov., 10.2009-12.2011; Period E2: PP gov. 12.2011-03.2016

Overall, this initial analysis of conflict and polarization provides first evidence of a more contentious debate in Greece when compared to Spain and Germany, which overall show a similar reliance on blame shifting.[93] Given the tremendous crisis impact and the traditional polarization in the

[93] While the analysis focuses on attribution strategies and, in particular, the use of blame shifting, the existing data allow the contentiousness of the debate to be approach from other perspectives, too. One such approach is to compare the share of editorials and opinion pieces covering the Eurozone Crisis. Opinion pieces can be considered an indicator of a debate's contentiousness in the sense that they offer strong positions on contested issues and the more an issue is disputed, the more we can expect actors to share their interpretation in opinion pieces. In the data at hand, the share of opinion pieces in Spain (12.0%) and Greece (10.3%) is significantly higher than that in Germany (4.0%). At least in this regard, the two 'crisis countries' are close to each other.

majoritarian political system, the contentious nature of the Greek crisis debate was expected. The similarity of the Spanish and the German debate, however, is surprising and needs further elaboration in the sections to come. Overall, the expectation of a declining trend of blame shifting with the overall improvement of the crisis situation only finds support in Spain. What is noteworthy is the increasing contentiousness in the final crisis episode, starting with the government takeover of Syriza in Greece.

9.3.2 Shape: Direction of Conflict

The past section shed light on the polarization intensity by comparing the frequency of blame shifting. So far, however, not much is known about more specific actor behaviour nor about the crucial question of who gets the blame. In this section, actors come back into play. A central advantage of the attribution of responsibility perspective is that it covers what was earlier introduced as the direction of conflict. From the perspective of responsibility attributions this means the consideration of blaming addressees. Polarization shape refers to said direction of conflict and to the extent to which the blame game is Europeanized.

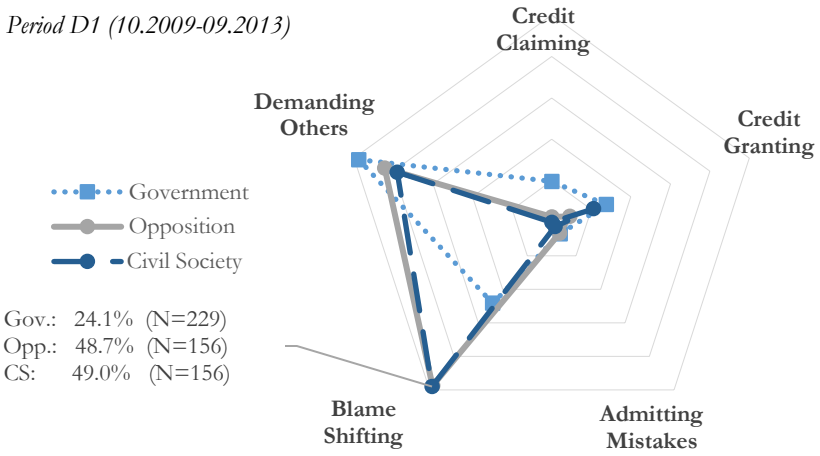
9.3.2.1 Strategies of Attributing Responsibility

Before focusing on blame addressees, I first come back to domestic actors and their attribution strategies. In the theoretical framework, I argued that it is political challengers that drive public blame games. Challengers, especially from the political opposition but also from civil society, are expected to use blame to delegitimize (incumbent) political opponents. Incumbents, on the other hand, will more often claim credit for their policies. Moreover, I hypothesized a more contentious communication in closed systems as well as in crisis-hit countries, resulting in expectations of a strongly blame-oriented strategies in Greece, followed by Spain and then Germany on the more moderate side.

Figure 23, Figure 24 and Figure 25 display attribution strategies by central actor categories, separated by government periods. The percentages are shares of all responsibility attributions made by the same actor category during the respective period.

Figure 23: Attribution Strategies, Germany, Government Periods

Period D1 (10.2009-09.2013)



Period D2 (09.2013-03.2016)

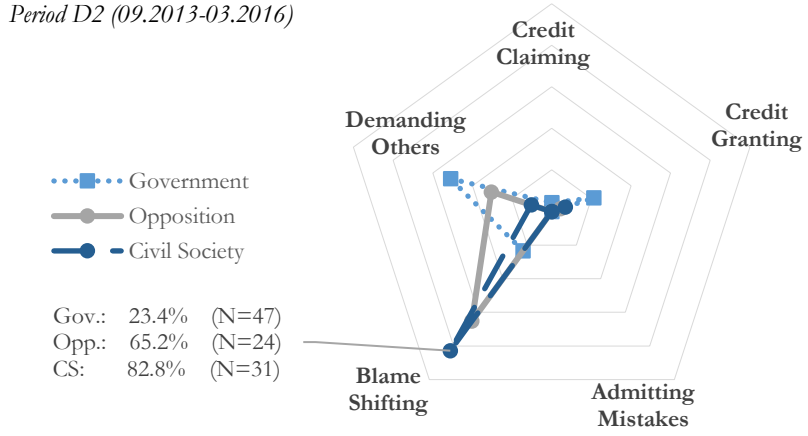
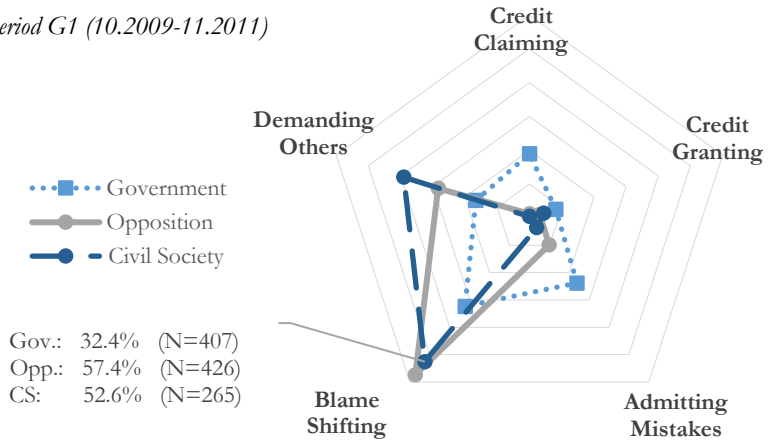
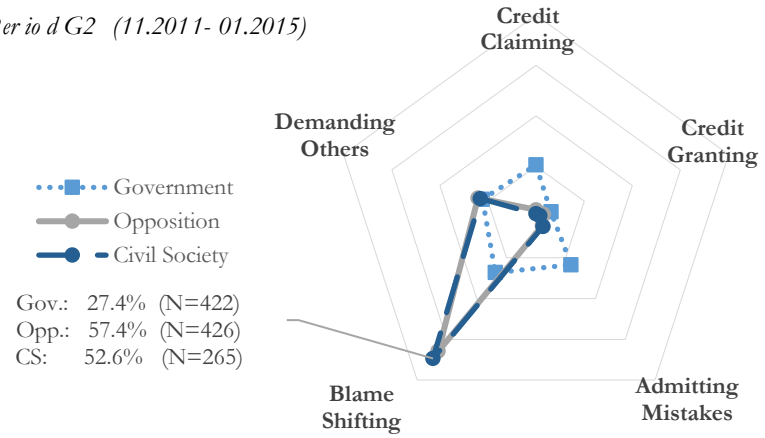


Figure 24: Attribution Strategies, Greece, Government Periods

Period G1 (10.2009-11.2011)



Period G2 (11.2011- 01.2015)



Period G2 01.2015-03.2016)

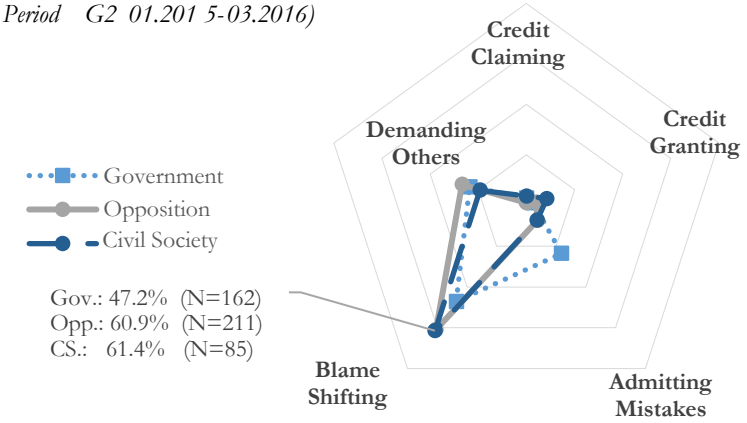
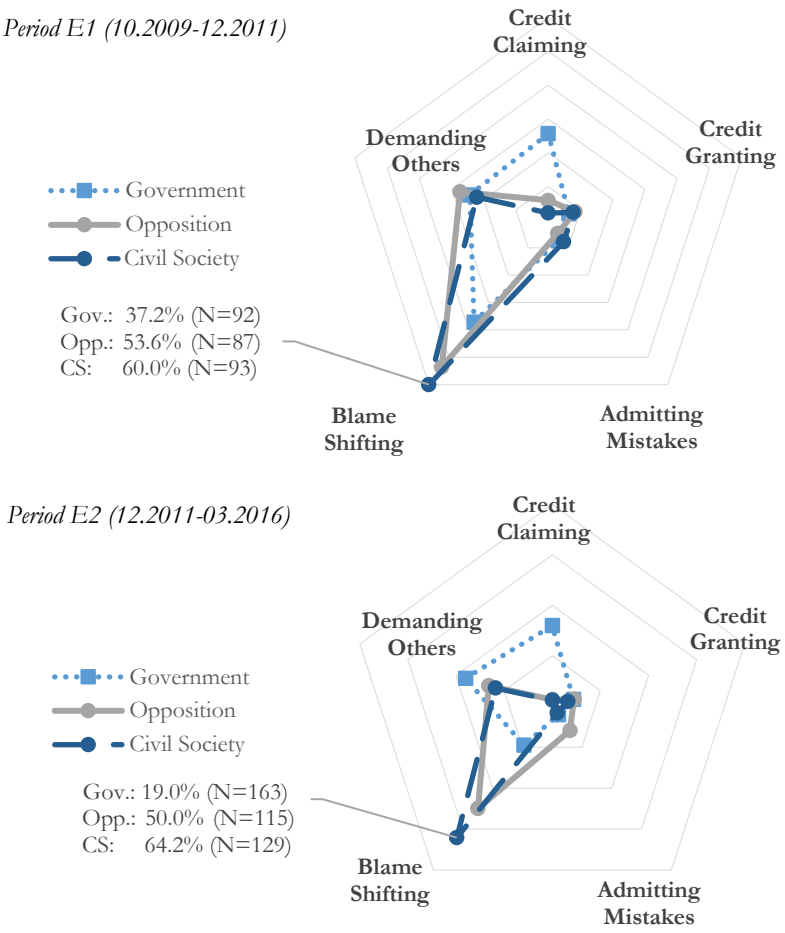


Figure 25: Attribution Strategies, Spain, Government Periods



Before turning to country differences, I focus on the comparison of actor strategies across countries. All seven figures display a common trend that is in line with the general argument of attribution theory: Far more than governmental actors, (political) challengers are the main drivers of blame shifting in the public sphere. With overall very similar attribution strategies (see dark blue and grey lines), blame shifting is their most likely option with shares ranging from roughly 50 per cent (Germany, period D1: Opposition and civil society) to 65.9 per cent (Greece, period G2: Opposition) to an astonishing 82.8 per cent (Germany, period D2: civil society). For all three actor categories, demanding others is the second most likely option while all other attribution strategies are marginal. The picture for governmental actors is more diverse when compared across countries. Most strikingly, the relative importance of credit claiming shows stark differences, with shares ranging from 2.8 per cent (Greece, period G3) to 32.0 per cent (Spain, period E2) (numbers not displayed in the figures).

The general finding that governmental actors are more likely to claim credit than other actors in the political process is in line with the self-serving bias in attribution theory and the assumption that executive actors seek to claim credit for what they want to sell as positive outcomes. Beyond that, it

is noteworthy that, on average, the Spanish and Greek governments are more inclined to claim credit than German governments. Given the devastating situation in Greece and Spain and the booming economy in Germany during the crisis years, this is odd at first sight. Here, it seems that legitimation pressure in the two crisis-hit countries translates not only into a stronger inclination to deflect blame but also into a stronger tendency to present oneself in a positive light by claiming credit. It is again the Syriza-ANEL government in period G3 which stands out from this pattern: in contrast to their predecessors in Greece and their counterparts in Spain, the Syriza-ANEL government hardly engages in credit claiming and remains true to the blame-focused communication pattern it had shown in times of opposition. Whereas the share of blame shifting is 32.4 per cent for the PASOK government (period G1) and 27.4 per cent for the following ND-PASOK coalition government (G2), the Syriza-ANEL government relies on blame shifting in 47.2 per cent of all attributions.

When it comes to further country specifics, it is striking that in Greece, admitting mistakes is widespread among government actors in all three government periods. Against the connotation of the name[94], however, these cases do not imply an admission of failure; instead, the vast majority of the cases derive from disagreement within the governing coalitions, but even more so from internal party frictions as well as from conflicts between the party leadership and party representatives who opposed the (austerity) measures imposed by their fellow colleagues. These frictions are yet another sign of the political crisis impact and the instability that extends to a visible decline of party and coalition discipline. No German or Spanish government shows a similar pattern.

For the German case, it is worth noting that the use of blame shifting remains equally low for the respective governments in both periods (23%-24%) but the second period witnesses a strong increase in the share of blame shifting on behalf of the opposition (+13 percentage points) and especially civil society (+32 percentage points). Given the general calming down of the Eurozone Crisis after 2013 and the establishment of new European institutions for its further containment, this was unexpected. The analysis of the crisis phases, however, showed that the general increase in blame shifting is largely limited to the latest crisis phase in 2015, and this tendency was also visible among (political) challengers. The political opposition and actors from civil society blamed not only the new Greek government but also the German government and EU institutions for risking an uncontrolled 'Grexit'.

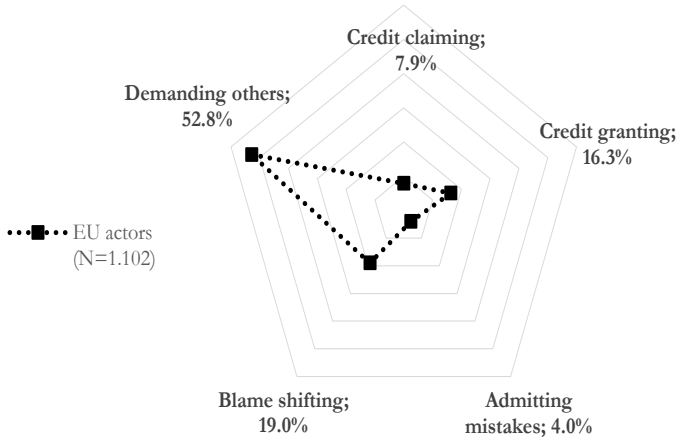
The Spanish case shows yet another pattern. Here, the share of blame shifting for the opposition and civil society remains stable but whereas the PSOE government (E1) uses blame shifting in 37.2 per cent of all cases, the share of the PP government (E2) is down to 19 per cent – the lowest overall

[94] When it comes to the analysis of collective actors, admitting mistakes is a potentially misleading name. Blame internalization is an alternative framing of the same attribution pattern.

share. This limited role of blame shifting is compensated by the strong use of credit claiming. In general, the PP government's attribution strategy seems to reflect its strong political position and the economic recovery in Spain at that time which was self-attributed to its crisis management. A further explanation for the more frequent use of credit claiming when compared to PSOE's time in government touches the role of austerity politics. Given their traditional preferences, the electoral risk of austerity is higher for leftist incumbents than for conservative and liberal ones (Giger and Nelson 2011) and hence, shifting blame for austerity is more likely for the former than for the latter, who also claim credit when debating responsibility for austerity measures (Sommer 2020).

Given that domestic competition seems to be key to understand the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis, attribution patterns of European institutions have so far been left out. Figure 26 now displays attribution strategies for European institutions, combined in all three debates and over the entire course of the crisis. Overall, the results confirm the expectation that European institutions refrain from joining public blame games. They are less dependent on electoral support and hence, less pressured to present themselves in a positive light when compared to domestic governments. Indeed, European institutions show the lowest inclination to shift blame among all actors analysed in this section. In contrast to other actors, credit granting is almost as frequent as blame shifting and demanding others is by far the most likely attribution strategy.

Figure 26: Attribution Strategies, European Institutions, Full Sample



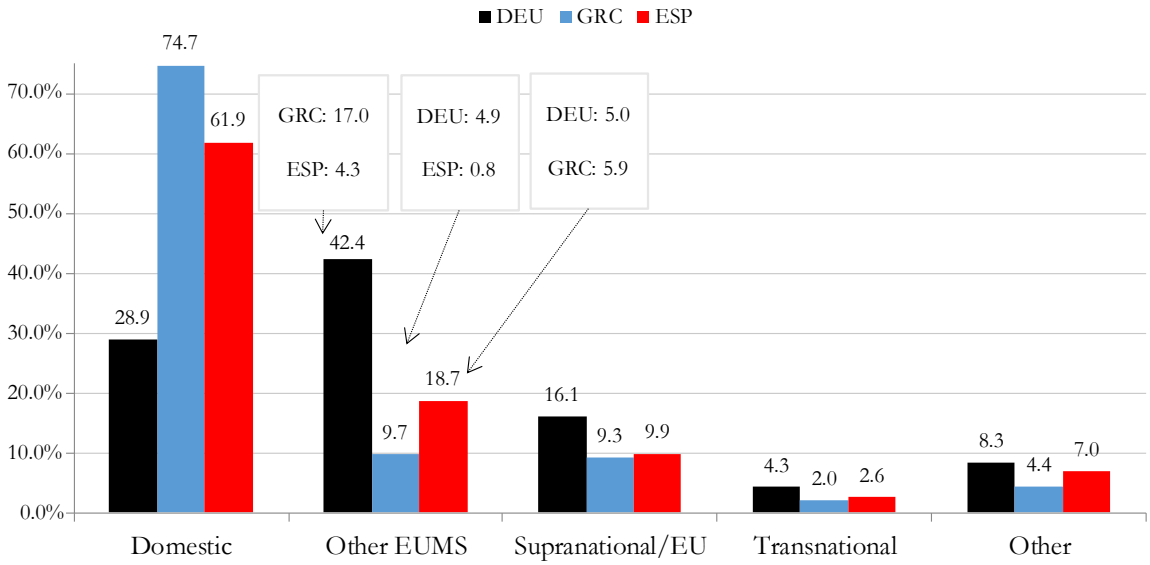
Summing up and coming back to the dynamics of domestic competition, the preceding analysis confirmed the expectation of different attribution strategies when comparing executive actors and political challengers, who were shown to be the main drivers of public blame games. The case of Spain provided initial evidence that the use of blame shifting and credit claiming among governments might is conditioned by party ideology, at least in times of austerity. European institutions hardly fuel blame

games in the public sphere. In this section, the use of blame shifting was linked to the attribution senders. In the following, I finally turn to linking blame shifting to the attribution addressees.

9.3.2.2 Addressees of Blame

Figure 27 compares the addressees of blame along geographic categories. The country patterns differ greatly, especially between Germany on the one side and Greece on the other side. In the Greek debate, almost three-quarters of all blame is addressed to domestic actors; in the Spanish case this share is about 62 per cent, while in the German crisis debate, domestic blame addressees account for less than 30 per cent. Rather than among domestic actors, in the German debate culprits are identified among actors from other EU member states in which Greek actors make up a much larger share than Spanish ones. In the Greek debate, actors from other EU member states make up only roughly 10 per cent of blame addressees; within this category German actors hold the largest share, while Spanish actors are negligible. The Spanish pattern is more similar to the Greek one than the German one albeit slightly less focused on domestic blame shifting and with a stronger focus on EU member states in 18.7 per cent of all cases. Among them, German and Greek actors hold a similar share.

Figure 27: Addressees of Blame Shifting, Geographic Differentiation



The low intensity of blame-ties between debtor and creditor countries is noteworthy. With respect to the fundamental opposition in the political negotiations on the Eurozone Crisis, I expected strong reciprocal references. However, it seems that neither Greek actors in Germany nor German actors in Greece are dominant scapegoats in the crisis debate.

Another finding that runs counter to expectations is the comparatively high share of blame addressed to European institutions in the German debate. In the two 'crisis countries', a strong focus on

domestic culprits prevails and all other actor categories remain marginal in the crisis blame game. In Spain and Greece, the conflict over the Eurozone Crisis is directed at domestic politicians. In Germany, instead, blame is predominantly Europeanized, vertically and horizontally.

Given the extraordinary role of domestic blaming targets in Greece and Spain, it is worth taking a closer look at the composition of this category. Table 28 displays the targets of domestic blame shifting. In all three countries, the government is the core addressee of blame. What is striking is the different role of oppositional actors as addressees of blame shifting. Spain leads with a share of 17.6 per cent, followed by Greece with 11.9 per cent and Germany with only 5.9 per cent. This suggests that political conflicts in the two debtor states are more strongly driven by political competition in the party arena.

Table 28: Domestic Addressees of Blame Shifting, Percentage Distribution

	Government	**Opposition**	Politics other	Economic governance	Journalists/Media	Economy	Civil society	Other	N
DEU	67.9	5.9	8.4	1.1	1.1	7.8	4.6	3.2	371
GRC*	70.5	11.9	3.4	0.4	1.4	2.5	9.1	0.7	2,190
ESP*	62.1	17.6	6.6	0.6	0.2	4.3	7.8	0.8	512

Source: Own calculations
* Coded: *DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

The following analyses focus on Europeanization of blame shifting, including temporal changes. Figure 28 below displays the share of Europeanized blame shifting per crisis phase including the countries' overall average and the linear trend as dotted lines. This is the share of blame attributions uttered by domestic actors and addressed at European actors (either horizontal or vertical Europeanization) among all instances of blame shifting in the crisis debate.

The data clearly show that throughout the entire crisis period, Europeanized blame shifting is strongest in the German debate, followed by Spain and Greece. Whereas in Spain and Germany, there is an increasing trend, the level in Greece is rather stable with very similar average shares at the beginning and end of the crisis period. Again, the developments in the last phase of the crisis are noteworthy, especially for the German case. Whereas the share of Europeanized blame shifting is constantly close to the average of 71.1 per during phase 2 to 5, there is a strong increase to more than 80 per cent in the last phase. Once more, this exemplifies the exceptional role of this final phase of the Eurozone Crisis for the German crisis debate. For this same phase, there is only a slight increase in Europeanized blame shifting in Spain and, surprisingly, a slight decline in Greece. The following analysis shows that this decline is mainly due to the strong presence of the two former main parties in Greece, PASOK and ND, who almost exclusively direct their blame at the new Syriza-ANEL government.

Figure 28: Share of Europeanized Blame Shifting, Temporal Changes

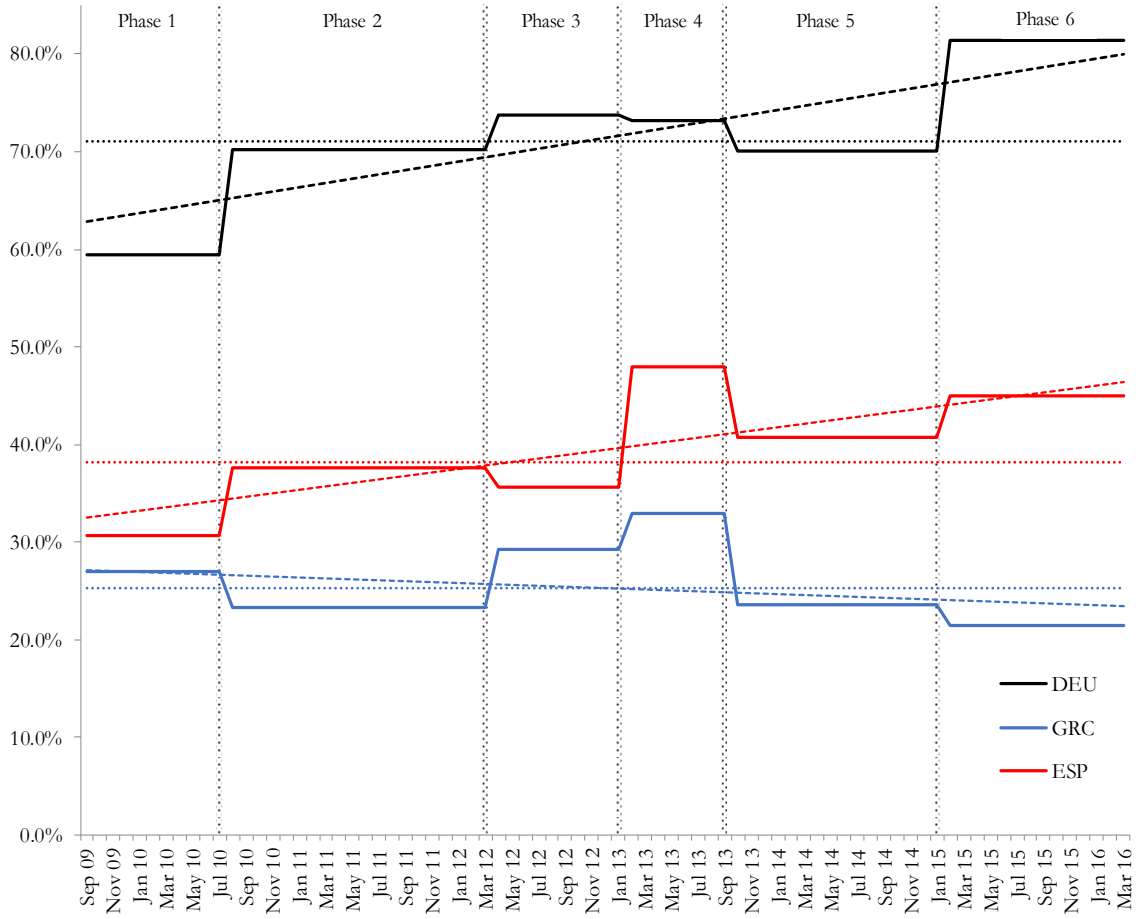


Table 29, Table 30 and Table 31 and the corresponding Figure 29, Figure 30 and Figure 31 in the following take a closer look at the Europeanization of the attribution activity in each country by linking Europeanized attribution activity to the attribution sender. Since I am especially interested in the difference between governmental actors and challengers, the timeframe is again divided into core government periods. For each domestic actor category, the tables display the overall share of attributions directed at European actors (column 1) and the percentage of Europeanized blame shifting as a share of all instances of blame shifting (column 2, fat). Moreover, since the tables do not differentiate party ideology, the respective figures below display the use of blame shifting to European actors for the most important parties in each case.

i. Europeanized Blame Shifting in the German Crisis Debate

Table 29 shows a very high level of Europeanized attributions for domestic actor categories in the German crisis debate. In both periods, the government, journalists and economic actors direct their attribution activity to European actors in more than two thirds of all cases (column 1). As expected, the political opposition is much more focused on the domestic realm with shares of Europeanized

attributions between 20.8 per cent (period D2) and 27.3 per cent (period D1). The role of European actors as addressees increases during the second government period, especially for the government (+21.7 percentage points), journalists (+11.9 percentage points) and civil society (+33.6 percentage points). This is closely connected to the re-intensification of the Eurozone Crisis in 2015.

The second column in Table 29 shows that when the government engages in blame shifting, European actors are the primary addressees (D1: 83.7%, D2: 81.8%). This is in line with the argument in attribution research that European actors serve as welcome scapegoats for governmental actors aiming to redirect responsibility for negative outcomes. Apart from that, shares for the opposition are again low and very high for the three non-political actor categories, journalists, economic actors (80%) and civil society (87.5%) in the second period.

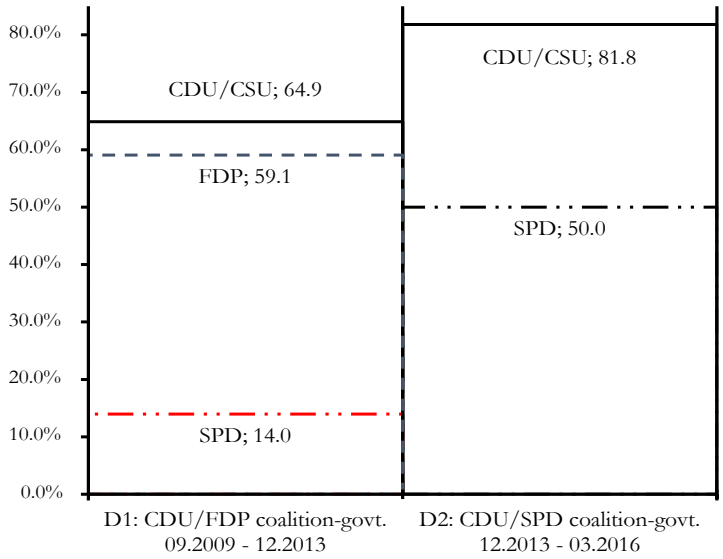
Table 29: Europeanized Attribution Activity, Percentage Distribution, Germany, Government Periods

		Share of Europeanized attributions / All attributions	**Share of Europeanized blame shifting / All blame shifting**
Period D1	*Government*	67.7	***83.7***
	Opposition	27.6	***10.7***
	Journalists	65.2	***92.9***
	Economy	70.2	***70.7***
	Civil society	53.5	***57.6***
Period D2	*Government*	89.4	***81.8***
	Opposition	20.8	***6.7***
	Journalists	77.1	***76.1***
	Economy	71.4	***80.0***
	Civil society	87.1	***87.5***

Source: Own calculations
Period D1: CDU/CSU/FDP-gov, 10.2009-09.2013; Period D2: CDU/CSU/SPD gov., 09.2013-03.2016.

Figure 29 takes a closer look at the behaviour of incumbent and oppositional parties in the German crisis debate. Essentially, the figure underlines the importance of the position a political party occupies in the political system. European blame shifting for the governing CDU/CSU remains constant and high during both government periods (D1, D2). The share for the social democratic SPD, however, significantly rises once the party enters government in the second period under investigation (D2). Shifting blame to European actors is a more important strategy in times of incumbency than in times of opposition when blame mainly focuses on the government.

Figure 29: Europeanized Blame Shifting, Parties, Germany, Government Periods*



* Oppositional parties are marked in red, incumbent parties in black.

ii. Europeanized Blame Shifting in the Greek Crisis Debate

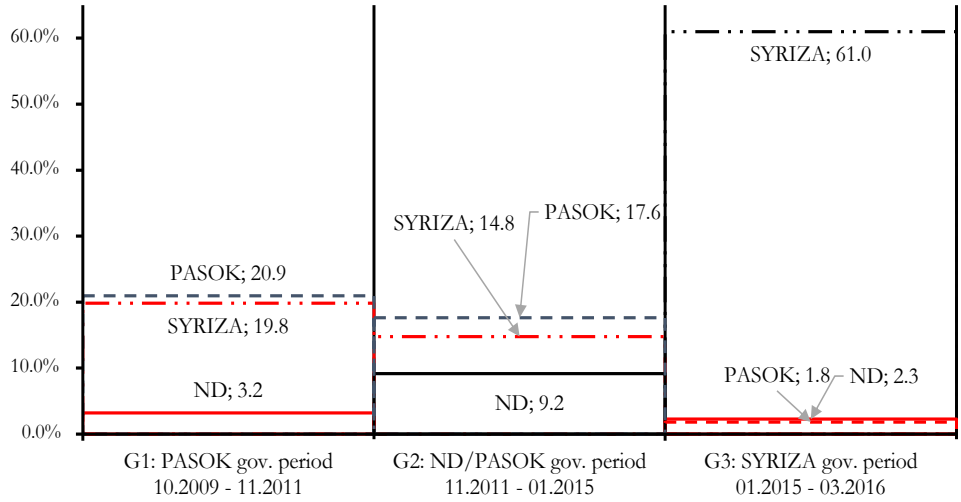
Compared to the German debate, Europeanized blame shifting in Greece is very different, but not in every respect (Table 30, Figure 30 below). First of all, the data confirm the general expectation that the government's attribution strategy is more Europeanized than that of the political opposition, in general (column 1), and when it comes to blame shifting, in particular (column 2). The distance between both actor categories, however, is much smaller in the Greek debate because of the (relatively seen) lower inclination to shift blame to European actors among Greek governments. During the first period until November 2011 (G1), the PASOK government shows the highest share of blame shifting to European actors among all actor groups, but the share is much lower than that identified for the German government. During the time of the ND-PASOK government in period G2, the share of Europeanized blame shifting is fairly equally balanced, ranging from 13.0 per cent (opposition) to 20.3 per cent (civil society). Period G3 shows yet a different pattern. Most strikingly, the Syriza-ANEL government engages in Europeanized blame shifting far more often than the preceding governments (50.0%, column 2) and in general the attribution activity is more Europeanized (22.8%, column 1). In general, the share of Europeanized blame shifting among all actor categories is very unevenly spread in that period, with the opposition and economic actors now almost exclusively targeting domestic actors, primarily the government (numbers not displayed in table). Interestingly, journalists are now more inclined to shift blame to European institutions and other EU member states, whereas civil society actors are less inclined to do so.

Table 30: Europeanized Attribution Activity, Percentage Distribution, Greece, Government Periods

		Share of Europeanized attributions / All attributions	**Share of Europeanized blame shifting / All blame shifting**
Period G1	*Government*	15.5	**22.3**
	Opposition	10.6	**12.0**
	Journalists	13.5	**15.8**
	Economy	5.8	**9.1**
	Civil society	12.1	**14.4**
Period G2	*Government*	17.1	**17.4**
	Opposition	11.9	**13.0**
	Journalists	18.8	**17.6**
	Economy	5.8	**15.0**
	Civil society	17.1	**20.3**
Period G3	*Government*	22.8	**56.0**
	Opposition	3.8	**4.1**
	Journalists	29.4	**25.4**
	Economy	2.3	**0.0**
	Civil society	20.0	**11.8**

Source: Own calculations
Period G1: PASOK gov., 10.2009-11.2011; Period G2: PP/PASOK-gov, 11.2011-01.2015; Period G3: Syriza gov. 01.2015-03.2016.

Figure 30: Europeanized Blame Shifting, Parties, Greece, Government Periods*



* Oppositional parties are marked in red, incumbent parties in black.

Figure 30 shows the attribution behaviour of political parties for the changing government coalitions in Greece. Again, for all parties, the share of Europeanized blame shifting increases in times of government responsibility and decreases in times of opposition. This applies for the conservative ND, rising from only 3.2 per cent in the first oppositional period (G1) to roughly nine per cent as an

incumbent party in the second period (G2) and dropping again to pre-government levels when re-entering the opposition in the third period (G3). The same trend is visible for PASOK, dropping from a relative share of 20.9 per cent Europeanized blame shifting as an incumbent party (left, G1) to 17.6 per cent as a junior coalition partner in the second period (middle, G2) to no more than 1.8 per cent Europeanized blame shifting as soon as Syriza takes over (right bar, G3). Syriza itself is an extreme case but, once again, the results are in line with the general assumption; as an oppositional party, Europeanized blame shifting makes up 14 to 20 per cent of their overall blame shifting efforts in period G1 and G2. After gaining power in 2015, this share rises to over 61 per cent which is by far the highest share among all parties.

iii. Europeanized Blame Shifting in the Spanish Crisis Debate

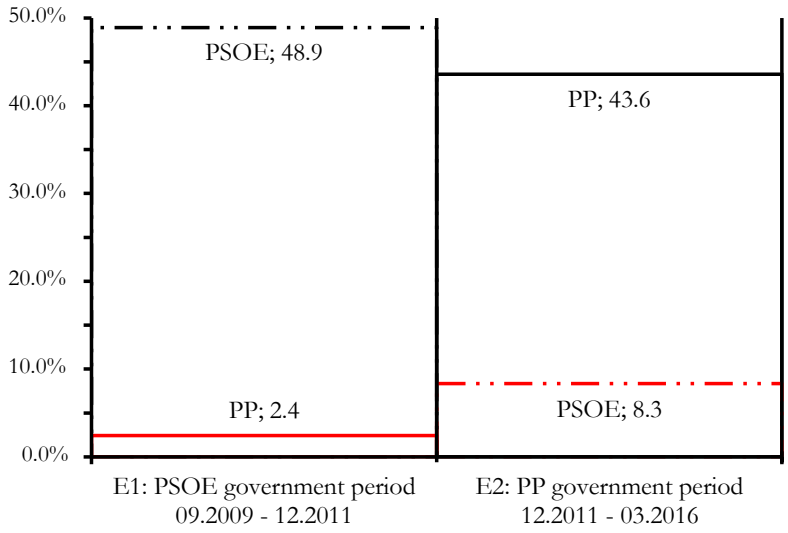
In Spain, too, the data for both government periods show that the attribution activity of government actors is more Europeanized and that in particular the share of Europeanized blame shifting is far higher than that of the opposition (Table 31). The Spanish case is the clearest support for this finding, as shown in Figure 31. The share of Europeanized blame shifting for the PP increases by roughly 40 percentage points when changing from opposition (E1) to incumbency (E2) and the share for PSOE declines to the same extent after losing office.

Table 31: Europeanized Attribution Activity, Percentage Distribution, Spain, Government Periods

		Share of Europeanized attributions / All attributions	**Share of Europeanized blame shifting / All blame shifting**
Period E1	*Government*	28.3	**47.9**
	Opposition	4.6	**0.0**
	Journalists	36.5	**35.0**
	Economy	10.5	**11.1**
	Civil society	24.7	**31.5**
Period E2	*Government*	33.1	**41.4**
	Opposition	13.9	**10.9**
	Journalists	41.1	**37.7**
	Economy	21.7	**0.0**
	Civil society	14.0	**11.4**

Source: Own calculations
Period E1: PSOE gov., 10.2009-12.2011; Period E2: PP gov. 12.2011-03.2016

Figure 31: Europeanized Blame Shifting, Parties, Spain, Government Periods*



* Oppositional parties are marked in red, incumbent parties in black.

Overall, the section revealed important insights into the attribution behaviour of collective actors in the crisis debate and put some of the earlier findings into perspective. Before, I argued that it is political challengers that push blame shifting in the debate. While this is true on a general level, the preceding analyses have shown for all three countries that in the political realm, *Europeanized* blame shifting is pushed by governmental actors more than by oppositional parties. Europeanized blame shifting rises significantly in times of incumbency when foreign actors are welcome scapegoats for government officials. This holds for all countries and for all parties alike. Again, there is tentative evidence that party ideology comes into play as a mitigating factor for differences in incumbent blame shifting to Europe. In both debtor states, the increase in times of incumbency is slightly stronger for parties of the left (PASOK, PSOE and Syriza) than for conservative parties (ND and PP). Austerity is opposed to socialist party preferences and, therefore, evokes a stronger need to shift blame in public. This is especially visible for radical-leftist Syriza who has the strongest inclination to blame Europe, but only once it took over government. This again underlines the unusual conflict pattern in this last phase of the crisis. Against the expectation that references to European actors should be more important for challengers in closed systems than in open ones, the European perspective among civil society and the opposition in Greece and Spain is much less pronounced when compared to Germany. When it comes to blame, only journalists and at least in Germany, civil society and economic actors direct blame at European actors in relevant proportions.

9.3.2.3 Conflict Lines

The past analysis suggested that against expectations, the public blame game in the German debate is more Europeanized than in the Greek or Spanish debate. In this section, I turn to conflict lines, which measure the relative contentiousness of sender-addressee links in the debate about responsibility. As a first step towards this measurement, the following Table 32 displays *evaluation* and *prestige* of collective actors in the crisis debate, here broadly differentiated into geographic categories. The evaluation index subtracts the number of positive evaluations (credit) from that of negative evaluations (blame) directed towards the attribution addressee. To standardize the values, they are divided by the overall number of incoming evaluations for the attribution addressees.[95] Non-causal attribution types, such as demands, are considered as neutral and therefore omitted. To assess the relevance of the actor link, the score of the evaluation index is multiplied by the relative share of this actor link among all sender-addressee relations. This is the prestige index. Thus, prestige combines the measure for the evaluation of an actor with a measure for the visibility of this link, benchmarked against all other relations in the debate.

Table 32: Evaluation and Prestige, Geographic Differentiation

	Germany		**Greece**		**Spain**	
	Evaluation	*Prestige*	*Evaluation*	*Prestige*	*Evaluation*	*Prestige*
Domestic	-0.46	-13.22	-0.69	-50.36	-0.41	-24.84
EUMS	-0.49	-20.45	-0.44	-4.85	-0.37	-6.83
Supranational/EU	-0.32	-5.60	-0.65	-5.95	-0.08	-1.03
Transnational	-0.47	-2.02	-0.85	-1.56	-0.57	-1.27
Other	-0.57	-4.37	-0.43	-2.14	-0.34	-2.38

Source: Own calculations
Evaluation, A=Indegree (credit, A) – Indegree (blame, A) / Indegree (credit + blame, A); $-1 \leq x \leq 1$.
Prestige, A = Evaluation, A x [Indegree (credit + blame, A) / Indegree (credit + blame, overall) x 100]; $-100 \leq x \leq 100$.

The fact that all index values are negative exemplifies the overall negativity of the debate and the dominance of blame over credit. While in none of the debates the most negatively evaluated actor category, weighing the evaluation with its relative importance in the debate, domestic actors have by far the lowest score on the prestige index. Once more, Greece stands out with an extremely low prestige score for domestic actors. Spain occupies a middle position. The prestige score for domestic actors is higher when compared to Greece but significantly lower than in Germany and while actors

[95] The indices for evaluation and prestige go back to Adam (2008).

from other European member states have a very negative prestige score in the German debate, the Spanish score is closer to that of Greece. Interestingly, EU actors experience an almost neutral evaluation in Spain, and in Germany they are the least negatively evaluated actor category. Given their relative importance as addressees in the German debate, the prestige index, however, is on similar levels to Greece which showed a far worse evaluation of EU actors.

Evaluation and prestige focus on the addressees of responsibility attributions. In order to assess conflict lines, sender-addressee relations have to be accounted for. Below, Table 33, Table 34 and Table 5 oppose attribution senders and attribution addressees, using an indicator for the contentiousness of conflict lines that builds on the prestige measure above. The index measures the relative contentiousness of a sender-addressee evaluation, which is again benchmarked against the frequency of other relations in the debate. The actor categories in this part of the analysis results from the earlier ones, which showed firstly that the three crisis debates showed large differences with regards to the level of Europeanization, and, secondly that, (domestic) political actors are the most visible actors in the crisis debates. With this in mind, the tables split domestic actors into functional categories; domestic political actors are divided into government actors, actors from the opposition and other political actors. Each table represents 144 possible ties, with attribution senders on the vertical dimension and addressees on the horizontal one. In the case of missing ties, the boxes are left empty.

In the Greek debate, the most contentious conflict lines concentrate in the upper left corner of Table 33 with the opposition (-12.83), journalists (-10.50) and civil society actors (-6.86) blaming the domestic government. The media is repeatedly represented among the most contentious relations, with its evaluations of the opposition (-1.60) and of civil society (-2.72) but also with its attacks on European actors (-3.47). Other relevant conflict lines are located in the party conflict (opposition vs. opposition: -1.48; government vs. opposition: -3.42) and, beyond the domestic sphere, in the discursive ties between the government and EU actors (-1.65), between the opposition and EU actors (-1.93) and in those between actors from other EU member states (-3.98). Overall, the concentration of the dominant conflict lines in the upper left corner is a sign of the importance of the domestic blame game about the Eurozone Crisis and its consequences. What is furthermore striking is that conflict is predominantly directed at the political realm. Eleven out of thirteen of the domesticized conflict lines with a score below -0.5 are directed at the government, the opposition or other political actors. It is remarkable that economic actors are rare targets of blame shifting in the debate. Even journalist, who do not follow the logic of political competition, rather trace responsibility for negative developments inside society (and, above all, inside politics) rather than inside the economic realm.

Table 33: Conflict Lines, Greece

AS↓AA →	*Gov.*	*Opp.*	*Other. Pol.*	*Eco. gov.*	*Jour-nalists*	*Eco.*	*Civil soc.*	*Other*	*EU-MS*	*EU*	*Trans.*	*Other*
Government	-1.32	-3.42	-0.08	0.03	-0.22	-0.08	-0.45	-0.06	-0.17	-1.65	-0.17	-0.17
Opposition	-12.83	-1.48	-0.25		-0.11	-0.08	-0.14	-0.23	-0.40	-1.93	-0.28	-0.68
Other. Pol.	-1.29	-0.14	-0.17	-0.06	0.00				0.00	-0.34		
Eco. gov.	0.03			0.08		-0.03	0.00			-0.06		-0.06
Journalists	-10.50	-1.60	-0.76	-0.06	-0.42	-0.34	-2.72	-0.23	-1.54	-3.47	-0.57	-1.37
Economy	-1.15	-0.03	-0.03	0.03		-0.17	-0.06		0.06	-0.11		-0.11
Civil society	-6.86	-0.22	-0.06	-0.03	-0.08	-0.34	-0.56	-0.34	-0.91	-1.65	-0.11	-0.23
Other	-0.20	-0.03				-0.06	-0.06	-0.06				
EUMS	-0.50	0.03	-0.03	-0.03			-0.28		-3.98	-1.48	-1.14	-0.23
EU	-0.11	-0.03	0.00			-0.08	-0.14		-0.85	-0.23	-0.23	-0.06
Tran.	0.14	-0.03				-0.03	-0.11		-0.51	-0.40	-0.40	-0.97
Other	-0.28	-0.06	-0.03			-0.03	0.17		-0.80	-0.85	-0.34	-0.40

Source: Own calculations
Conflict line, A→B = (Blame, A→B - Credit, A→B)/ (Blame, A→B + Credit, A→B) x (Blame, A→B + Credit, A→B) / (credit + blame, overall) x 100]; -100 ≤ x ≤ 100.
The three most contentious conflict lines are marked in red. Conflict lines below the score of -0.5 are marked in orange, those above 0.5 green.

In the German case (Table 34), this same part of the table remains comparatively empty, pointing to a fundamentally different conflict constellation in that country. Only attacks of the opposition on the government (-4.04) and that of journalists on the government (-2.45) are important in this regard but overall, much weaker than in Greece. Strong conflict lines are concentrated on the right hand of the table, the most relevant of which are domestic journalists blaming other EU member states (-9.44) and, to a lesser extent, the EU (-2.28). The second most contentious actor relationship, however, is that between EU member state actors and other actors from the same category (-7.74). Here, the conflict over the Eurozone Crisis is fought outside of the domestic realm, with neither the government or any other German actor involved. Apart from this European conflict pattern, domestic conflicts also play a role, but they are much less relevant when compared to Greece. The government's evaluation of the domestic opposition in Germany, for instance, is only slightly negative and not among the most relevant conflict lines.

Table 34: Conflict Lines, Germany

AS↓AA →	*Gov.*	*Opp.*	*Other. Pol.*	*Eco. gov.*	*Jour-nalists*	*Eco.*	*Civil soc.*	*Other*	*EU-MS*	*EU*	*Trans.*	*Other*
Government	0.85	-0.34	-0.06	0.11	0.06	-0.11	0.06	0.00	0.17	-0.68	-0.11	-0.40
Opposition	-4.04	-0.17	-0.23			-0.17		-0.06	-0.11	0.11	-0.06	-0.11
Other. Pol.	0.11	0.23	-0.11	0.06	0.06	-0.11	-0.06	-0.17	-0.46	-0.23	-0.34	0.00
Eco. gov.	0.00			0.00		0.11			-0.28	-0.34	-0.06	0.00
Journalists	-2.45	-0.17	-0.51	0.06	-0.06	-0.34	-0.57	-0.11	-9.44	-2.28	-0.17	-1.14
Economy	-0.28	-0.17	-0.17	-0.06		0.11		0.11	-0.46	-0.06	-0.17	-0.17
Civil society	-0.97	-0.06	-0.11	-0.06		-0.17	-0.11	-0.23	-0.85	-1.19	-0.34	-0.63
Other	0.06		0.11				0.11	0.06				-0.06
EUMS	-1.99		0.11	0.06	-0.17	0.00	-0.06		-7.74	-1.48	-0.57	-1.25
EU	-0.51	-0.06	0.06	0.06		-0.28		-0.06	-0.74	0.97	0.06	-0.34
Tran.	0.00					0.23	0.11		-0.85	0.00	-0.06	-0.06
Other	-0.63	-0.06		-0.06					-0.23	-0.40	-0.17	-0.28

Source: Own calculations
Conflict line, A→B = (Blame, A→B - Credit, A→B)/ (Blame, A→B + Credit, A→B) x (Blame, A→B + Credit, A→B) / (credit + blame, overall) x 100]; -100 ≤ x ≤ 100.
The three most contentious conflict lines are marked in red. Conflict lines below the score of -0.5 are marked in orange, those above 0.5 green.

The Spanish case is again different. Similar to the Greek case, the three strongest conflict lines are directed towards the domestic government which is blamed by the opposition (-6.83), journalists (-6.18) and civil society (-6.02). Also, media evaluations of the opposition (-2.57) and EU member states (-2.49) are negative, as well as the government's evaluation of the opposition (-1.93) and attributions of causal responsibility between other EU member states actors (-2.89). On the one hand, the Spanish case seems to replicate the findings for Greece in terms of the dominant concentration of conflict lines in the domestic realm. On the other hand, the analysis shows anew that the Spanish debate is much less contentious, with fewer conflict lines showing index scores lower than -0.5. The average score for existing ties is -0.39 in the Spanish debate versus an average score of -0.73 in the Greek one and -0.41 in the German one. As in Greece, conflict lines are overwhelmingly directed at political actors. In Spain, however, the absence of economic actors in the blame game is even more surprising, given that economic actors, such as the national bank Bankia were at the core of the crisis.

Table 35: Conflict Lines, Spain

AS↓AA →	*Gov.*	*Opp.*	*Other. Pol.*	*Eco. gov.*	*Jour-nalists*	*Eco.*	*Civil soc.*	*Other*	*EU-MS*	*EU*	*Trans.*	*Other*
Government	4.50	-1.93	-0.24	0.08		-0.08	0.16		-0.08	-0.48	-0.32	-0.24
Opposition	-6.83	-0.72	0.08			-0.16	0.24		0.08	0.00		-0.08
Other. Pol.	-0.16	-0.24	-0.16						-0.32	-0.08		-0.16
Eco. gov.	0.32			0.08		0.16			-0.16	-0.16		0.08
Journalists	-6.18	-2.57	-0.96	-0.08	-0.16	-0.24	-1.37	-0.16	-2.49	-0.40	-0.24	-1.69
Economy	0.00		-0.24	-0.16		0.00	-0.40			0.32	-0.08	0.08
Civil society	-6.02	-0.56	-0.32			-0.48	-0.48	-0.16	-0.40	-0.08	-0.48	-0.48
Other	-0.16	0.00										
EUMS	0.24	-0.08	-0.08		-0.08	0.08			-2.89	-1.12	-0.16	-0.32
EU	1.20					0.08			-0.32	1.20	-0.08	0.32
Tran.	0.48		-0.24			0.00			-0.16	-0.08	0.16	0.08
Other	-0.08	-0.08				0.08			-0.16	-0.08	-0.08	0.08

Source: Own calculations.
Conflict line, A→B = (Blame, A→B - Credit, A→B)/ (Blame, A→B + Credit, A→B) x (Blame, A→B + Credit, A→B) / (credit + blame, overall) x 100]; -100 ≤ x ≤ 100.
The three most contentious conflict lines are marked in red. Conflict lines below the score of -0.5 are marked in orange, those above 0.5 green.

The preceding analysis located dominant conflict lines in the three crisis debates. Indeed, the vast majority of the total of 312 actor ties is negative, which means that blame is far more dominant than credit and that the public conflict extends towards many different actors. Only few actor relations maintain a positive score, mostly in Spain and Germany. In particular, in case of self-attributions[96] positive evaluations dominate over negative ones. This pattern is in line with the self-serving bias, according to which governments tend to claim positive developments for themselves while shifting blame for negative ones onto others. The positive scores identified for the German government (0.85) and in particular for the Spanish one (4.5), however, cannot be found in the Greek debate. Though less negative than others, the strength of the inner governmental conflict line is -1.32. On the one hand, this finding can be attributed to the composition of actors in this category with one coalition party attacking the other. On the other hand, the finding seems to point to splits within the government(s). In fact, many of these cases in the Greek debate can be traced back to parliamentary members of the governing parties attacking their own party leaders. In Greece, much more than in

[96] To recall, self-attributions are attributions in which the sender equals the addressee.

Germany and Spain, these dissenting voices from politicians among the governing parties are a relevant part of the public blame game. The political turmoil and prospects of changing majorities produced fractions not only between different parties but also within parties and the executive elites.

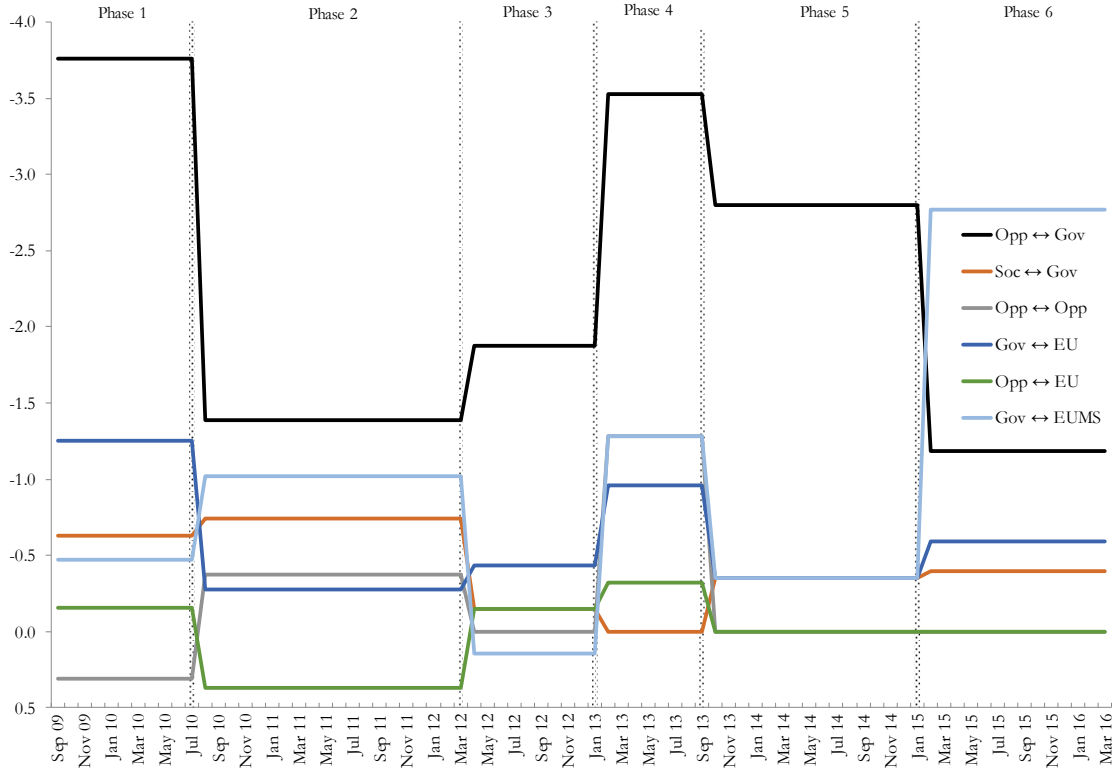
Overall, the extent to which the blame games are *political* is astonishing. Culprits are predominantly identified in the political realm whereas economic actors are mostly absent. Even actors belonging to the broad category of civil society are more often targeted, at least in Spain and Greece. To make sense of this finding, one interpretation is that economic actors have fewer incentives to go public and to engage in the public blame game and due to this, they are less often targeted themselves. In that sense, economic actors successfully escape the public blame game by keeping calm and staying out of the spotlight. This, however, contradicts the idea that it is precisely these 'silent' actors that are often used as scapegoats in public debates. Another explanation concerns the issue at stake. The data cover all sub-issues connected to the Eurozone Crisis, strongly featuring debates on its (political) management. Economic actors as blame addressees would more likely be expected in debates about crisis causes which are only one part of this issue focus, making up no more than roughly eight per cent of the entire debate. Indeed, further analysis (not displayed) shows that economic actors are more often blame addressees in this sub-sample. But again, political actors are not only made responsible for failures in the management of the crisis but also for its outbreak in the vast majority of the cases. And in Greece, this debate on the origins of the crisis rather focuses on the role of Greek (civil) society than on the responsibility of economic actors. In 18 per cent of all cases, civil society actors are blamed for the crisis, e.g. with reference to general overspending.

A final note should be made with respect to the role of European institutions as active contributors to public crisis conflicts. The fact that they have so far received limited attention, does not come by chance. In none of the three debates do European institutions significantly contribute to public conflicts as important senders of blame. While the score of -0.51 for EU relations with Greek governments does indicate an overall negative evaluation, the ties between EU actors and the Spanish government are even positive. Overall, this supports the assumption that European institutions rarely actively interfere in public blame games since they are less driven by the logic of political competition. Rather than as senders, EU actors appear as addresses of blame. Especially in Greece and Germany, blame ties between domestic actors, such as journalists but also civil society and governmental actors, are clearly visible. In Spain, EU institutions have a higher standing in the crisis debate.

The preceding analysis of conflict lines provided an overview of the conflict structure over the entire course of the crisis. To complete the picture, Figure 32, Figure 34 and Figure 33 display the evolution

of the six strongest reciprocal conflict lines over time.[97] The scores for two-directional conflict lines are calculated on the basis of the existing actor matrices for each respective phase. I focus on the most striking findings only.

Figure 32: Two-Directional Conflict Lines, Germany, Crisis Phases



In the German debate (Figure 32 above), the reciprocal conflict line between the opposition and the government (black) is by far the strongest during the beginning of the crisis period and again in phase 4 (January-September 2013) which also witnesses an increasing intensity of Europeanized conflict lines between the government and EU institutions (dark blue) as well as between the government and other European Member States (light blue). Most telling is the last crisis period with a very strong increase in the reciprocal conflict line between the government and other European member states, which mainly comes down to the discursive conflicts with Greek actors. At the same time, the conflict line between the government and the opposition drastically declines in importance in that period. The (blame) focus on the developments in Greece eclipses domestic conflicts in the political realm.

[97] The conflict lines with journalists as attribution sender are left aside since they are almost exclusively one-directional. Two-directionality or reciprocity was calculated as ((A→B) + (B→A))/2 (see earlier notes on the calculation of one-directional conflict lines).

Figure 34: Two-Directional Conflict Lines, Greece, Crisis Phases

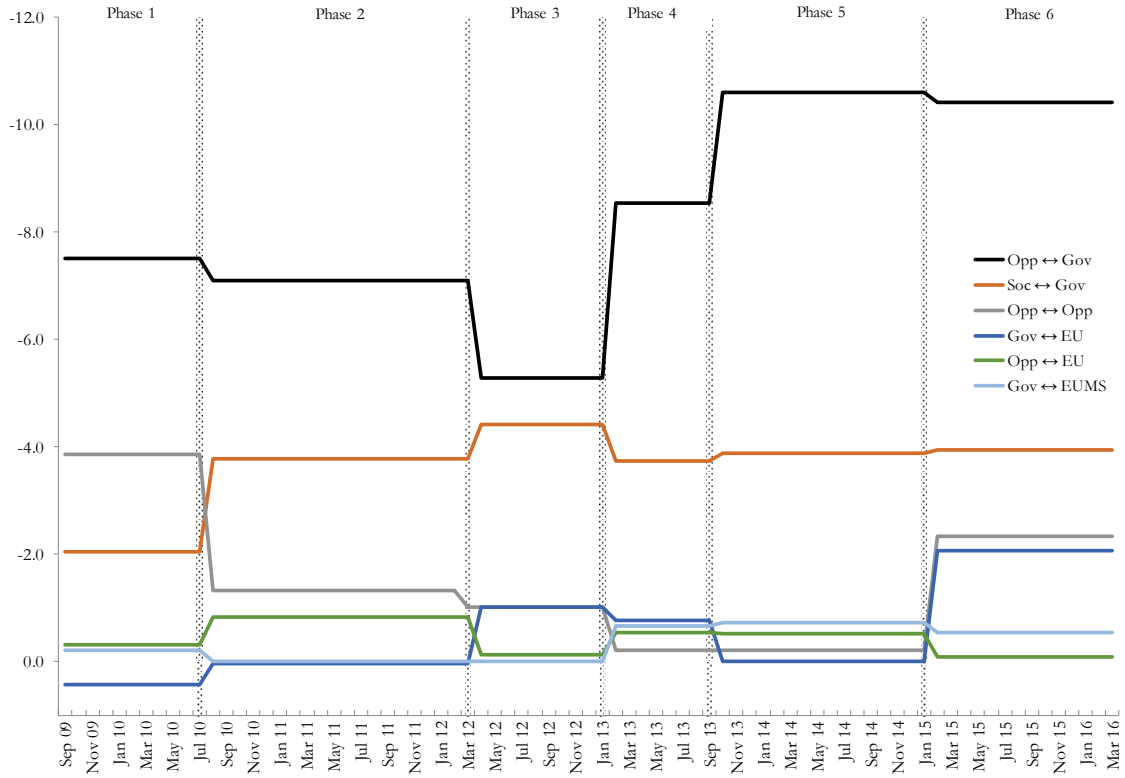
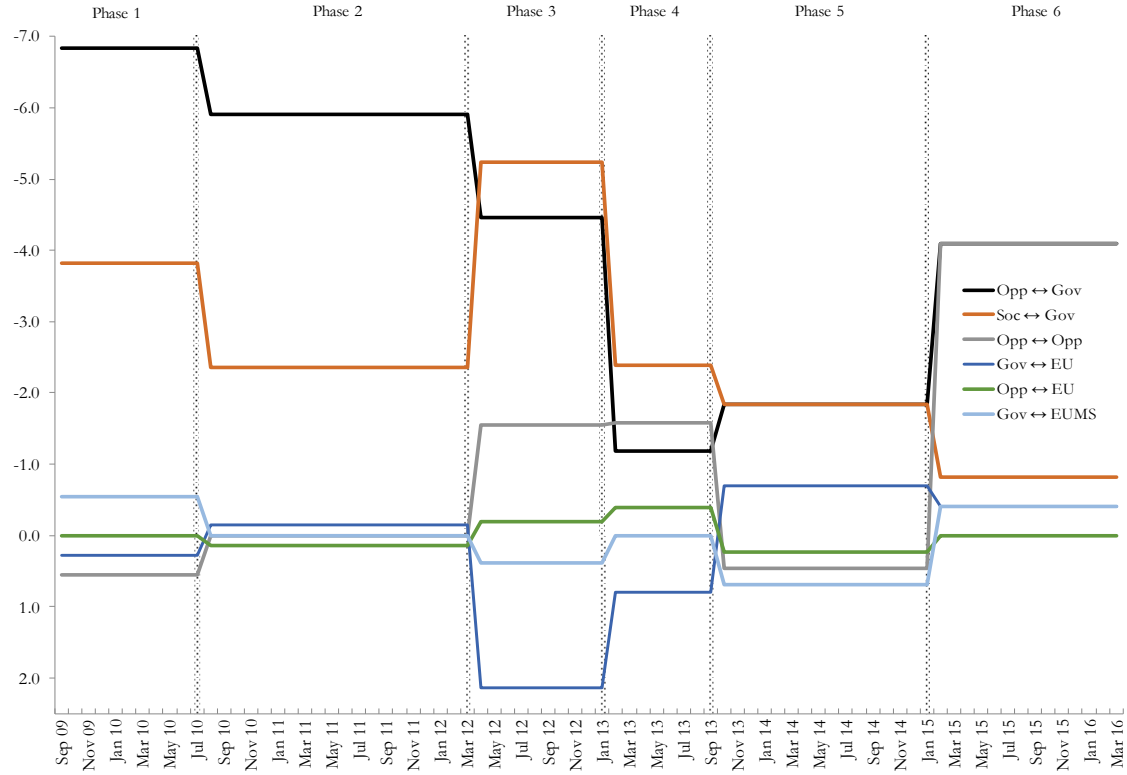


Figure 33: Two-Directional Conflict Lines, Spain, Crisis Phases



In Greece (Figure 34), the conflict line between government and opposition is by far the strongest during the entire crisis (black), and, note the diverging scale on the Y-axis, located on a much more contentious level than in Germany. After a relatively low score in crisis phase 3, there is a further increase in the second half of the crisis period. Other conflict lines remain rather stable, again with the notable exception of the last crisis period. The strong increase in the reciprocal conflict line between the government and EU institutions (dark blue) exemplifies disputes over the bailout negotiations at that time.

In Spain (Figure 33), the dominant conflict line between government and opposition (black) experiences a gradual decline throughout the crisis only to increase again in the last crisis phase. This late increase is paralleled by an intensification of the inner-oppositional conflict line (grey) which now mirrors the former. In Spain, it seems that in this last phase of the crisis, it is less the developments in Greece that structure the (political) conflict[98] but the rise of the leftist party Podemos which fuels public sphere conflicts, not only with the conservative government but also with the social democratic PSOE, the former governing party and competitor on the left-leaning political spectrum.

Overall, the analysis of conflict lines underscored the central differences in the intensity and shape of public conflicts over the Eurozone Crisis in the three debates.

9.3.2.4 German-Greek-Spanish Relations

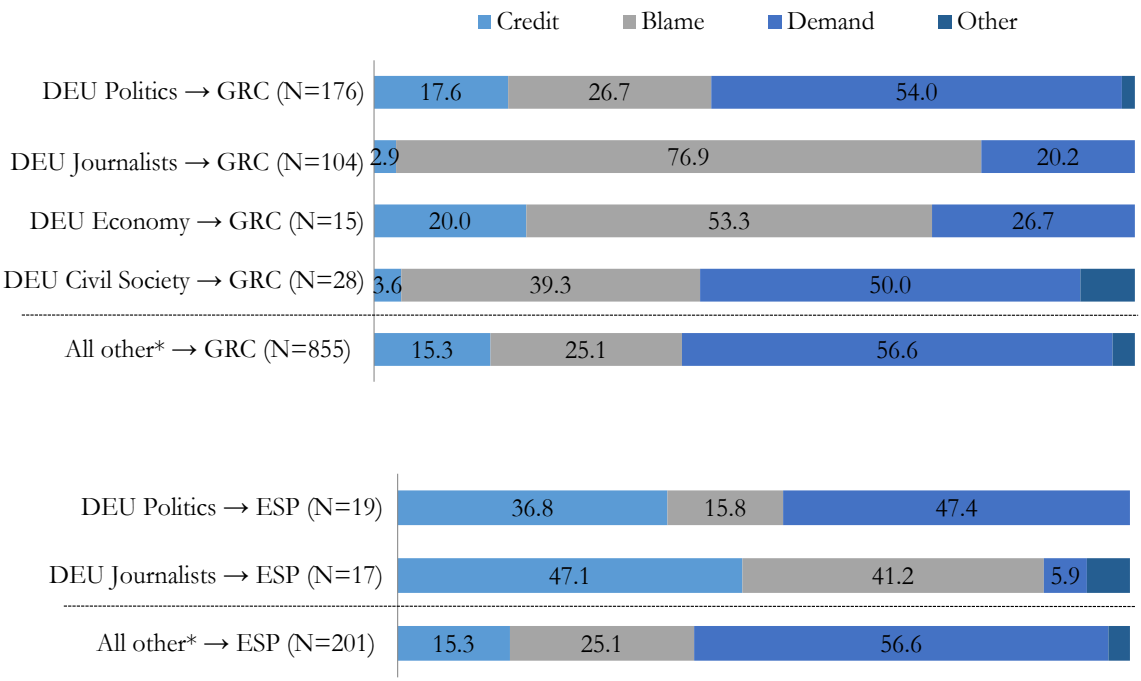
As a final perspective on conflict lines, is worth taking a closer look at the reciprocal relationship between the three countries. In general, I have argued that other European governments are likely scapegoats in public debates around European policy issues. This trend was expected to be clearly visible in the Eurozone Crisis, which touches upon core state powers such as national self-determination and sovereignty. In particular, collective actors in debtor countries complained about the strict conditionality of bailout loans and the restrictions on national sovereignty. Therefore, Europeanized blame shifting in Greece and Spain was argued to feature a strong horizontal dimension, directed at the German government, which has most firmly advocated for supranational supervision and strict austerity in crisis-affected countries. In Germany, I expected government blame shifting to be horizontally Europeanized rather than vertically; the German government was closely entangled with European institutions which suggests that blame should rather focus on governments in debtor countries. All in all, these arguments had suggested an important dimension of the public blame game evolving between Spain and Greece, on one side, and Germany, on the other.

[98] There is, however, a slight intensification of the mutual conflict line between the Spanish Government and other EU member states.

However, the earlier analysis of conflict lines did not hint at an intense polarization between these three countries. The following figures display German-Greek-Spanish relations in more detail. Since I am interested in direct country relations rather than in a comparison of country debates at that stage, I focus on the overall crisis debate, taking all three samples together.

Figure 35[99] shows the attribution pattern of core German actor categories directed at Greece and Spain. Accordingly, Figure 36 reports the Greek actors' evaluation of German and Spanish actors and Figure 37 sheds light on responsibility attributions from Spanish actors to Greece and Germany.

Figure 35: Germany – Attributions of Responsibility Addressed to Greece and Spain



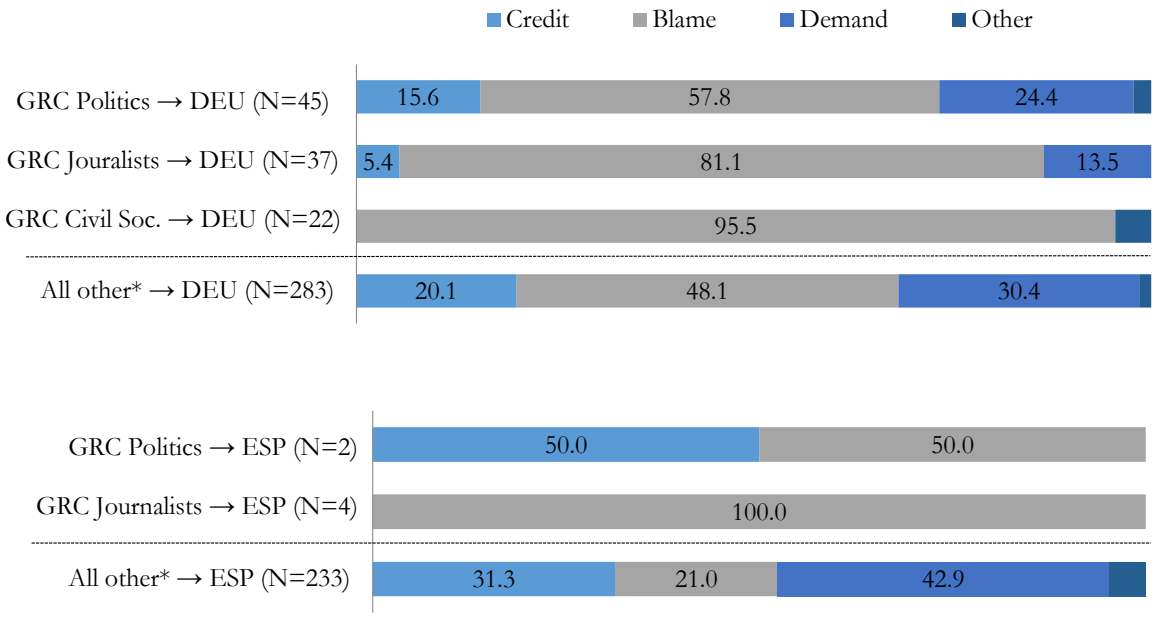
Most importantly, Figure 35 shows that German politicians are not as negative towards Greece as expected. Demands are the most frequent responsibility attribution (54%) and, surprisingly, blame shifting (26.7%) is soon followed by credit granting (17.6%). In fact, this attribution pattern is very similar to the pattern of other (non-German, non-Greek) actors addressing Greek actors (row 5) and is more positive than that of other German actors addressing Greece. Checking for instances of dominant blame shifting to Greece in this data, it is especially journalists who are extremely critical towards Greek actors with a blame shifting share of roughly 77 per cent. Less relevant in terms of quantity, economic actors and civil society show an above-average share of blame shifting to Greece.

[99] The category 'all other' refers to all actors, excluding actors from the respective sender country and from the addressee country, e.g. in the first case of German-Greek relations, all non-German, non-Greek actors.

When it comes to responsibility attributions from German actors directed at Spain, the analysis suffers from small total numbers, especially for German economic and civil society actors, which were consequently omitted in Figure 35. Nevertheless, the data for political actors and journalists reveal a lesser inclination to shift blame to Spanish actors when compared to Greek actors. For German politicians, blame shifting to Spain (15.8%) is much less frequent than demands (47.4%) and even credit granting (36.5%). Even journalists rely on credit granting in almost half of all cases, a pattern that is almost absent for German journalists' links to Greece.

Figure 36 presents attribution links from Greece to Germany and Spain. First of all, the prior analyses showed that the Greek attribution strategies are very much focused on the domestic realm and, indeed, the small number of cases for this sub-sample allows only limited insights. The focus on domestic struggles renders references to non-domestic actors almost negligible. In particular, attribution ties between Greek and Spanish actors are almost completely absent in the crisis debate. The common location at the debtor side of the Eurozone Crisis does not lead to mutual references, neither in the sense of demarcation and blame nor in the sense of a bond of (discursive) solidarity and credit.

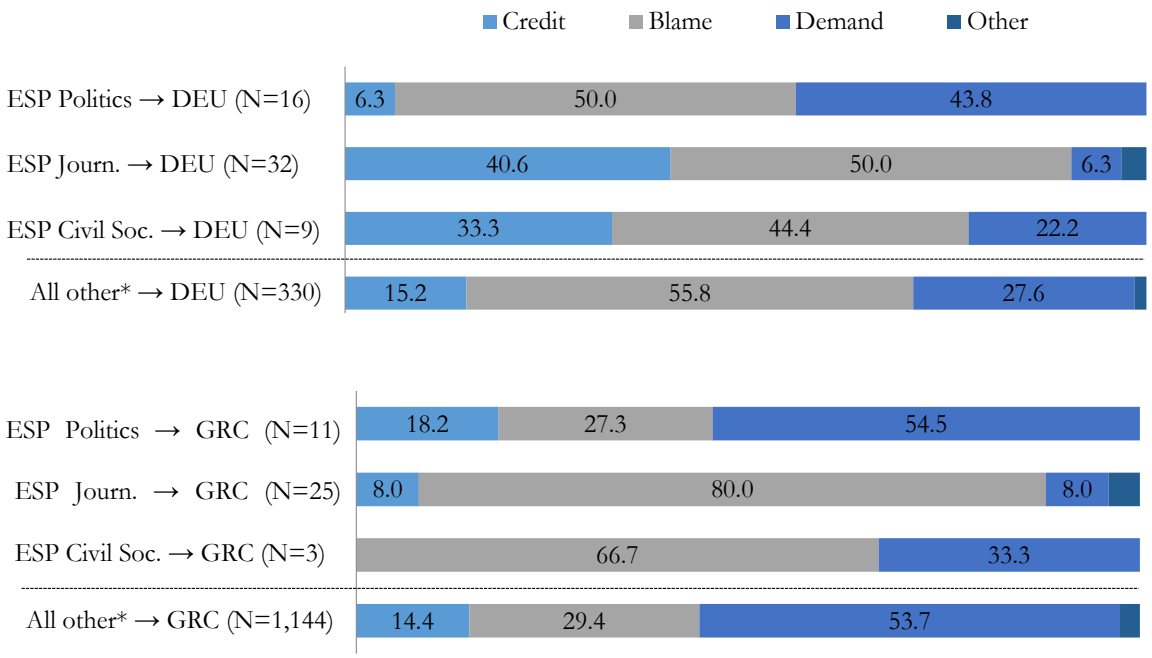
Figure 36: Greece – Attributions of Responsibility Addressed to Germany and Spain



In those cases, for which a Greek-German relationship is documented, the evaluation is strongly negative, with over 57 per cent blame shifting among Greek politicians and even higher shares for journalists (81.1%) and civil society with an astonishing 95.5 per cent share of blame shifting when attributing responsibility to German actors. Greek actors, including politicians, are more critical towards German actors than vice-versa and more critical when contrasted with the comparative case of all other actors attributing responsibility to German actors (48.1% blame; row 4).

Finally, Figure 37 assesses links to Greece and Germany from the Spanish reference point. Once again, the limited number of cases demands caution and especially for the Spanish-Greek references, this absence underlines the interpretation of a missing bond between both crisis countries. In the few cases that Spanish actors address German actors, the evaluation is predominantly negative, though more positive than the average of other non-Spanish, non-German actors (row 4) and more positive than the respective evaluation from Greek actors (see above). What is interesting is the relatively strong use of credit granting to German actors by Spanish journalists (40.6%) and by Spanish civil society actors (33.3%). Spanish journalists, for instance, are much more negative towards Greece (blame shifting, 80.0%). Spanish politicians instead, are less negative towards Greek actors than towards German ones when attributing responsibility in the debate.

Figure 37: Spain – Attributions of Responsibility Addressed to Germany and Greece



Overall, horizontally Europeanized blame shifting in general and the blame game between debtor and creditor governments, in particular, is less relevant than expected. In contrast to expectations raised by de Wilde and Lord (2016) and others (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018, p. 182) the polarization between countries does not follow the "ideal type of international conflict" that pits national governments and public against each other. While the blame game between creditor and debtor countries has received much attention in popular narration, the analysis shows is that this presumed importance is overstated. The popular narratives of German 'Greek-bashing' and the reverse, Greek 'German-bashing' are, if at all, visible for domestic journalists, but by no means representative for the crisis debates in the two countries. Especially in Germany, journalists are key in directing blame

towards Greece, but political actors are not excessively negative. Greek politicians are more inclined to shift blame to Germany, but in absolute numbers, this attribution pattern is marginal. Spain is even less involved in Europeanized blame games. Mutual relations with Greece and Germany rarely feature in the debate. Spanish politicians are more negative towards German politicians than vice-versa and again, the only actor that adds a strong share of blame shifting to the debate is the Spanish journalists' evaluation of Greek actors. In creditor countries, domestic conflicts suppress the visibility of inter-governmental conflicts but also that of cross-country coalitions.

9.3.2.5 The Issue Dimension of Public Blame Games

So far, polarization was approached from the perspective of actors. Its shape was traced in the importance assigned to Europeanized blame shifting. The earlier analysis of salience highlighted differences in the framing of the crisis debates in each country with a focus on European regulation in Germany and on domestic implementation in Greece and Spain. This distinction allows this perspective to be expanded to the issue dimension of public blame games. Following the argument that in debtor countries, European integration is no longer primarily a question of culture and identity, I expected socio-economic conflict dimension to be particularly strong in those countries.

Table 36 compares the share of blame shifting in sub-issue domains of the crisis debates.

Table 36: Share of Blame Shifting, Issue Categories, Percentage Distribution

		DEU	GRC	ESP
Political issues	European regulation	39.3	39.3	32.9
	Domestic implementation	/	/	/
	Austerity	42.6	49.7	42.8
	Other	48.0	55.6	42.3
	Financial markets, economy	37.2	45.2	39.4
	Culture, identity, sovereignty	55.6	60.2	59.7
	Total share of blame shifting	42.0	49.3	42.0
	N	3,052	6,008	2,016

Source: Own calculations

Overall, the high polarization intensity in Greece translates into the highest shares of blame shifting in all sub-fields. The ranking of the sub-fields in the three countries is similar. In all three cases, European regulation and issues dealing with the financial markets and the broader economy are the least polarized. This is explained by a stronger participation of EU actors in these sub-samples, who add a moderate tone in the debates. Debates about the domestic consequences of the crisis and the domestic implementation of European measures are more contentious with shares slightly above the country average for each case. But, in all three countries, questions of culture, identity and sovereignty

are the most polarized with a share of blame shifting of about 60 per cent in Greece and Spain. Again, this results from the specific actor composition in this sub-field, which is consistently dominated by the political opposition, journalists and civil society actors, who are all distinguished by a high inclination to engage in blame shifting. While the general framing of the crisis debate is dominated by political and economic issues, the cultural dimension of the crisis is the most polarized one in all three cases. This interpretation is also visible in Table 37, which compares polarization intensity across communities of reference that justification frames (reasons) are directed at. Justifications made with reference to societal consequences and cultural values (row 3) are more strongly associated with blame shifting than those made with reference to economic or political consequences.[100]

Table 37: Functional Communities of Reference, Share of Blame Shifting, Percentage Distribution

	DEU	GRC	ESP
Political sphere	43.3	40.1	47.0
Economy	39.2	40.4	33.9
Society & culture	50.6	72.3	63.9
Total share of blame shifting	42.0	49.3	42.0
N	468	794	341

In conclusion, the analysis provided insights into whether economic, political or cultural concerns push public blame games in the Eurozone Crisis. Against the expectation, the cultural rather than the economic dimension of the crisis is the most polarized and most strongly connected to the attribution of blame, especially in Greece and Spain. This substantiates the finding that despite the return of the economic dimension in conflicts over European integration, polarization is strongly fuelled by questions of identity and culture.

9.3.3 Interim Conclusions

This section focused on the third and most central sub-process of politicization. The analysis provided results for intensity and shape of the actor polarization around public debates over Eurozone Crisis politics in the three countries. In contrast to the focus on programmatic or ideological differences in most politicization studies, the attribution of responsibility perspective on polarization pointed to the direction of political conflicts. Polarization was operationalized with recourse to the relative share of blame shifting in the overall communication pattern. The crisis debate in Greece is generally the most contentious with the strongest blame game. In light of the tremendous crisis

[100] Reading example: In the German crisis debate (column 1), 50.6 per cent of all responsibility attributions that are justified with reference to consequences on societal level or cultural values are attributions of blame.

impact and the closed political system in Greece, this was expected. The strong dominance of blame in Greece is partly due to the relative strength of political challengers who are more inclined to engage in blame shifting than governmental actors. The similarity of the Spanish and German debate is surprising. Overall, the expectation of a declining tendency to engage in blame shifting during the crisis is only (partially) met in Spain. Especially the final episode of the crisis connected to the government takeover of Syriza in Greece led to a severe rise in blame shifting, especially in the German debate.

In all cases, the blame game is overtly political and predominantly directed to governments, but when it comes to the geographic focus, there are strong differences. In Greece and slightly less in Spain, the vast majority of blame attributions is directed to domestic actors. In Germany, actors from other European member states, and especially from 'crisis countries', are the focus of public blame. What is common to all three countries is that it is governments who push Europeanized blame shifting rather than oppositional parties who focus on the domestic government. The expectation of a increasing tendency to shift blame to EU actors in 'crisis countries' as a consequence of the continuous transfer of authority in the crisis, is not met. Instead, only the German debate shows an increasingly strong share which is mainly due to blame shifting to Greece in the last crisis period.

In line with the domestic orientation of political conflict in Greece, the majority of dominant conflict lines are concentrated in the domestic realm. Although domestic conflict lines also prevail in Spain, their strength is generally lower. However, the growing importance of the leftist Podemos in the last crisis phase visibly intensified domestic conflict lines. The German conflict pattern is more Europeanized with the domestic media attacking actors from other EU member states, as well as non-domestic actors attacking each other. This pattern comes close to the trajectory of 'remote conflict', in which European issues are portrayed as foreign policy problems and which mainly affect other countries (de Wilde and Lord 2016). The temporal evolution of the most important two-directional conflict lines once again highlighted the distinct role of the last crisis phase not only for the structuration of Europeanized conflicts but also for domestic ones, at least in Germany and Greece. In the German debate, the German-Greek conflict line strongly gains in importance and, at the same time, the central one between government and opposition declines. In Greece, in contrast, growing conflicts with EU actors in that period also seem to heat up domestic tensions.

Despite this increasing role of European conflicts in the last crisis phase, however, the general expectation of a strong polarization between debtor and creditor countries is not met. The data show a low-profile conflict where blame shifting between debtor and creditor countries stands out only on behalf of journalists and civil society actors. Finally, the analysis of issues and justifications showed that rather than the economic one, the cultural dimension of the crisis is the most polarized one.

Table 38: Polarization – Expectations and Findings

POLARIZATION		**GERMANY**	**GREECE**	**SPAIN**
INTENSITY	**Expectation**	Low	High	Moderate-high
	Findings	Low-moderate	High	Low-moderate
SHAPE *(direction of conflict)*	**Expectation**	a) Dom. blame game: low b) Eu. blame game: strong (horizontal) c) Dominant issue dimension: European regulation	a) Dom. blame game: moderate b) Eu. blame game: strong (vertical & horizontal) c) Dominant issue dimension: economic	a) Dom: blame game: strong b) Eu. blame game: strong (vertical & horizontal) c) Dominant issue dimension: economic
	Findings	a) Dom. blame game: low b) Eur. blame game: moderate (horizontal) c) Dominant issue dimension: cultural, European regulation	a) Dom. blame game: strong b) Eur. blame game: low c) Dominant issue dimension: cultural, economic	a) Dom. blame game: moderate b) Eur. blame game: low c) Dominant issue dimension: cultural

9.4 Aggregate Indices: Politicization and Europeanization

In the past three sections, the crisis debates were compared with respect to their salience, to the structure of participating actors and to actor polarization. For each of these three sub-processes of politicisation, I distinguished intensity and shape, which was discussed with reference to the Europeanization or domestication. This accentuation of the politicization shape, allows the different patterns in which politicization unfolds to be distinguished. Before summarizing these patterns, this section now provides an aggregate overview and a joint perspective on politicization intensity and shape.

Inspired by the work of Hutter et al. (Grande and Hutter 2016b, p. 10), I calculate a quantitative index of politicization intensity which combines all sub-processes. Hutter et al. used this index to compare politicization across integration steps over long periods of time. This is beyond the scope of this research but the combined measure allows for a comparison of politicization intensity over the course of the crisis. Index-building does not stop at this point; as I have argued, politicization and Europeanization are closely related but distinct processes. Europeanization is best understood as a shape of the politicization pattern. Similar to the politicization index, the preceding analyses allow a combined index of Europeanization to be computed. This allows juxtaposing politicization intensity and shape and assessing the extent to which they influence each other.

9.4.1 Index of Politicization Intensity

To calculate the index of politicization intensity, salience is multiplied by actor expansion and polarization.[101] The salience measure runs from 0 to 100, in which 100 represents the most salient moment (month) in the crisis period in all three countries together. To recall, salience is operationalized by the number of responsibility attributions referring to the Eurozone Crisis. The score of the actor expansion measures the share of non-executive actors as attribution senders in the respective debate with scores form 0-1 where 1 represents a complete domination by non-executive actors. The score for polarization measures the share of blame shifting. Overall, the index runs from 0 (least politicized) to 100 (most politicized) with the (hypothetical) score of 100 meaning a maximal salient debate, a total domination by non-executive actors and an exclusive use of blame shifting. Figure 38 shows the development of the index of politicization intensity with average scores for the six crisis phases. For each country, linear trends (based on the monthly average) and overall averages are displayed in dotted lines.

Table 39 below lists the three scores adding to the combined index.

The development over the course of the crisis is telling in several ways. First, the index shows once more that the overall intensity of politicization is clearly strongest in the Greek debate with an overall score of 13.35. Secondly, the trends show that while Spain and Germany are not only rather similar in their overall politicization intensity but also rather synchronized in the development over time, Greece follows its own domestic logic with frequent ups and downs and sometimes even a reverse trend when compared to Spain and Germany. Here it seems that domestic factors trigger politicization, whereas the German and Spanish debates are more strongly influenced by the rhythm of European crisis management. Thirdly, the final phase (6) is unique in the sense that now the Greek and German trends are clearly synchronized and interconnected with a clear increase in politicization intensity. Fourthly, this final phase is particularly special in that it runs counter to the overall linear trend of decreasing politicization in all three countries. In neither country, however, does the index score reach above-average levels, which puts its only just proclaimed uniqueness into perspective.

[101] Index of politicization intensity = Salience X actor expansion X actor polarization (0→100). In contrast to Hutter et al., I cannot compare the salience of the issue (here Eurozone Crisis) with other issues debated in national newspapers. Therefore, I have to rely on relative measures with respect to the three country cases: Salience = Salience_month_n / Salience_month_max * 100. The most salient moment is June 2011 in the Greek crisis debate, with a total of 276 coded attributions of responsibility. In the same months, 99 attributions are coded for the German debate, resulting in a salience-measure of 35.87. Expansion= Actor_nonex / Actor_all. polarization = blame shifting / all attributions.

Figure 38: Index of Politicization Intensity, Crisis Phases

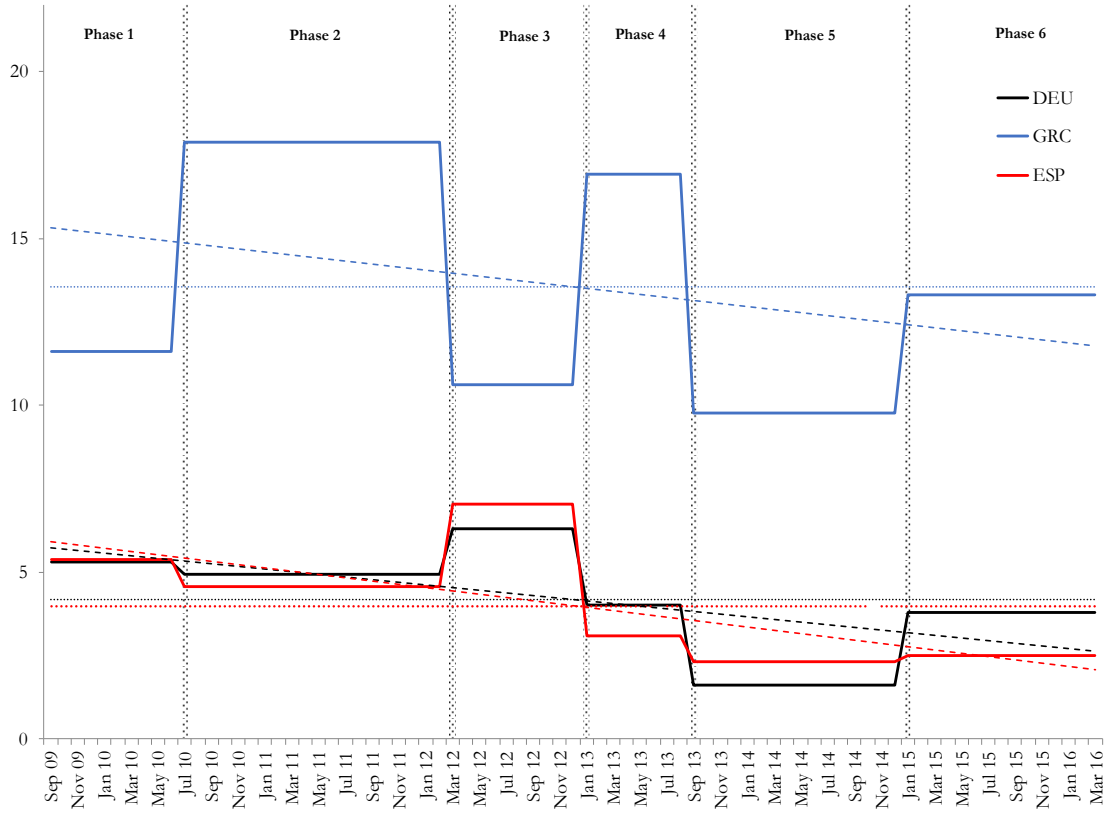


Table 39: Index of Politicization Intensity, Crisis Phases

		Phase 1 Oct 09-Jul 10	Phase 2 Aug 10-Mar 12	Phase 3 Apr 12-Jan 13	Phase 4 Feb 13-Sep 13	Phase 5 Oct 13-Jan 15	Phase 6 Feb 15-Mar 16	Total
DEU	**Index score**	**5.29**	**4.93**	**6.30**	**4.02**	**1.61**	**3.79**	**4.32**
	*Salience**	*17.65*	*18.13*	*20.98*	*13.68*	*6.09*	*9.45*	*14.33*
	Participation	*0.74*	*0.68*	*0.72*	*0.72*	*0.71*	*0.72*	*0.72*
	Polarization	*0.40*	*0.40*	*0.41*	*0.41*	*0.37*	*0.56*	*0.43*
GRC	**Index score**	**11.60**	**17.88**	**10.60**	**16.94**	**9.78**	**13.31**	**13.35**
	*Salience**	*36.41*	*55.73*	*36.74*	*47.55*	*29.21*	*38.16*	*40.64*
	Participation	*0.65*	*0.65*	*0.59*	*0.67*	*0.71*	*0.70*	*0.66*
	Polarization	*0.49*	*0.49*	*0.49*	*0.53*	*0.47*	*0.50*	*0.49*
ESP	**Index score**	**5.39**	**4.55**	**7.02**	**3.10**	**2.32**	**2.48**	**4.14**
	*Salience**	*13.69*	*15.68*	*21.90*	*12.77*	*12.94*	*7.38*	*14.06*
	Participation	*0.78*	*0.66*	*0.76*	*0.64*	*0.53*	*0.80*	*0.69*
	Polarization	*0.51*	*0.44*	*0.42*	*0.38*	*0.34*	*0.42*	*0.42*

Source: Own calculations
Index of politicization intensity = Salience X Actor Expansion X Actor Polarization (0→100)
* Coded: *DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

Finally, Table 40 compares politicization intensity for different issues. As expected, debates about the domestic implementation of European regulation, such as the 'troika's' austerity conditions, are most strongly politicized in Greece, followed by Spain. In Germany, questions of crisis management on European level, are the most politicized.

Table 40: Index of Politicization Intensity, Issue Categories

			DEU	GRC	ESP
Political issues	**European regulation**	**Index score**	1.27	2.33	0.58
		*Salience**	*4.71*	*9.52*	*2.83*
		Participation	*0.69*	*0.62*	*0.62*
		Polarization	*0.39*	*0.39*	*0.33*
	Domestic implementation				
	Austerity	**Index score**	1.07	4.59	1.39
		*Salience**	*3.63*	*12.91*	*5.07*
		Participation	*0.69*	*0.71*	*0.64*
		Polarization	*0.43*	*0.50*	*0.43*
	Other	**Index score**	0.34	2.26	0.49
		*Salience**	*1.11*	*6.55*	*1.59*
		Participation	*0.65*	*0.62*	*0.73*
		Polarization	*0.48*	*0.56*	*0.42*
	Financial markets, economy	**Index score**	0.83	1.60	0.76
		*Salience**	*3.00*	*5.29*	*2.64*
		Participation	*0.75*	*0.67*	*0.73*
		Polarization	*0.37*	*0.45*	*0.39*
	Culture, identity, sovereignty	**Index score**	0.63	2.61	0.75
		*Salience**	*1.38*	*6.54*	*1.57*
		Participation	*0.82*	*0.66*	*0.80*
		Polarization	*0.56*	*0.60*	*0.60*
	Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	N		3,052	6,008	2,016

Source: Own calculations
* Coded: *DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

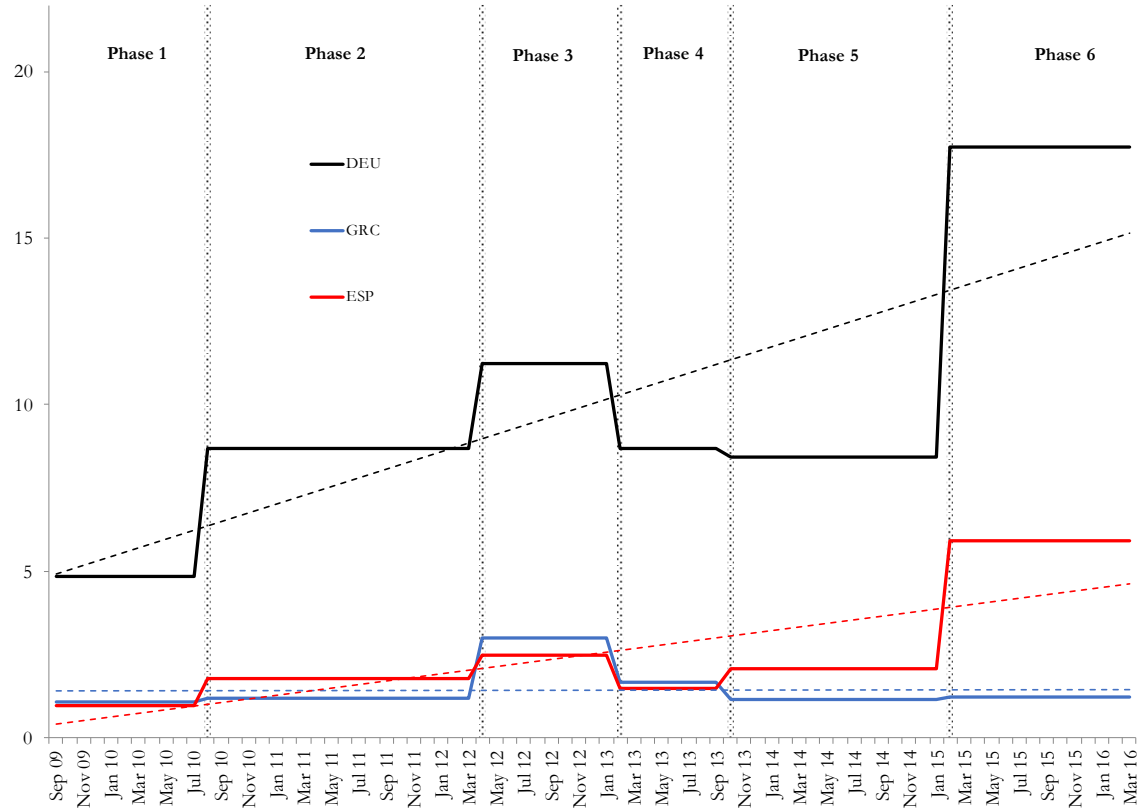
9.4.2 Index of Europeanization

In analogy to the index of politicization intensity above, the following presents an index of Europeanization which summarizes central dimensions of the politicization shape. To calculate the index, the salience of the sub-issue European regulation is multiplied by the share of European actors participating in the debate and the share of Europeanized blame shifting among domestic actors. Again, the salience measure runs from 0 to 100 and those for participation and polarization from 0 to 1.

Overall, the Europeanization index runs from 0 (fully domesticized) to 100 (completely Europeanized) with the (hypothetical) score of 100, meaning an exclusive reference to issues of European regulation, a total domination by European actors in the crisis debate and an exclusive use of Europeanized blame shifting among domestic actors.[102]

Figure 39 shows the development over time, with average scores per crisis phase and the linear trends (based on monthly averages) in dotted lines. Table 41 below provides the corresponding numbers.

Figure 39: Europeanization Index, Crisis Phases



Several findings stand out. Firstly, the German debate is clearly the most Europeanized throughout the crisis years. If Greece is the outlier in terms of politicization intensity, Germany is the outlier when it comes to the level of Europeanization. Secondly, the 'rhythm of Europeanization' is less volatile than the one for politicization intensity with a higher overall synchronization of the three debates. Again, especially Spain and Germany seem to follow similar developments, albeit on different levels. Thirdly, the German and the Spanish debate feature strongly increasing linear trends while in the Greek one, the level of Europeanization remains rather constant. At least for Spain and Germany, it seems that the more the Eurozone Crisis is regulated in European terms, the more the crisis

[102] In this case, the maximum score is not only hypothetical but also not possible given that a complete domination by European actors prevents any case of Europeanized blame shifting among *domestic* actors.

debates are Europeanized. In Greece, instead, nothing really seems to change the overtly domestic orientation of public debates. Fourthly, in Germany and Spain this increasing linear trend is strongly influenced by the strong increase in the last phase of the crisis which again underlines its special role in the overall crisis setting.

Table 41: Europeanization Index, Crisis Phases

		Phase 1 Oct 09-Jul 10	Phase 2 Aug 10-Mar 12	Phase 3 Apr 12-Jan 13	Phase 4 Feb 13-Sep 13	Phase 5 Oct 13-Jan 15	Phase 6 Feb 15-Mar 16	Total
DEU	**Index score**	**4.86**	**8.68**	**11.22**	**8.70**	**8.43**	**17.73**	**9.65**
	Eu. issues	*0.25*	*0.36*	*0.38*	*0.27*	*0.25*	*0.47*	*0.33*
	Eu. actors	*0.33*	*0.34*	*0.40*	*0.44*	*0.48*	*0.46*	*0.41*
	Eu. blame	*0.59*	*0.70*	*0.74*	*0.73*	*0.70*	*0.81*	*0.71*
GRC	**Index score**	**1.09**	**1.20**	**2.99**	**1.65**	**1.14**	**1.24**	**1.53**
	Eu. issues	*0.16*	*0.23*	*0.31*	*0.22*	*0.19*	*0.30*	*0.23*
	Eu. actors	*0.26*	*0.23*	*0.33*	*0.23*	*0.26*	*0.19*	*0.25*
	Eu. blame	*0.27*	*0.23*	*0.29*	*0.33*	*0.24*	*0.21*	*0.26*
ESP	**Index score**	**0.95**	**1.78**	**2.49**	**1.48**	**2.08**	**5.91**	**2.28**
	Eu. issues	*0.16*	*0.20*	*0.27*	*0.15*	*0.14*	*0.34*	*0.21*
	Eu. actors	*0.19*	*0.24*	*0.26*	*0.21*	*0.36*	*0.38*	*0.27*
	Eu. blame	*0.31*	*0.38*	*0.36*	*0.48*	*0.41*	*0.45*	*0.40*

Source: Own calculations
Index of Europeanization = Issue framing "European regulation" X Share of European actors participating in the debate X Share of Europeanized blame shifting among domestic actors (0→100).
* Coded: *DEU: 100%-sample, GRC: 67%-sample, ESP: 67%-sample*

9.4.3 Interim Conclusions

This section summed up some of the earlier analyses in two integrated indices. The index calculation helps to trace overall trends in politicization intensity and its shape. The two-fold perspective on politicization and Europeanization underlines the importance of an analytical distinction. Throughout the crisis period, the most politicized debate is the least Europeanized and, vice versa, the most Europeanized is the least politicized. Where Greece represents the extreme case of a strong but domestic politicization pattern, Germany represents the other extreme of a limited but strongly Europeanized pattern. Apart from that, the results provide another argument for the distinctiveness of both processes. At least for Spain and Germany, the indices show a decreasing trend of politicization and at the same time, an increasing trend of Europeanization. Together, this suggests that against expectations, the relationship between Europeanization and politicization is not positive but negative. This replicates unexpected findings by Grande and Hutter (2016c, p. 80). The more a debate is Europeanized, the less it is politicized and the more it is politicized, the less it is Europeanized.

9.5 Overview: Politicization Patterns in Germany, Greece and Spain

This final section summarizes politicization patterns in Germany, Greece and Spain, and contrasts the findings with the theoretical expectations presented in section 5. The expectations for the country comparison were based on the argument that the openness of the political system and the strength of the crisis impact structure intensity and shape of the politicization pattern. With an open political system and a limited direct crisis impact, but high stakes in the Eurozone Crisis, I expected the politicization pattern in Germany to show a comparatively low issue salience with a focus on European regulation, a moderately broad actor range, but a high Europeanization of the actor composition. Finally, actor polarization was expected to be rather low, with an emphasis on conflicts over European regulation, and a horizontally Europeanized conflict setting with government actors blaming debtor countries. Overall, I expected a low but strongly Europeanized politicization.

With a very closed system and very strong crisis impact, Greece was discussed as the antithetical case to Germany. I expected a high politicization intensity with a high salience and a focus on crisis consequences and domestic implementation of European regulations. The range of participating actors was expected to be moderately broad, including European actors as attribution senders. Finally, I expected the actor polarization to be very strong with domestic as well as Europeanized blame games.

Spain was located in between the two extreme cases, with a closer proximity to Greece in terms of the crisis impact and a closer proximity to Germany in terms of the institutionalized political system. In relative terms, I expected a moderate to high salience of the debate, with a focus on crisis consequences, a moderately broad range of participating actors, also in terms of the Europeanization of the actor composition, and finally a moderate to high polarization intensity, including a European dimension of public blame games.

9.5.1 Germany

All in all, the German case matches the expectations to a large degree. The Eurozone Crisis is a much-debated topic of responsibility debates throughout the crisis but especially in relation to Greece, the salience of the debate remains moderate and declines between 2009 and 2016. As in the two other countries, the Eurozone Crisis is predominantly framed in political terms with a relatively stronger focus on the European dimension of the crisis and its management. In terms of actor participation, too, the German crisis debate is more Europeanized, with a higher share of European actors participating in the debate. Against the expectations, the German debate is the most diverse one, not only with respect to Europeanization but also in terms of the participation of non-executive and non-political actors. When it comes to the scope of domestic, political actors, however, the debate is very much personalized and focused on key executive positions.

At the level of actor polarization, the European dimension of the crisis blame game prevails. The strongest conflict lines span between German journalists blaming actors from other EU member states (vertical Europeanization) and between actors from other member states blaming each other. In this latter case, the limited but strongly Europeanized politicization of the German debate takes the form of a detached, 'remote conflict' with limited reference to the role of German actors. Interestingly and against expectations, conflict lines between political actors in Germany and the two 'crisis countries' Greece and Spain are only important in the last period of the Eurozone Crisis and directly connected to the takeover of the Syriza government.

9.5.2 Greece

As expected, the Greek politicization pattern strongly differs from that in Germany, but the way and extent to which it does, is surprising. Greece showed a highly salient and contentious debate that is strongly focused on domestic political actors, both in terms of actor expansion and in terms of dominant conflict lines. The issue focus is on domestic implementation of European regulations, austerity, 'cultural' issues and elite behaviour. The overall politicization intensity of the Eurozone Crisis remains high throughout the crisis. However, Europeanization is constantly low. Debates concerned with the domestic causes and consequences of the Eurozone Crisis prevail over its European regulation, domestic political actors strongly dominate European actors and Europeanized conflict lines, vertical or horizontal, are surprisingly weak when compared to the blame game in the domestic, political realm. In addition, domestic political actors clearly overshadow actors from other parts of society, resulting in an unexpectedly small range of the actor participation. Within the dominant actor group of domestic, political actors, however, the heterogeneity is much higher than, for instance, in the German debate. Overall, the Greek case shows a strong, domesticized politicization of the Eurozone Crisis with a strong focus on the blame game between the government and the (party) opposition.

9.5.3 Spain

While belonging to the camp of the crisis-hit countries, Spain was considered an intermediate case on the two explanatory macro dimensions. However, despite the serious (economic) effect of the Eurozone Crisis, in some respects, the politicization pattern is closer to that in the German debate than to the Greek one. As for the salience of the crisis in public responsibility debates, for instance, Spain and Germany are on par and the debates seem to follow a similar, European rhythm. Greece, on the contrary, is a world of its own, not only in terms of the general salience but also in terms of the rhythm, which seems to follow its own (domestic) logic. When it comes to the (sub-) issues of the crisis debate, the focus on austerity, domestic implementation and the financial market is a representation of the crisis reality in Spain and closer to the issue focus in Greece. In terms of the

structure of participating actors, Spain is indeed in between Greece and Germany. A relatively broad range of domestic political actors clearly dominate the debate over other actor categories, although not to the same extent as in Greece. Accordingly, the actor composition is more Europeanized. Finally, the Spanish debate shows an equally strong focus on blame shifting as Germany and a lesser polarization when compared to the Greek one. However, as in Greece, domestic blame games dominate, in particular between the government, the opposition and actors from civil society and, against the expectations, the relevance of European blame games is marginal. Summing up and in relation to the two other cases, the Spanish debate shows a limited, domesticized politicization pattern.

9.5.4 Temporal Developments

On an abstract level, the index of politicization intensity in the past section largely confirmed the expectation of an increasing trend in the early years of the crisis and a slowly declining trend from 2013 onwards. However, the last crisis period, which was marked by the new Greek government's attempt to alter the Eurozone Crisis management, is special. Firstly, the data illustrate a return to a growing politicization intensity in Greece and Germany, including a greater role of blame shifting. Secondly, Germany and Spain show a parallel increase in the Europeanization of the debate in this phase, while Europeanization remains consistently low in Greece. In general, the expectation that with growing levels of authority transfer throughout the crisis, the contestation of this authority and blame shifting to the EU in the 'crisis countries' continuously grow is not met. Instead, domestic political dynamics structure the direction of political conflict in both countries.

Overall, and as expected, the German crisis debate is largely driven by the rhythm of the European crisis management and discussions surrounding European events and crucial episodes, such as bailout negotiations. The increasingly strong European dimension of responsibility conflicts in the last crisis period, especially, renders domestic conflict lines less important.

The Eurozone Crisis debate in Greece follows its own domestic logic and, apart from the increasingly Europeanized conflicts in the last crisis period, nothing really seems to change the overtly domestic blame game. Against the expectation of increasing trends over time, politicization remains continuously high and continuously domesticized. The crisis impact in Greece seemed to have reached such a devastating level hat conflicts were less structured by events such as EU summits or bailout negotiations and more by economic deprivation and the destabilization of the political system.

Matching the expectations, the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis in Spain intensifies later than in Greece. Despite the fact that both belong to the camp of the 'crisis countries' they differ, not only in their overall politicization pattern but also in their temporal development. Indeed, when it comes to temporal trends, the Spanish debate is closer to the German one; both publics seem to debate within

an integrated, European framework – at least until the last crisis phase. The increasing trend of Europeanization confirms the expectation that the more the Eurozone Crisis is regulated in European terms, the more the debate is Europeanized. However, this changes towards the end of the timespan when the rise of Podemos destabilized the party system and domestic conflicts regain in importance.

9.5.5 Interim Conclusions

Before a more general discussion of the results in the next section Table 42 recalls the central expectations for politicization patterns in each country and Table 43 summarizes the actual results. Necessarily, this summary is simplifying and accentuates differences. To recall, I find a low to moderate intensity, Europeanized politicization pattern in Germany, a strong intensity, strongly domesticized politicization pattern in Greece, and a moderate intensity, domesticized politicization pattern in Spain.

Table 42: Summary of Expectations for Politicization Patterns in Germany, Greece and Spain

POLITICIZATION PATTERN		**GERMANY**	**GREECE**	**SPAIN**
SALIENCE	*Intensity*	Low	High	Moderate-high
	Shape (issue framing)	European regulation	Domestic implementation and consequences	Domestic implementation and consequences
PARTICIPATION	*Intensity (actor range)*	Moderate	Moderate-broad	Moderate
	Shape (actor composition)	Strong Europeanization	Moderate Europeanization	Moderate Europeanization
POLARIZATION	*Intensity*	Low	High	Moderate-high
	Shape (direction of conflict)	a) Dom. blame game: low b) Eu. blame game: strong (horizontal) c) Dominant issue dim.: European regulation	a) Dom: blame game: strong b) Eu. blame game: strong (vertical & horizontal) c) Dominant issue dim.: economic	a) Dom. blame game: moderate b) Eu. blame game: strong (vertical & horizontal) c) Dominant issue dim: economic
Summary		**Low intensity, strongly Europeanized politicization**	**High intensity, moderately Europeanized politicization**	**Moderate intensity, moderately Europeanized politicization**

Table 43: Overview of Results – The Politicization of the Eurozone Crisis in Germany, Greece and Spain

Politicization Pattern		**GERMANY**	**GREECE**	**SPAIN**
SALIENCE	***Intensity***	Moderate	High	Moderate
	Shape *(issue framing)*	European regulation	Domestic implementation and consequences	Domestic implementation and consequences
PARTICIPATION	***Intensity*** *(actor range)*	Moderate-high	Low-moderate	Moderate
	Shape *(actor composition)*	Strong Europeanization Strong personalization among domestic political actors	Low Europeanization Broad range of domestic political actors	Low-moderate Europeanization Broad range of domestic political actors
POLARIZATION	***Intensity***	Low-moderate	Strong	Moderate
	Shape *(direction of conflict)*	a) Dom. blame game: low b) Eu. blame game: moderate (horizontal) c) Dominant issue dimension: cultural, European regulation	a) Dom. blame game: strong b) Eu. blame game: weak c) Dominant issue dimension: cultural, economic	a) Dom. blame game: moderate b) Eu. blame game: weak c) Dominant issue dimension: cultural
→ ***Summary***		**Low-moderate intensity, Europeanized politicization** / 'remote conflict'	**High intensity, strongly domesticized politicization**	**Moderate intensity, domesticized politicization**
Temporal Changes (2009-16)	Politicization intensity	Decreasing	Slightly decreasing	Decreasing
	Europeanization	Increasing	Stable	Slightly increasing

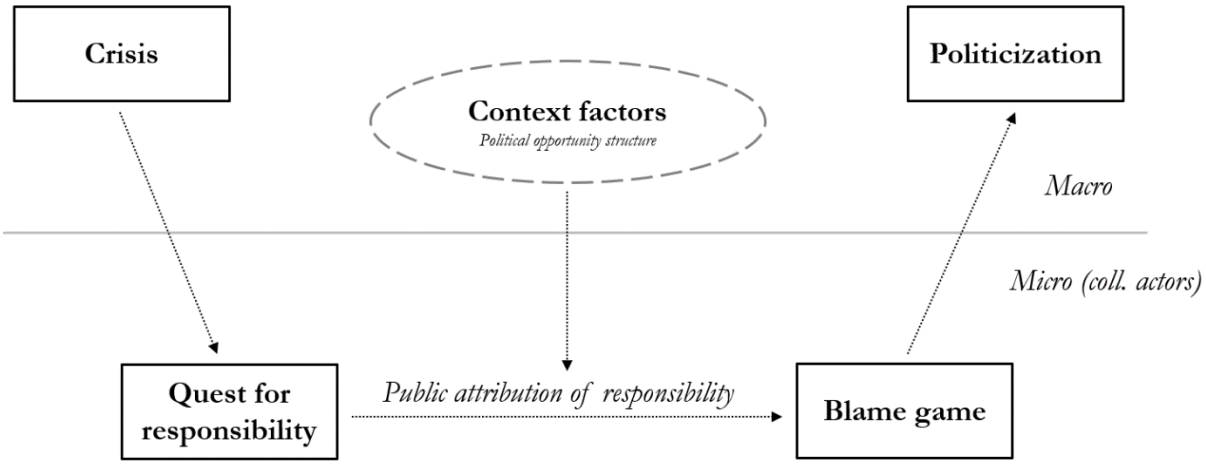
10 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This final section answers the initial research questions and discusses central differences in politicization patterns against the background of the theoretical framework. This thesis was set out to explore and explain intensity and shape of the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis between 2009 and 2016 in three countries that play prominent roles in the crisis scenario. The analysis revealed distinct patterns of politicization. Greece showed a high intensity, strongly domesticized politicization pattern, Germany a moderate intensity, Europeanized politicization pattern and Spain a moderate intensity, domesticized politicization pattern. In the following, I summarize the main argument (section 10.1) before discussing central findings and their theoretical implications (section 10.2 to 10.7). After that, I summarize scientific contributions (section 10.8), sketch avenues for future research (section 10.9) and I discuss the legacy of the Eurozone Crisis twelve years after its outbreak (section 10.10).

10.1 Main Argument

This study brought together politicization research and research on the public attribution of responsibility. This merger is particularly useful for analysing politicization in times of crisis (Figure 40).

Figure 40: An Attribution of Responsibility Approach to Politicization in Times of Crisis



The line of argument starts with the nature of crises. Crises induce collective uncertainty and a destabilization of established patterns of sense-making. This uncertainty demands explanations; it triggers the quest for responsibility and the search for culprits. In times of crisis, to explain is to blame. The phase of intense blame games that follows crisis outbreaks leads to the concept of politicization. In this study, politicization is understood as a societal process of transforming issues into the object of public controversy. This comprises an increasing issue salience in public debates, an expansion of

these debates beyond a narrow circle of actors, and a process of polarization and conflict among these actors. Adding to discussions about differentiated politicization, I distinguished politicisation intensity and shape, which was specified as the extent to which the politicization pattern is Europeanized or domesticized. In that sense, the focus on blame games allowed the direction of political conflict to be accounted for.

Bringing together both theoretical perspectives, I argued that in times of crisis, the public attribution of responsibility is at the heart of politicization dynamics in the public sphere. Therefore, understanding the rules of the blame game is crucial for understanding the patterns in which politicization unfolds. Here, the starting point is the idea that the public attribution of responsibility is a strategic choice corresponding to an actor's interest in the public sphere. A core distinction is that between challengers, primarily pointing the finger at political authorities in power, on the one hand, and executive actors trying to disperse responsibility, on the other hand. Beyond those general logics of attributing responsibility, communication strategies and the addressees of responsibility attributions are conditioned by contextual factors at country level. Political opportunities influence the rules of the blame game and, as a result, intensity and shape of politicization.

While originally designed to explain collective behaviour of political challengers, the core ideas of the political opportunity approach were extended to also make sense of the behaviour of executive actors and their strategies of blame avoidance. For that, two dimensions of the political opportunity structure are central: Firstly, if conflict is at the heart of politicization, the mechanisms of dealing with conflictive interests in different political settings play a role. This is the institutionalized openness of the political system. The second dimension to explain differences in intensity and shape of politicization is the strength of the economic and political crisis impact. In the next section, I discuss how the combination of both perspectives helps to make sense of the three distinct politicization patterns.

While these arguments are in principle applicable to crisis contexts in general, the Eurozone Crisis is a paradigmatic case to study politicization dynamics and responsibility attributions in Europe. As opposed to rule-based decision making and public neglect in the European policy context, it implied a "return to politics" (Hutter and Kriesi 2019b, p. 2). Not least, the strong interference of European actors in domestic politics provided viable opportunities to engage in European blame games.

10.2 Context matters: Case Discussions

This section now discusses the distinct politicization patterns. The comparison shows, first, that the differentiated conceptualization of politicization and the distinction of intensity and shape is essential to grasp country differences. Secondly, the discussion of the combined influence of the openness of the political system and the Eurozone Crisis impact exemplifies that contexts matter to explain these

different outcomes. Nevertheless, especially politicization shape and the direction of crisis blame games are often different than initially expected.

10.2.1 Germany

In Germany, the low direct economic and political crisis impact in combination with an open and consensual political tradition led to a low politicization intensity in the public sphere. On the one hand, Germany was strongly involved in the Eurozone Crisis and the magnitude of newspaper articles on the topic documents the stakes at hand. Stronger than in the two other countries, responsibility debates featured discussions over the contours of the European crisis management. Here, Germany's role in the European negotiations is the decisive factor and responsibility debates largely followed the ups and downs of the rhythm of European summits and bailout negotiations.

But unlike Greece or Spain, the larger part of society in Germany was mostly unaffected directly and thus, the domestic politicization of the Eurozone Crisis remained constantly low. Moreover, the traditional pro-European consensus among political elites and all major parties largely prevented controversial (political) debates about European integration in the past. Unlike in other countries, the evolving cleavage of national closure and globalized openness, which includes contentious arguments about the costs and benefits of European integration, has still gained relatively little prominence in Germany, at least until the so-called refugee crisis in 2015/2016 and the growing salience of migration at that time (Grande et al. 2019; Hutter and Kriesi 2021). Even the emergence of the Euro critical party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) has not visibly altered the public debate on the Eurozone Crisis (see also Wendler 2014, p. 456). Conflicts over European issues were contained and the Eurozone Crisis has not changed this pro-European consensus. Other studies come to similar conclusions. Wonka finds a relatively high salience but limited conflict on crisis-related issues and concludes his study on the polarization of parliamentary debates in the Bundestag by stating that "the Euro crisis thus did not lead to a destabilization of the pro-EU consensus among the majority of German political parties" (Wonka 2016, p. 136). Similarly, Grande and Kriesi find a "consistently low politicization" (2016, p. 283; Hutter and Kriesi 2019b) in Germany after the outbreak of the Eurozone Crisis.

Taking a closer look at the actor participation in the German crisis debate, the overall range of domestic actors is limited. On the domestic level, few executive actors dominate the debate, which brings us back to the German government's strong position in the European crisis management and the important role of chancellor Merkel and finance minister Schäuble. This is in line with the argument that 'emergency politics' and the delegation of decision-making to technocratic actors in the Eurozone Crisis empowered governments over the legislative, the opposition and other voices (White 2015; de Wilde et al. 2016, p. 16).

Apart from that, the lack of strategic incentives to participate in the crisis debate plays a role. In the light of a large consensus, there seemed to be little to gain for non-executive domestic actors and opposition parties and they therefore largely refrained from entering the public debate about responsibility. In the run-up of the 2013 general elections, Die Linke and the FDP tried to mobilize on the issue but neither "succeeded in making Europe a salient issue in any of the election campaigns" (Bremer and Schulte-Cloos 2019). The overall limited relevance of the role of the opposition in the responsibility debates at hand, confirm this picture. Moreover, given the lack of direct affect, few civil society actors had immediate stakes in the debate and indeed, civil society voices are marginal. Overall, rather than being diverse in the domestic realm, the actor composition is diverse in terms of a strong participation of European actors, from EU institutions and other EU member states. In line with the expectations from both explanatory macro dimensions, the debate is open for the participation of European actors. Moreover, this strong presence of European actors is connected to the general 'master frame' of the German crisis debate. While the domestic blame game remains low, the Eurozone Crisis is discursively constructed as a 'crisis of the others'. Even the role of the German government is only rarely contested domestically, and politicization takes the form of "remote conflicts" (de Wilde and Lord 2016). Responsibility debates focus on individual national crises, most notably in Greece and especially in the last crisis period. The Eurozone Crisis is pictured as an external problem and not one for which German actors are held responsible. Responsibility for solving the crisis lies within the 'crisis countries'. German political actors disconnect themselves from the crisis blame game; instead, they appear as requesting others to act (Roose et al. 2020). Finally, apart from journalists and the government in the last phase of the crisis period, blame shifting to debtor countries is less important than expected. Here, the lack of a contentious tradition seems to play a more important role in the structuration of the debate than the antagonism of creditor and debtor countries in the Eurozone Crisis. Overall, however, the findings for Germany match the expectations to a large extent. This is different in Greece, which therefore deserves more attention in the following.

10.2.2 Greece

In Greece, too, both the configurations of the political system and the crisis scenario contribute to an understanding of the politicization pattern. In fact, the majoritarian system and the dramatic crisis impact seem to reinforce each other. While expectations concerning the high politicization intensity were met, the politicization shape is different as hypothesized. Starting with the former, the debate is the most salient and the most contentious (see also: Hutter and Kriesi 2019b, p. 8). The social, economic and political insecurity evoked a strong need for the identification of culprits. Crisis trigger blame and this is clearly visible in Greece. The findings for actor participation underlined the need of a differentiated perspective on politicization processes on all dimensions; while less diverse when

measured in terms of non-executive or non-political actor shares, the Greek debate is considerably more diverse than the German one when it comes to the range of domestic political actors. The debate is much less focused on few executive actors. Instead, a broad range of oppositional actors is on par with a similarly heterogenous participation of executive voices and, overall, domestic conflicts over the crisis are fought on many different dimensions. Nevertheless, this diversity is overtly limited to the political realm. This is unexpected and runs counter the expectation that politicization processes in times of crisis encompass a broad variety of actors from all spheres of society, who will come forward to raise their concerns. In Greece, in contrast, the intensive blame game between government and opposition left little room for voices from civil society, economy, or other spheres from outside of institutionalized politics.

As expected, the issue framing concentrates on the domestic impact and the domestic implementation of Eurozone Crisis policies. And in contrast to Germany (and Spain), the Greek debate is less driven by European events but rather seems to follow its own (domestic) logic. Both findings correspond to the dominant direction of the blame game which the crisis-specific explanation fails to explain and which, therefore, deserves special attention. Despite the important role of European actors in the crisis management, the answer to the prevalent question *Who is to blame?* is predominantly found in the domestic arena, among the political adversary and sometimes even among one's own party colleagues. Against the expectations, in Greece the political conflict around the Eurozone Crisis is a domestic one. Here, the second explanatory dimension is complementary.

In Greece, instead of generating new, Europeanized conflict structures, the Eurozone Crisis reinforced traditional national conflicts and an adversarial political culture. Pappas (2013) argues that the history of Greek politics is characterized by political polarization. Since the end of the civil war, the political sphere has largely been dominated by confrontational rhetoric. The delegitimization of domestic adversaries and the shifting of blame to other tiers of the political system is part and parcel of this rhetoric. For the years immediately preceding the crisis, Kovras and Loizides (2014, p. 8) conclude that "[i]n Greece, the blame game […] became an election-winning formula for PASOK and New Democracy (ND) at the expense of other issues." The high concentration of power in the executive and other majoritarian elements, such as the first-party bonus shape intense party competition. Already before the crisis, "stakes are high in each election" (Altiparmakis 2019, p. 98) and with its many elections, this strategic blame game was then reinforced during the Eurozone Crisis and expanded into other parts of society. Vasilopoulou et al. (2014) describe for the early crisis years in Greece that "[t]he two mainstream parties, ND and PASOK, engaged in a blame shifting rhetoric predominantly criticizing each other for the crisis and the inability over the years to instigate successful reform. Given the fact that these two parties have alternated in power since the restoration of

democracy in 1974, it is rational for them to shift part of the blame onto the other main opposition party".[103] Similarly, Ladi and Tsakgroni show that in Greek parliamentary debates in the crisis, blame shifting "is much more complex that just blaming the external enemy and often takes the form of historical blameshifting, turning blame onto previous governments" (Ladi and Tsagkroni 2019, p. 7).

Moreover, the traditionally closed Greek system and the newly emerging opportunities, that came about with the crisis of the old elites, brought oppositional actors to the scene, who had incentives to join in the domestic blame game. The findings confirm those by Vasilopoulou et al. who show that, even for the newly emerging left-wing challengers from Syriza, blame shifting to external elites is surprisingly low, despite its fierce opposition against European austerity dictates; instead, the arising opportunities to gain power "entailed that it would primarily target its domestic competitors" (Vasilopoulou et al. 2014, p. 11; see also: Sommer et al. 2016; Sommer 2020). The analysis showed that also in the later stages of the crisis, this verdict remains true until Syriza entered power in 2015 and, suddenly, their inclination to shift blame to Europe strongly increases.

Despite the strong dominance of government-challenger conflicts in the political sphere, this domestication of the blame game is not limited to party conflict and political elites. Rather, the entirety of the political system became a blame target for all parts of society (Theodossopoulos 2013; Andreadis and Stavrakakis 2019). When in Germany the master frame was that of a 'crisis of the others', the dominant interpretation in the Greek debate is one of a general legitimacy crisis of the entire political system and "political indignation" (Altiparmakis 2019, p. 96). At the heart of this picture is that "the major political parties had created a corrupt system of power, based on intertwining political and economic interests, bribery and intrigues" (Psimitis 2011, p. 196). This is also mirrored in the issue framing of the responsibility debate which puts a strong emphasis on aspects of political behaviour among political elites in that country. Responsibility was not only discussed in debates about the success and failure of policies but also in terms direct and personal responsibility of officeholders. This collective failure of domestic politics was symbolically localized in the Greek parliament. A central slogan of the massive protests after 2009 was "Burn, burn the brothel called Parliament" (ibid.). Here, a political tradition of excluding large parts of the population in majoritarian arrangements backfired in a massive popular outcry against the entire political system, which was held responsible for the misery (Altiparmakis and Lorenzini 2018). Contrary to the expectations then, in the Greek

[103] They go on to argue that "[t]he most significant frame for PASOK […] was a reference to the mistakes made by previous ND governments as well as to the non-constructive spirit of ND as leader of the opposition. On the other hand, as expected, ND overwhelmingly blamed the inability of PASOK to govern at this particular moment in time, accusing it for the 'evils' of the past that led the country to crisis." These interpretations are in line with the overall pattern of the blame game identified in Greece and also with the more specific attribution patterns found for PASOK and ND in section 9.3.2.

crisis debate external responsibilities for the crisis are not the central focus. In relative terms and apart from the role of the Syriza government in the last phase, EU actors and even German actors are rarely blamed in the crisis debate.

Public opinion research supports this interpretation from the citizen perspective. In 2012, the Pew Research Center asked the population in 'crisis countries' about the main culprits for the economic depression (Pew Global Attitudes Project 2012, p. 55). In Greece, 70 per cent of the respondents attributed blame to the domestic government (and, hence, not to the European Union, Germany, the IMF or banks), far more than in any other country. Especially after the parliamentary approval of the first bailout plan, citizens attributed more and more responsibility to the national government at the expense of the EU (Kosmidis 2014, p. 1142). "Put differently, Greek voters see their national government as responsible for the political situation, even though the latitude given to the government by the EU is limited" (Tzelgov 2017, p. 8).

10.2.3 Spain

When compared to Greece, politicization dynamics in Spain are less extreme and crisis debates in this country have overall received less attention. In the comparative design of this research, Spain was presented as an intermediary case between Germany and Greece. Indeed, the Spanish politicization pattern is in between on both dimensions; while politicization intensity is closer to Germany than Greece[104], its domestic shape is closer to the one found in the Greek debate.

Characteristics of the political system in Spain help to explain why the severe crisis impact did not translate into a Greek-style politicization intensity, at least in the early phases of the crisis. In contrast to the historical polarization of the Greek party system, the 'pacted nature' of the transition to democracy in Spain has shaped a less adversarial political culture. Lisi et al. (2019), for instance, document on the basis of the analysis of party manifestos, how populism is much higher in Greece compared to Spain. The more consensual tradition and the importance assigned to social dialogue also guided the political handling of the Eurozone Crisis during its first years and contained an excessive politicization at that time. Da Campos Lima and Artiles describe how "[t]hrough a variety of approaches the PSOE government tried to combine previous experiences of concertation in Spain – tripartite, bipartite and inter-confederal" which resulted in a social pact that „prevented a political crisis in the short term" (da Campos Lima and Artiles 2011, p. 400). Moreover, Spain did not immediately impose austerity and instead engaged in expansionary fiscal policy at first (Armingeon and

[104] To be fair, it is worth a reminder that politicization levels are assessed in relative terms and in this case, the template for comparison is an extremely salient and contentious debate in Greece. Bluntly, the Spanish debate appears similar to the German one on many dimensions not least because Greece is so different in terms of intensity and temporal rhythm.

Baccaro 2012, p. 172). Soon, however, the situation changed and, in an attempt to regain confidence of financial markets and reacting to growing European demands, the socialist government started introducing cuts in public spending and a structural reform of the labour market in 2010. In 2011, the rise of the indignados that mobilized against austerity and for 'real' democracy "injected new life into Spanish (contentious) politics" (Ancelovici 2015, pp. 17–18). Moreover, after the conservative party's victory in the November 2011 general elections, "institutional channels were completely closed, and the government henceforth took unilateral unpopular decisions." For Ancelovici, "[t]his was the perfect mix for a resurgence and intensification of contention" (ibid.). This change is clearly visible in the intensification of the politicization dynamics (see section 9.4.1). For the time being, however, the party system remained relatively stable, at least when compared to Greece. This stability is one of the factors that explain why, despite similar levels of insurgence on the streets, politicization intensity in Spain did not reach up to Greek levels during this time of intensified crisis. It was not until the rise of Podemos in 2014 and the 2015 general elections that the traditional two-party system was put to an end (Vidal 2018).

While the crisis debate is clearly more politicized in Greece than in Spain, both are strongly domesticized in their shape. Especially expectations of a prominent European blame game in the Spanish debate were misplaced. Despite the growing authority exercised by EU institutions and the socio-economic misery which followed austerity, responsibility for failures was attributed to domestic actors. While in Greece, the combination of the political and economic crisis with a closed and adversarial political system served as explanations, further factors explain the outcome in Spain.

Firstly, the Spanish debate on the Eurozone Crisis were soon intertwined with debates about ongoing corruption scandals among political parties in that country[105] (Orriols and Cordero 2016). As a consequence, crisis debates were absorbed by domestic issues and by the perception of a profound crisis of representation. Exemplified in the protesters' demands for real democracy ('democracia real, ya'), a "democratic regeneration" (Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro 2018) was put on the public agenda which overshadowed contentious debates about the contours of European (crisis) governance. These demands for democratic renewal and the anger behind them were directed towards the two established parties that had alternated in power since the transition to democracy. Attributions of blame in the public sphere followed a similar logic, including mutual blame shifting between

[105] Two examples are the 'Gürtel corruption case' uncovered in 2009 and the 'Bárcenas affair' from 2013. Both cases were closely entangled with the real estate bubble in Spain. Vidal (2018, p. 269) describes how in 2014 "concern over corruption and fraud had become the second most worrying problem for Spaniards (slightly below unemployment). At this time, 63.8% of Spanish citizens claimed that corruption and fraud was one of the three most important problems facing the country. In March 2008, only 0.2% had agreed with this claim".

PP and PSOE politicians. As in the case of Greece, insights from other areas confirm this interpretation. Eurobarometer data underline the impression of a fundamental crisis of political legitimacy in Spain; the share of Spaniards who were very or fairly satisfied with the functioning of democracy in their country decreased from 77 per cent before the Eurozone Crisis in 2007 to only 22 per cent in 2014 (Vidal 2018). Consequently, Teperoglou et al. (2014) show how voting in the crisis was rather driven by concerns about the political situation in Spain than European affairs and that voters assigned responsibility for the crisis to their government and less to the EU. Both major parties were blamed for their "alleged joint responsibility in the mismanagement of the economy and their inability to ameliorate the worst consequences of austerity" (Cordero and Montero 2015, p. 358). In Spain (and in Greece) the fact that austerity was first introduced by a socialist party explains much of the dealignment among left leaning voters who felt abandoned and deceived (Roberts 2013; Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser 2016, p. 1079). Finally, protest research comes to similar conclusions concerning the dominant direction of conflict; Baglioni and Hurrelmann show for Spain that in the years "with the most intense protest activity (2011 to 2013), protests aimed at national-level decision-making clearly outnumbered protests with an explicit EU reference" (Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016, p. 108) and studying protest waves and Spain and other Southern European countries, Altiparmakis and Lorenzini find that "despite the supranational character of the Eurozone crisis, political conflicts remain grounded in national terms and events" (Altiparmakis and Lorenzini 2018, p. 79).

A second argument for the absence of European blame shifting in Spain is the fact that the consensual tradition extended towards a historical pro-European consensus among mainstream parties (Álvarez-Miranda 1996; Fishman 2003). This consensus held up and the Eurozone Crisis did not enforce Eurosceptic positions among parties (Palau and Ansemil 2020). Even the anti-austerity challengers from Podemos, who started to win ground from 2014 onwards, predominantly pursued a populist anti-elite rhetoric directed at the two established parties (Font et al. 2021). Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro (2018) show that, overall, party positions on European integration even *improved* during the Eurozone Crisis in Spain. For them, this is, on the one hand, related to the above-mentioned crisis of representation that put the focus on domestic elites and their management of the crisis. Comparing Spain and Portugal, they furthermore argue that "[t]he visibility of the intervention and political responsibility of European and international institutions' on national economies vis-à-vis national governments was different in both countries" (ibid. p. 354). In Portugal, the visibility of the bailout and its consequences were stronger and consequently, the role of European institutions and became a more urgent topic and European conflicts over bailout conditions were more central. In contrast, Spain formally requested a loan to recapitalize its banking system and not a bailout. While the conditionality was similar, the visibility of supranational intervention was less obvious for the

wider public and it was therefore less salient and contentious.

Summing up and bringing together the perspective on both 'crisis countries', the discussions show that contextual factors shaped the politicization patterns and contributed to its domestication. Contrasting studies that have suggested a strong Europeanization of conflict, the findings confirm expectations that the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis has "proceeded mostly in nationally segmented domestic publics instead of a transnationally integrated European public sphere" (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2014, quoted in: Baglioni and Hurrelmann 2016). Against the expectations, this domestication is strongest in the two crisis-affected countries Spain and Greece.

The finding of a domestic orientation of blame games in both 'crisis countries' requires a final but important comment. The fact that, in relative terms, European blame shifting is marginal in both debates, does not imply that there was no public criticism of European institutions or the German government. In the Eurozone Crisis, domestic governments in Spain and Greece were blamed for not speaking up against intrusive European demands, for failing in European bailout negotiations or for implementing unpopular European policies. Protesters depicted domestic politicians as 'puppets of the EU'. In these cases, blaming domestic governments equals criticizing European actors or in Mair's words, "[t]o mobilize against the government in this sense is also to mobilize against Europe, since Europe is, par excellence, the business of government" (2009, p. 3; see also: Hobolt and Tilley 2014, p. 155). But, overall, when it comes to the core of attributing responsibility in the debate, the blame game in the Greek and Spanish crisis debates unfolded along domestic lines.

10.3 Beyond Authority Transfer

Beyond these case-specific interpretations and the importance of contextual factors, this study points to further, more general implications. One concerns the central explanation for politicization dynamics in Europe which states that politicization follows the transfer of authority to supranational institutions beyond the sphere of national sovereignty. The argument is that the "more decision-making power shifts to the European level […], the more attention for and criticism of the European Union rise" in the public sphere (Statham 2010, p. 295). In particular for the most affected countries, the Eurozone Crisis implied a massive restriction of domestic sovereignty and a significant transfer of authority to European institutions (Dawson and de Witte 2013). With respect to the research focus at hand, this suggested not only a generally strong politicization of the Eurozone Crisis in 'crisis countries' but also that responsibility attributions and blame travel with policy-making authority (Rittberger et al. 2017). In short, a strong blaming focus on European institutions that exercise authority over the handling of the crisis was expected.

The astonishing findings for Greece but also for Spain, show that in the case of the Eurozone Crisis,

the authority transfer hypothesis is simultaneously correct and incorrect. It is correct in the sense that, indeed, the most hit country with the strongest transfer of authority shows the strongest politicization intensity. However, at the same time, the hypothesis is incorrect when it comes to the shape of the politicization pattern and the direction of the blame game. It is not the European level that is at the epicentre of the crisis blame game. The Eurozone Crisis is inherently European but in Greece and Spain, the buck stops at the national borders.

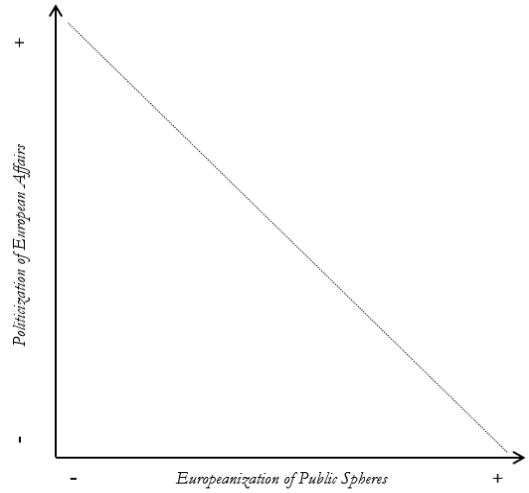
To make sense of this counter-intuitive outcome beyond the case-specific explanations above, a general interpretation is that blame follows policy implementation. While European institutions held authority over the Eurozone Crisis management, governments were in charge of its domestic implementation. This lends support to Rittberger et al. (2017) who argue that blame in European policy fields is directed at the implementing agent rather than at authority per se. The level of blame shifting to European actors then depends on the European policy issues at stake and whether this entails supranational or governmental implementation. While this implementer hypothesis is undoubtedly part of the explanation, it does not fully explain the picture. In Greece, the 'troika' representatives were not only overseeing domestic efforts, but they were actively involved in policy implementation on the ground. In contrast to the soft or 'implicit' bailout in Spain (see above), supranational intervention was clearly visible. With that in mind, I argue that in extreme political situations such as the Eurozone Crisis in Greece, the political conflict over European issues follows a paradoxical trend. When the impact of European integration reaches such an extent that it shakes the domestic political landscape, the immediate direction of political conflict switches to the domestic realm. In this sense, politicization does not follow the transfer of authority, per se, but its direct consequences on the ground. In this process, European topics are transformed into domestic ones and absorbed into domestic conflict dynamics. In the hardest hit countries, the Eurozone Crisis led to a domestication of political conflicts over Europe and politicization patterns were driven by domestic blame shifting.

Overall, one lesson learned is that the classical authority transfer hypothesis fails to explain diverging politicization dynamics in the Eurozone Crisis. Instead, the results confirm the push factor of domestic opportunity structures. Europe pulls but what is more crucial for the trajectory of politicization is the development of domestic political opportunities and when these opportunities are conducive to political change, Europeanized conflicts become secondary. Hence, what matters for the analysis of politicization in times of crisis are domestic power shifts and the opportunities (and constraints) they imply for domestic executives and their challengers. The case discussions in the preceding section highlighted the importance of these opportunities. This qualification of the authority transfer hypothesis leads to a second lesson learned. It underlines the necessity to differentiate intensity and shape of politicization and to disentangle processes of politicization and Europeanization.

10.4 The Politicization-Europeanization Nexus

In this study, I argued that politicization of European affairs and the Europeanization or public spheres are not the same. The parallel analysis of the index of politicization intensity and the Europeanization index in section 9.4 underlined the necessity of an analytical distinction. Throughout the crisis period, the most politicized debate (Greece) is the least Europeanized one and, vice versa, the most Europeanized one (Germany) is the least politicized. What is more, the aggregate indices show a decreasing trend of politicization throughout the crisis and, at the same time, an increasing trend of Europeanization. Hence, the results stand in contrast to the widespread assumption that the more Europeanized a public debate, the more politicized debates over European issues should be and that "[t]he emergence of Europeanised public spheres constitutes a first step in the politicisation of European policies" (Risse 2010, p. 232). These conclusions instead corroborate research by Grande and Hutter who find that the relationship between the Europeanization of public spheres and politicization is not positive but rather negative (Grande and Hutter 2016c, p. 80). In fact, rather than the Europeanization of the debate, the *domestication* of the debate fuels its politicization. Or the other way around, a Europeanization of the debate is only likely if domestic politicization is low. Figure 41 exemplifies the politicization-Europeanization nexus in an oversimplified manner. While surprising at first, this relationship of these two processes on the macro level makes sense when adding the micro perspective on the attribution behaviour of collective actors and the directions in which they drive public conflicts. I turn to that in the following section.

Figure 41: The Politicization-Europeanization Nexus



10.5 Drivers of Politicization: Party Position, Ideology, and the Direction of Blame

Apart from discussions on country differences and intermediary factors to explain these differences, the study adds to underlying discussions about the core drivers of politicization in the public sphere.

The micro perspective on responsibility attributions helps to detect and explain phenomena on the macro level of politicization patterns. From the attribution of responsibility perspective, the results of this study suggest as follows. Politicization intensity is driven by the domestic opposition. At the same time, the participation of the domestic opposition drives the domestication of conflict. Political challengers are firstly more prone to engage in blame shifting than other actors, and secondly, they have a stronger focus on the domestic arena. Blame shifting to the European level, instead, emanates from government actors. While these findings confirm basic assumptions of attribution studies, they are at odds with central arguments in politicization research.

Starting with the former, the findings corroborate those by Gerhards et al. (2009) who find that oppositional actors tend to blame the government while governmental actors are more prone to claim credit for positive outcomes. Also, the finding that European actors provide opportunities to disperse responsibility for government actors is in line with their findings and with similar studies conducted by Heinkelmann et al. (2020; Heinkelmann-Wild and Zangl 2020). Governments are more inclined to shift blame to EU actors than oppositional actors, but the extent to which they adhere to this strategy is surprisingly low, especially in 'crisis countries'. This qualifies some of the above mentioned findings by Gerhards et al., who studied blame shifting in times of routine politics and find that EU institutions are the quasi natural scapegoats for governments in European policy fields (Gerhards et al. 2013). Again, the crisis impact explains this divergence; I argue that, paradoxically, government blame shifting to EU institutions is more common in times of routine politics than in times of crisis, when the blame game between domestic challengers and governments prevails. When the EU is the standard addressee of blame in time of routine politics, the domestic realm is the standard direction of blame in times of crisis. In line with the data at hand, Hobolt and Tilley, for instance, show that blaming Brussels was not a common tactic for prime ministers in the Eurozone Crisis and when there was scapegoating "it [was] of previous national governments rather than of the EU" (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, p. 111). Finally, the argument that blame shifting is highly strategic is underlined by the finding that EU institutions resort less to blame shifting in public debates. This is in line with the basic argument that technocratic actor are less dependent on the voter will and that they have therefore fewer incentives to present themselves in positive terms than directly elected actors (Greuter 2014; Sommer and Roose 2015; see also: Schimmelfennig 2020).

Now turning to actor-related arguments in politicization research, the findings are at odds with salience theory of partisan competition in European integration research. Scholars in this tradition assume that the politicization of European affairs is driven by fringe and oppositional parties, since governments are expected to have more to lose from speaking up and emphasizing their role in European politics. From this perspective, Euroscepticism is "the politics of opposition" (Sitter 2001)

and when facing government, parties are expected to moderate their positions towards European institutions. In stark contrast, the analysis (section 9.3.2.2) showed that irrespective of crisis context all major parties in all three countries *increased* their tendency to shift blame to Europe in times of incumbency, while overtly directing blame at the government in times of opposition. It makes a difference for the direction of blame if a party is in the opposition or in the government and when many oppositional parties are driving politicization dynamics, as in the case of Greece, European blame games become less likely. The consistency of this pattern underlines that blame shifting is highly strategic rather than driven by programmatic considerations and that blaming Europe should not be conflated with Euroscepticism, despite existing overlaps.

Apart from this, party ideology played a role as a conditioning factor for general blame shifting and for European blame shifting. In both 'crisis countries', the increase of (European) blame shifting in times of incumbency was stronger for parties of the left than for conservative parties. Further away from their traditional party positions, austerity politics are considered more dangerous among the left than among liberal and conservative parties who are more inclined to also claim credit. This finding provides support for the argument that the relationship between the perceived electoral risks of austerity and the propensity to engage in blame avoidance is conditioned by party ideology (Giger and Nelson 2011; Alonso and Ruiz-Rufino 2020). This tendency is strongest for the radical-leftist Syriza in Greece who showed the strongest inclination to blame European actors among all parties, but again, only once it took over government in January 2015.

This last discussion brings us to a further ore argument in the politicization literature. A widespread explanation for politicization dynamics is party ideology and the existence of far-right parties in the respective country (Hooghe and Marks 2009). The argument is that the radical right challenges the pro-European consensus among mainstream parties by fuelling Eurosceptic sentiments, framed in cultural-identitarian terms. In this research, I have been mostly silent about the role of the radical right. One justification of the case selection was the relatively marginal role of radical right parties in the three countries within the analysed time frame. Indeed, none of the crisis debates featured a strong voice from radical right parties. To be fair, especially the absence of the Eurosceptical AfD in the German debate after its founding in 2013 could partly be due to its initial difficulties in gaining access to the German mainstream media. However, in general, the role of the radical right has been marginal in all three countries and yet, politicization patterns are highly distinct. This is not to say that the radical right does not play a role in structuring conflicts over Europe; however, the analysis suggests that its role in structuring different patterns of politicization might be overstated in the literature (see also: Dolezal and Hellström 2016).

A final, similar note should be made with respect to the role of civil society, including social

movements and other protest actors. In the most-hit countries, the Eurozone Crisis led to massive protest waves that became common symbols for the widespread indignation among large parts of the population (Diani and Kousis 2014; Roose et al. 2018a; Portos 2021; Romanos and Sadaba 2022). Especially in closed systems with few institutional access points and in crisis affected countries, I expected a strong incentive for civil society actors to go public. In none of the three countries, however, civil society actors are central drivers of politicization intensity.[106] Only in Spain do civil society actors appear among the central conflict lines. In Greece, civil society shows a very high share of blame shifting to German actors but, overall and in both debtor countries, they contribute to the dominant blame focus on the domestic government (see also: Altiparmakis and Lorenzini 2018). In Germany, civil society hardly plays a role at all. At least when it comes to the perspective on responsibility attributions and when compared to the dominant party arena, the role of civil society in the structuration of politicization patterns is limited (see also: Dolezal et al. 2016b). This is in line with Kriesi and Grande's conclusions that "the euro crisis does not pave the way towards a 'cosmopolitan Europe' based on a strong mobilisation of civil society (Grande and Kriesi 2016, p. 274).

10.6 The Eurozone Crisis: A New Quality in Politicization?

At the beginning of this dissertation, I asked to what extent the Eurozone Crisis is a 'game changer' in the politicization of European affairs and in how far it has, as many have argued, introduced a new quality in politicization (Leupold 2016). This argument has at least three dimensions. Firstly, scholars have argued that the crisis has introduced an unprecedented Europeanization of national public spheres including a strongly Europeanized conflict pattern (Risse 2014c). Secondly, scholars have assumed that the Eurozone Crisis caused an extraordinarily high politicization intensity surpassing all previous periods of European integration (Rauh and Zürn 2014). Thirdly, scholars have argued that the new quality of politicization is reflected in a re-intensification of conflicts over socio-economic issues and a diminishing importance of identity or cultural conflicts (Statham and Trenz 2015).

Concerning the first dimension and based on the analysis at hand, this new episode of the politicization of European affairs does not seem to be all that new. When it comes to an alleged new phase of Europeanized conflict constellations, the results suggest as follows: while it shook the whole continent, the Eurozone Crisis did not lead to a fundamental realignment of discursive conflict constellations in Europe. The classic national container remains the dominant arena for public contestations,

[106] One argument that could partially explain this surprisingly marginal role of civil society actors is the fact that the distinction of protest and party politics is becoming increasingly blurred (Borbáth and Hutter 2021). In the Eurozone Crisis, opposition to austerity drove parties to the streets, as in the case of the two 'movement parties' Podemos and Syriza.

especially when the crisis hits hard, and domestic conflicts overshadow European ones. Time and again, public sphere research has documented the national orientation of public debates and national media reporting (Machill et al. 2006). In the most affected 'crisis countries' where European institutions and the 'troika' strongly intervened in domestic crisis politics, the Eurozone Crisis has not changed this pattern. In Germany, the debate is more Europeanized but also less politicized. Rather than generating new configurations of conflict, the crisis debate shows a strong imprint of traditional political cultures. Path dependency and national legacies matter for politicization dynamics. This applies to all three cases. In Germany, the inclusive tradition of the political system and a strong pro-European tradition are mirrored in a less contentious debate. In Greece, the Eurozone Crisis reinforced long standing national conflicts with a tradition of adversarial politics and institutional mistrust. In Spain, the crisis of representation and the pro-European consensus prohibited intense European conflict dynamics.

When it comes to the second dimension of the 'crisis as game changer'-thesis, this study is not equipped to provide full empirical insights. Focusing on the crisis period between 2009 and 2016, I am not able to compare politicization intensity with earlier periods. Longitudinal research, however, suggests that the Eurozone Crisis has not introduced a new peak in the history of politicization, at least not in Western European countries (Hutter et al. 2016b, p. 242). Greece, however, is special and this study as well as more recent findings by Hutter and Kriesi (2019b) indeed suggest a very intense and unprecedented politicization intensity.

Concerning the argument that the crisis has changed the nature of political conflicts in the sense that it re-intensified its economic dimension, the empirical results are mixed. Overall, the data clearly showed the dominance of a political framing of the crisis debate. While the crisis extends to all societal fields, in all three countries, the Eurozone Crisis was mainly debated as a political crisis. This is the case for the dominant sub-issues of the debate as well as for dominant justifications. Moreover, responsibility for the crisis was overwhelmingly attributed to political actors rather than economic ones. Austerity and other socio-economic issues are central in the crisis debates in the two 'crisis countries' and more often discussed than cultural issues and, especially in Spain, economic justifications prevail over cultural ones. But while these cultural issues are not dominant in the debate, they are clearly the most contentious ones in the sense that they trigger the highest share of blame shifting in all three countries. To sum up, the economic issue dimension prevails over the cultural one but more than economic issues, debates over cultural issues contribute to the polarization of the debates.

10.7 Creditors vs. Debtors?

One dimension of the assumed European blame games in the Eurozone Crisis received strong attention; the crisis has pitted debtor countries and creditor countries against each other (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2018). Hence, this antagonism was expected to structure the public crisis debates with a clearly visible blame game between both poles. Especially in Greece, the effects of the crisis were disastrous and the grounds for hostile intergovernmental conflict seemed to be prepared. De Wilde and Lord summed up their expectations as such:

"When the news broke that the Greek government had been lying for years about the Greek public deficit to its EU partners, the Euro crisis started in earnest. The ensuing crisis politics constitute a very prominent episode of politicisation of European integration (Risse 2015). German media immediately framed the crisis in terms of international conflict pitting 'deceitful and uncompetitive Greece' against 'honest and hardworking Germany'. Greek media followed suit and frequently depicted Germany and later the Troika as an 'occupational force' in the country." (de Wilde and Lord 2016, p. 152).

Based on the data at hand, I cannot confirm this picture. The Greek-German conflict line is merely one among many others, neither very strong, nor the most negative one. In the light of the dominance of domestic blame games in the two 'crisis countries', Germany and other creditor countries are hardly identified as central scapegoats. Greek actors especially evaluate German actors very negatively but given the low weight of Greek-German links in the overall crisis debate, this dimension of the blame game is of limited relevance. The same is true for the Spanish-German link. From the reverse perspective, Greek actors (but not Spanish ones) are a frequent target of blame shifting in the German debate, but again, Greece is not the central scapegoat in the debate either. Only German journalists show a strong and continuous trend of blaming Greece. Political actors, including the government, are less critical than expected. Only in the last crisis period between 2015 and 2016 does blame shifting to Greece become a dominant communication pattern. Overall, only when journalists actively contribute to responsibility debates does the blame game between debtor states and creditor states become a relevant conflict dimension. However, this is by no means representative of the entirety of the crisis debates in the three countries. This is in stark contrast with the abundant qualitative studies on that matter but its basic premise is in line with recent findings by Traber et al. who find "no clear evidence for a relationship between adverse economic conditions and blame shifting to Germany" in Greece (Traber et al. 2020, p. 17).

10.8 Contributions to the Literature – A Final Assessment

This section assesses the initially stated contributions to the literature (section 1.5) and sums up core arguments. Overall, the study complements core insights from existing politicization research (1-6) (de Wilde et al. 2016; Hutter et al. 2016b) and it adds to the literature on responsibility attributions and blame (7-9) (Gerhards et al. 2009; Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Rittberger et al. 2017).

1) First, attribution of blame is often mentioned as relevant in politicization studies, but hardly ever theorized. Filling this gap, the attribution of responsibility approach offered an alternative perspective on the role of actors as drivers of politicization dynamics. Particularly in times of crisis, when the quest for responsibility is pressing and blame shifting pervasive, the perspective on attribution logics is crucial to understanding politicization dynamics on the macro level. From this perspective, the study showed that politicization *intensity* is mainly driven by the presence of oppositional actors in public debates and by domestic political competition.

2) Secondly, the attribution of responsibility approach allowed to account for the direction of political conflict, a dimension which is often secondary in politicization research. Distinguishing intensity and shape of the politicization pattern, the above-mentioned role of the opposition as the driving force can be substantiated. A strong presence of oppositional actors in public debates leads to a high intensity, *domesticized* politicization of European affairs, while it is government actors who contribute to a European dimension of public blame games.

3) Thirdly, patterns of politicisation are specific to the settings in which they unfold. The differences between the three politicization patterns showed that politicization is far from linear and underlined the importance to unpack "differentiated politicization" (de Wilde and Lord 2016). Politicization processes are more complex and manifold than early politicization research suggested. The integration of politicization and Europeanization into one framework of intensity and shape allows to account for these different trajectories. Following this distinction, the study corroborated findings by Grande and Hutter (2016c) that against the expectations, the relationship between the Europeanization of public spheres and the politicization of Europe is negative, rather than positive.

4) Fourthly, the endorsement of differentiated politicization leads to a further lesson learned for the larger field of politicization studies. It seems self-explanatory that the assessment of politicization processes depends on its operationalization, on the object and on the extent to which it accommodates multi-dimensionality. Often, however, the common politicization framework disguises these differences which complicates comparability. Scholars should pay more attention to specifying what aspect of politicization they are looking at, how they operationalize it and how the results speak to existing studies. This specification also entails that blaming Europe should not be conflated with

ideological Euroscepticism. The study showed that blame shifting is strongly influenced by strategic rather than by programmatic considerations.

5) Fifthly, the results underlined that the unpacking of politicization needs to be accompanied by a systematic approach to explain cross-country differences. The political opportunity perspective helped to understand context factors that influence how collective actors engage in public debates about responsibility and contributed to recent discussions of how intermediary factors "condition the way political conflicts over Europe play out in public debates" (Grande and Hutter 2016a, p. 24). Apart from the role of the crisis impact, I argued that if conflict is at the heart of politicization, one needs to consider the institutionalized settings of dealing with conflict in national political cultures. Indeed, the results for Greece showed that in times of crisis, closed political systems further spur politicization intensity and the domestication of political conflict.

6) Sixthly, the analysis of politicization patterns in three countries in the extended crisis period from 2009 to 2016 adds detailed empirical data to existing research. The results put the argument of a new quality of politicization into perspective and showed that the Eurozone Crisis did not fundamentally change conflict dimensions in these countries. Importantly, the analysis of the two 'crisis countries' Greece and Spain contributed to filling an empirical gap in the literature that has so far mainly focused on creditor countries in the Eurozone Crisis. While the moderate but strongly Europeanized politicization pattern in Germany is largely in line with previous findings, the analysis of Greece and Spain adds new and surprising results to the state of empirical politicization research. Finally, and in contrast to other studies, the analysis included the latest intensification of the Eurozone Crisis after the takeover of the Syriza government in Greece in January 2015 and showed that, indeed, this last phase implied an important twist in politicization dynamics, especially in Germany but also in terms of European blame shifting on behalf of the new Greek government.

7) Seventhly, and now turning away from the sphere of politicization studies, the DAAA offered a standardized analysis of responsibility debates which serves as a useful extension of the qualitative case studies that dominate in this area of research.

8) Eighthly, the research offered insights into the understanding of responsibility attributions in European policy fields and filled an empirical gap in this field by studying those in a period of crisis. Partially deviating from earlier findings, the empirical results surprisingly suggest that domestic blame shifting to European institutions might be more central in times of European routine politics than in times of crisis when the domestic blame game between challengers and governments prevails.

9) Finally, the standardized approach to study contentious debates in the Eurozone Crisis substantiated the many qualitative studies in this field. In particular, the findings put the focus on the discursive

antagonism between creditor and debtor states into perspective. The blame game between North and South is only a minor dimension of the overall structure of conflicts over the Eurozone Crisis.

10.9 Avenues for Future Research

This section now points to limitations of the research and it delineates some avenues for further research. First of all, the scope of this research is limited to the Eurozone Crisis. This entails that, beyond a general claim, I am not in the position to provide empirical evidence on the extent to which the Eurozone Crisis has changed existing patterns of politicization in the respective countries. But the theoretical and conceptual framework is located on a broader level and not necessarily tied to the Eurozone Crisis. I have argued that the attribution of responsibility perspective is particularly useful for the study of conflict in times of crisis, and hence, its application to other periods of European crises, such as the so-called European refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016, could be promising. Equally interesting would an adaptation to non-crisis settings and less contested European policy fields be. Indeed, comparing the results of this research with findings presented by Gerhards et al. (2009; 2013) as well as other scholars (Heinkelmann-Wild et al. 2020) suggests that the European dimension of public blame games might be more pronounced in times of European routine politics than in times of crisis. While this seems paradoxical at first, this expectation is in line with the results of this study which show that crisis intensity pushes domestic blame games rather than European ones. Studies building upon this could compare patterns of politicization and strategies of (Europeanized) blame shifting in times of routine politics with those in times of crisis.

The limitation on three countries in this study is another aspect on which future research could focus. Studies could add countries with closed systems and limited crisis impact and further crisis-affected countries on the more consensus-oriented side, such as Portugal, to corroborate the findings. Portugal would be especially interesting case to test the authority-transfer hypothesis because of the 'high clarity' intervention by the 'troika' (see section 10.2.3). Further research may adapt the design of this study as a starting point for the comparative analysis of different 'blame worlds'. Part of this would be a finer grained analysis of the role of dynamic opportunities in the context of referendums, elections or other important events that go beyond the often-abstract level of the political opportunity perspective applied in this study.

A further path towards a more detailed analysis of the interplay of politicization and blame includes a more substantial perspective on the role of fringe parties and party ideology. While the results of this study show that the fear of electoral punishment in times of austerity drives incumbent parties from the left to shift blame while incumbents from the right also claim credit (see: Sommer 2020), a better picture of the effects of party ideology on the frequency and direction of blame is needed. A

full picture of responsibility debates in the public sphere furthermore includes a comparative substantiation of the role of actors beyond the sphere of politics, including civil society and economic actors. This perspective also includes a further investigation on the role of journalists as an independent voice in public politicization processes and blame games. Journalists follow their own logic when attributing blame and the analysis of cross-national blame shifting showed, for instance, that journalists made a stronger contribution to the blame game between donor and debtor countries than most other actor categories. This exemplifies the importance to add journalists to a comprehensive analysis of politicization and Europeanization processes in the public sphere (see, for instance: Pfetsch et al. 2008). Following from this, a more thorough juxtaposition of politician's blaming patterns with those of journalists and commentators might be promising. This includes a comparison of different arenas of responsibility attributions in increasingly fragmented public spheres (Pfetsch 2018).

These points lead to the general question of the impact of public attributions of responsibility. So far, little is known about the consequences of blame shifting and blame avoidance behavior in the public sphere. Further research in this field should study the relationship of authors and audience in this regard. This entails the question of how attributions of responsibility in the public sphere are influenced by public perceptions of responsibility and how, in turn, perceptions of responsibility among the population follow the attribution of responsibility in the public sphere. This relationship has important democratic implications and for Hinterleitner (2020, p. 205) a "reassessment of democratic responsiveness under more conflictual conditions must incorporate the insight that citizens […] do not only express their preferences as voters, but also through their role as spectators of blame games." Further pursuing this relationship between spectators and actors of public blame games also promises to foster an understanding of the conditions under which blame avoidance in the public sphere is successful. At least for Southern European incumbents in the Eurozone Crisis, blame shifting did not help to prevent voter wrath. In pursuing these questions, a combination of experimental designs and population surveys with standardized attribution analyses and more qualitative approaches are conceivable. Most importantly, however, the presented merger of two perspectives, that have had little contact thus far, should encourage scholars in (European) politicization and public sphere research to incorporate perspectives and arguments from the broad literature on blame avoidance.

10.10 Looking Back – Looking Forward

Writing about twelve years after its outbreak and five years after its last eruption in Greece, the Eurozone Crisis has disappeared from European headlines. Since then, the continent has gone through continuous episodes of crisis from the so-called refugee crisis 2015/2016 over 'Brexit', the ongoing

conflicts with Hungary and Poland and the recent pandemic. Today, Europe has changed and several of these changes can be traced back to one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of European integration between 2009 and 2016. While the social consequences of the Eurozone Crisis in the most-effect countries in Southern Europe are still visible, the economic recovery seemed stable, at least until the pandemic. The worst fears of a Eurozone break-up did not materialize and the political turmoil in Southern Europe did not lead to the massive rise of Eurosceptic parties that many were afraid of (Hutter and Kriesi 2019a). At the same time, Euroscepticism in the population is declining again (Teperoglou and Belchior 2020). The Greek political system has witnessed a "remarkable defeat of Euroscepticism" (Pagoulatos 2021) and re-arranged in a large pro-European consensus. While astonishing at first, this is in line with the finding of this research showing an intense politicization of the Eurozone Crisis but a blame game that focuses on domestic rather than European responsibility. This important differentiation exemplifies that normative evaluations of politicization and its consequences should account for the different ways in which politicization unfolds.

In the beginning of this dissertation, I showed how the politicization of European affairs in the Eurozone Crisis were met with an optimistic and a pessimistic reading. The optimistic reading emphasized that the crisis would contribute to a greater interconnectedness between European societies. Greater attention to European affairs and the emergence of cross-national alliances would potentially foster a sense of European belonging. Despite all of its negative implications, the Eurozone Crisis was conceived as an opportunity and a potentially "cosmopolitan moment" (Beck 2012). This study suggests that these hopes were misplaced. At least when responsibility debates are concerned, the crisis did not contribute to strong cross-border links and there are hardly signs of an emerging pan-European debate. Especially in the two 'crisis countries', the national orientation of domestic debates prevails. Even though the crisis changed political realities and institutional arrangements in large parts of the Eurozone, the dominant, domestic logic of public sphere debates remained unchanged.

According to a more general argument from this optimistic reading of politicization, a broad actor participation in European debates increases the democratic responsiveness of decision makers in European policy fields and the transparency of European policies (Statham and Trenz 2013, p. 5). Here, the results of this study are mixed. While the crisis debate in Greece and Spain was shown to be less focused on individual actors form the executive than the one in Germany, the debate in both countries was strongly dominated by the domestic competition between government and opposition, thereby leaving little space for actors from other parts of society to be heard.

While overall, the optimistic perspective was misplaced, the pessimistic outlook was not accurate, either. This reading underlined the negative implications of politicization which allegedly prevent effective decision-making (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Given the fact that I did not measure the effect

of politicization on European decision-making, this research is inconclusive in this regard. Nevertheless, the extremely high politicization intensity in Greece did not prevent European and domestic actors to orchestrate a fundamental re-organization of the Greek welfare state and, at European level, the Eurozone Crisis has produced major steps of supranational integration (Schimmelfennig 2014; Genschel and Jachtenfuchs 2016).

Moreover, a further perspective from the pessimistic camp suggested the formation of a strong North-South divide in Europe and a general increase in anti-European rhetoric in the Eurozone Crisis (Streeck 2013). Instead, the study shows, firstly, that the EU is not blamed for everything. In fact, blame shifting to EU institutions is a marginal aspect of the politicization of the Eurozone Crisis. Secondly, although Germany, on the one hand, and Greece and Spain, on the other hand, occupy fundamentally different positions in the crisis setting, the creditor-debtor conflict line is not particularly strong. Even the Greek-German blame game is not more than a marginal part of the overall crisis debates. In the light of this fundamental crisis of European integration, this is good news.

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12 APPENDIX

12.1 Coding Example

In the following coding example, only the central attribution triad and the attribution reason is illustrated. Contextual variables are omitted.

> In the parliamentary debate on Monday, Sigmar Gabriel attacked finance minister Schäuble for his continuous calls for a *Grexit*. The leader of the social democratic party claimed that Greece's exit of the Eurozone would impose an unjust burden on the financially disadvantaged segments of society.

Here, the social democratic party leader, Sigmar Gabriel, (*attribution sender*) blames (*attribution type - negative causal attribution*) the German finance minister Schäuble (*attribution addressee*) for his take on a possible 'Grexit' (*attribution issue*). The attribution sender, furthermore, adds a justification (*attribution reason*) to his claim that corresponds to a cause-effect-logic. 'Grexit' (*cause*) would impose an unjust burden (*effect* → reason content: (in-) justice) for poor segments of the Greek society (*affected collectivity*).

For further examples, see (Roose et al. 2015), available at http://userpage.fu-berlin.de/~jroose/ggcrisi/Codebook-GGCRISI-final.pdf.

12.2 Abstract (German)

Zwischen 2009 bis 2016 hat die Eurozone Krise in ganz Europa zu kontroversen Debatten geführt. Mit den gegenseitigen Schuldzuweisungen, die auf den Ausbruch der Krise folgten, schien die Politisierung Europas eine neue Qualität erreicht zu haben. Anhand quantitativer Primärdaten, die auf Basis einer standardisierten Inhaltsanalyse von Zeitungsberichten gewonnen wurden, untersucht die vorliegende Dissertation die Politisierung der Eurozone Krise in der öffentlichen Auseinandersetzung um Verantwortung in Deutschland, Griechenland und Spanien zwischen 2009 und 2016. Wie unterscheidet sich die Politisierung der Eurozone Krise in den einzelnen Ländern? Wie lassen sich diese Unterschiede erklären?

Zunächst wird argumentiert, dass Politisierungsmuster in Krisenzeiten davon abhängen, wie sich kollektive Akteure an der öffentlichen Zuschreibung von Verantwortung, insbesondere von Schuld, beteiligen. Für die Erklärung der Politisierungsmuster ist ein Verständnis dieses ‚blame games' auf der Mikroebene entscheidend. Ferner wird argumentiert, dass die Attribuierung von Verantwortung durch politische Gelegenheiten auf der Makroebene bedingt ist, die sich aus der Offenheit des politischen Systems und den politischen und wirtschaftlichen Auswirkungen der Krise ergeben.

Der Fokus auf Verantwortungszuschreibungen bietet eine neuartige Akteursperspektive auf das Phänomen der Politisierung. Darüber hinaus wird eine Konzeptualisierung von Politisierung

vorgeschlagen, die zwischen Intensität und Form unterscheidet. Die Form wird dabei als Ausmaß der Europäisierung bzw. der Domestizierung des Politisierungsmusters spezifiziert. Diese Konzeptualisierung erlaubt es, länderspezifische Unterschiede in den Politisierungsmustern und die ‚Richtung von Konflikt' in den Blick zu nehmen. Die Kombination der Mikroperspektive der Verantwortungszuschreibungen mit der Makroperspektive der politischen Gelegenheitsstruktur trägt zu aktuellen Debatten über Treiber der Politisierung und über intermediäre Faktoren bei, die die Art und Weise bestimmen, wie politische Konflikte über Europa in öffentlichen Debatten ausgetragen werden. Schließlich liefert die Dissertation eine detaillierte Analyse der Politisierungsdynamiken in der Eurozonen Krise, die den gesamten Zeitraum zwischen 2009 bis 2016 umfasst. Im Gegensatz zu vielen vorliegenden Studien werden neben Deutschland dabei auch Griechenland und Spanien als prominente südeuropäische ‚Schuldnerstaaten' in die Analyse einbezogen.

Die vergleichende Analyse zeigt unterschiedliche Muster der Politisierung. In Deutschland führen die geringen direkten Auswirkungen der Krise und die konsensuale Tradition zu einer geringen Politisierungsintensität. Angesichts der zentralen Rolle Deutschlands bei der Krisenbewältigung weist die Politisierung zwar eine starke europäische Dimension auf, doch beteiligen sich deutsche Akteure kaum an europäischen Schuldzuweisungen. Vielmehr erscheint die Krise als Problem der ‚Schuldnerstaaten'. In Griechenland bedingen die drastischen Krisenauswirkungen und das geschlossene politische System eine extreme Politisierungsintensität. Entgegen der Erwartung, dass Verantwortung in erster Linie der EU und der sogenannten ‚Troika' zugschrieben wird, wird die Politisierung der Krise jedoch hauptsächlich durch den innenpolitischen Konkurrenzkampf und nicht durch europäische Schuldzuweisungen angetrieben. Vielmehr verstärkt die Krise eine antagonistische politische Kultur und folglich werden europäische Themen von innenpolitischen Konfliktdynamiken absorbiert. Spanien liegt zwischen diesen beiden Polen. Zumindest in den ersten Jahren der Krise verhinderten Sozialpartnerschaften und ein vergleichsweise stabiles politisches System eine übermäßig starke Politisierung. Aufgrund eines pro-europäischen Konsenses, einem Vertrauensverlust in die politischen Eliten des Landes und hausgemachter Korruptionsskandale, die die europäische Krisendimension überschatteten, fokussieren Schuldzuweisungen vor allem auf nationalen Akteuren.

Die Perspektive auf Verantwortungszuschreibungen trägt dazu bei, Politisierungsdynamiken in der Krise zu verstehen. Die Ergebnisse unterstreichen die Bedeutung inländischer Gelegenheitsstrukturen und politischer Traditionen für die öffentliche Konfliktaustragung zu europäischen Themen und zeigen, dass der Zusammenhang zwischen der Politisierung Europas und der Europäisierung von Öffentlichkeiten entgegen den Erwartungen negativ und nicht positiv ist. Darüber hinaus verdeutlichen die Ergebnisse, dass die Politisierungsintensität und die Ausrichtung auf inländische Akteure von der politischen Opposition bestimmt werden. Schuldzuweisungen nach Europa gehen hingegen

von nationalen Regierungen aus. Insgesamt widerlegt die Studie jedoch die Annahme eines europäisches ‚blame games' zwischen ‚Gläubiger- und Schuldnerstaaten' und legt vielmehr nahe, dass die Eurozonen Krise europäische Konfliktdynamiken nicht grundlegend verändert hat.

12.3 Non-Plagiarism Affirmation

I declare to the Freie Universität Berlin that I have completed the submitted dissertation independently and without the use of sources and aids other than those indicated. The present thesis is free of plagiarism. I have marked as such all statements that are taken literally or in content from other writings. This dissertation has not been submitted in the same or similar form in any previous doctoral procedure. I agree to have my thesis examined by plagiarism examination software.

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Education

2015 – 2021	Doctoral Studies: Freie Universität Berlin, Institute of Sociology
2012 – 2015	M.A. Research Training Program: Humboldt Universität zu Berlin
2011 – 2012	M.Sc. Political Sociology: London School of Economics and Political Science
2007 – 2011	B.A. Public Administration: Westfälische Wilhelms Universität Münster B.Sc. European Studies: University of Twente

Work Experience

Since 2020	Research Assistant: German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM)
2016 – 2019	Scientific Coordinator: Institute for the Study of Protest and Social Movements (ipb)
2014 – 2016	Research Assistant: Institute of Sociology, Freie Universität Berlin