Politicization and the Public Interest:

When Do the Elites in Brussels Address Public Interests in EU Policy Debates?

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Abstract

Contemporary European studies concur that public pressure and responsiveness have become key ingredients of the EU policy arena. Nonetheless, there is little known about when and how the elites in Brussels articulate public interests in EU policy debates. This article bridges this gap by examining the conditions under which political elites involved in EU legislative procedures address public interests in the news. It is expected that the politicization of EU policy processes stimulates elites to articulate public interests. The dataset consists of 2164 media statements in six European media outlets on a sample of 125 legislative proposals (2008-2010). The results demonstrate that elites address public interests in the media predominantly when issues are publicly salient and attract intensive mobilization by civil society groups. Elites stay silent about public interests when policy processes are crowded with business lobbyists and are of low salience to European citizens.

Keywords: European Union, political communication, politicization, elites, representation, interest groups

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Introduction

Modern-day EU policy processes have the potential to be politicized and become salient in media debates. The era in which EU politics was exclusively characterized by consensus, technocratic deliberation, and an indifferent public has come to an end (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Distrust rates towards European institutions and Euroskepticism are on the rise (Armingeon and Ceka, 2013), exemplified by the recent Brexit referendum. While the public scrutiny of EU policy processes has undoubtedly increased in recent decades, the gap between political elites and European citizens today seems wider than ever before. Addressing this gap is precisely the aim of this research article, which tackles the following question: under what conditions do EU political elites openly articulate public interests during EU policy debates?

Addressing this question is important as its aids in clarifying the relationship between citizens’ interests and political elites in EU public policy. While responsiveness studies that focus on the EU context demonstrate that EU public policy is susceptible to public pressure (Alexandrova et al., 2015; Bølstad, 2015; Toshkov, 2011), it remains highly unclear whether and under what conditions elites address the interests of citizens in EU policy debates. Claims about public interests can be seen as a form of rhetorical responsiveness, which pertains to how politicians address public concerns by discussing them rather than translating them into policy output (Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008). For policy outcomes to be susceptible to the interests of citizens, elites need to make these interests apparent in policy debates, which is not evident in the EU context. Moreover, by openly appealing to public interests, elites can signal to citizens whether their interests are being considered, alleviating or stimulating public pressures. Importantly, political elites do not always present factual information. They tend to strategically frame public support for a specific policy so that it aligns well with their own policy views (Baumgartner and Mahoney, 2008; Daviter, 2011; De Bruycker, 2016a).

To explain the conditions under which elites openly appeal to public interests, this article focuses on the politicized nature of policy processes. While broad consensus exists regarding the
increasing politicization of EU policies, the meaning and consequences of this phenomenon are more contested (Zürn, 2015). Some associate EU politicization with more democratic quality and control (De Wilde and Lord, 2015; Follesdal and Hix, 2006), while others also point to the critical junctures politicization brings about for EU democracy (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Zürn, 2006). This research article seeks to contribute to these debates by examining whether and how the politicization of EU policy issues stimulates elites to openly appeal to public interests.

In line with much research about politicization and the European public sphere, this article takes as a starting point that the news media provide a forum for political elites to address the interests of citizens. The news media connect different EU policymakers, stakeholders, and citizens, allowing for interaction and exchange (Koopmans and Erbe, 2004; Trenz, 2004). The article’s empirical focus therefore lies on claim-making by elites in the news media. The analysis draws from a large-scale content analysis of 2164 statements made by political elites in six different media outlets on a sampled set of 125 legislative proposals. The results show that elites are indeed more prone to address public interests under politicized conditions, but the constituting dimensions of politicization (salience, polarization and actor expansion) render different, sometimes contrasting, results. More precisely, the findings demonstrate that elites predominantly address public interests when policy processes are salient to European citizens and crowded with civil society groups, while elites remain silent about public interests on policies that attract abundant business lobbying. Moreover, mostly the supporters of EU policy proposals appeal to public interests in the news and Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) stand out as the most vigorous representatives of public interests when compared to European Commission (EC) and Council officials.
**Politicization and the public interest**

Public interests pertain to the welfare or well-being of a broad and diffuse collection of individual citizens in relation to a specific policy. They are broader than the interests of parties, minority groups, territorial entities, or any other well-delineated or formalized group of citizens. They refer to a diffuse array of individual citizens or the general public, such as ‘taxpayers’, ‘patients’, ‘consumers’, or European citizens in general. Political elites are defined as individuals who, by virtue of their status as members of government institutions or pivotal organizations, are able to affect political outcomes regularly and substantially (Higley, 2010: 163). In the EU context, elites include elected representatives, executive officials and civil servants of the EU’s supranational institutions, as well as Council and member state delegates. The main factor put forward to explain the conditions under which elites openly appeal to public interests is the politicized nature of policy issues. I define politicization as a phenomenon linked to specific policy issues, which is characterized by three key features: public salience, polarization, and actor expansion (Börzel and Risse, 2009; De Wilde et al., 2016; Hutter and Grande, 2014; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). In this study, I conceive of issues as legislative proposals for regulations and directives that have been developed by the European Commission.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Figure 1 portrays the main conceptual framework. It depicts an exchange where citizens exert public pressure and, as a reaction to cope with or stimulate these pressures, elites appeal to public interests. Public pressure involves signals of opposition or support, on behalf of citizens or broad and diffuse constituencies, directed at political elites (De Bruycker, 2016a; Schattschneider, 1960). The portrayed interaction takes place in the public arena, operationalized in this study as the news media. The news media have their own rules and dynamics that facilitate politicization. Journalists and news editors tend to prioritize conflict and pit antagonists against each other to bring balanced coverage (see for instance De Bruycker and Beyers, 2015; Hopmann et al., 2012; Van Dalen, 2012). The small arrows specify the relationship between politicization and elite appeals to public interests. First, arrow ‘A’ signifies that politicization affects political elites. Elites can react to politicization by appealing to public...
interests to alleviate or strengthen public pressures. Second, arrow ‘B’ signifies that citizens may also contribute to politicization processes. That is, when citizens and other stakeholders are exposed to public interest appeals by elites, they grow more aware that their interests are at stake, stimulating politicization. This study will not empirically distinguish between these top-down and bottom-up processes, but takes as its point of departure that the relationship between elites’ appeals to public interests and politicization is reciprocal and mostly self-reinforcing (Steenbergen et al., 2007: 18). In what follows, I clarify this further by specifying how the relationship between appeals to public interests and the politicization of policy issues may differ along the salience, polarization, and actor expansion dimensions.

I expect the first dimension of politicization – *public salience* – to stimulate claim-making about public interests. Public salience is understood as the importance public opinion attributes to a specific issue (Wlezien, 2005). When issues are important to citizens, elites are incentivized to address public interests to clarify to their constituents whether their interests are considered. Departing from their role as representatives, political elites face constraints in assembling and communicating information about public interests when issues enjoy a low level of public salience (Burstein, 2014; Page and Shapiro, 1983). When the public is unaware of the issue or has not adopted an opinion on it, it is difficult for elites to accurately estimate what the public wants or needs. If issues are publicly salient, in contrast, political actors have a steady information flow out of which to craft and communicate claims about public interests. In the other direction, elites may also try to strategically manipulate the salience of an issue by openly addressing public interests (Zaller, 1992). When elites manage to frame a topic as being of broad relevance to citizens, the public may grow more engaged and interested in the issue, resulting in increased public salience.

**H1:** Political elites are more prone to address public interests when issues are publicly salient.

In addition, I expect the second dimension of politicization – *polarization* – to stimulate claim-making about the public interest and vice versa. I understand polarization as the degree to which different stakeholders disagree on specific aspects of a policy issue. When issues grow more conflictual, political
elites face a greater need to justify and defend their positions. Polarization, therefore, stimulates political elites to appeal to public interests as a strategic frame to defend their position when conflict occurs. In the absence of conflict, there is less need for justification or legitimation. In the other direction, claim-making about public interests may also stimulate polarization. When elites depict an issue as being of relevance to the broader public instead of to only a small segment of society, this may lead to an expansion of the scope of conflict (Daviter, 2011; Schattschneider, 1960). Namely, when elites depict an issue as being of public concern, more citizens and stakeholders become aware and involved, which may activate latent controversies.

**H2:** Political elites are more prone to address public interests as a policy issue becomes more polarized.

The third dimension of politicization – *actor expansion* – refers to the audiences involved in a policy issue (De Wilde et al., 2016). While some audiences act as representatives of public interests, others promote particularistic (economic) interests. In this regard, the distinction between civil society groups and business interests is relevant. Civil society groups – such as NGOs, environmental groups or consumer organizations – are more likely to engage in public campaigns than business groups and typically have a broader and more diffuse membership base among citizens (Binderkrantz, 2012; Dür and Mateo, 2013; Rasmussen et al., 2017). They typically defend a certain ideal or public good and promote public interests above more specific or economic interests when approaching policymakers. Therefore, the mobilization of civil society groups is expected to make elites more prone to openly appeal to public interests. This is different for business groups. The popular notion of corporate lobbying holds that business lobbyists seek to bypass public interests. Business groups – such as firms, trade unions or business associations – are known to prefer quiet politics and are rather hesitant to engage in public campaigns (Culpepper, 2010; Dür and Mateo, 2013; Kriesi et al., 2007). They typically promote specific economic interests, which can be at the expense of the general public. I therefore expect that the involvement of business interests makes elites less prone to appeal to public interests. In addition, I consider the reverse (top-down) relationship. That is, when elites openly address public interests, this stimulates the activity of civil society groups since they are signaled that an issue important to their constituents is being publicly debated. Such appeals may constrain business mobilization, since business
lobbyists are publicly warned that – if they mobilize – their particularistic interests will have to compete with public interests.

\textit{H3a}: The more civil society groups mobilize on a policy issue, the more likely it is that elites will address public interests.

\textit{H3b}: The more business groups mobilize on a policy issue, the less likely it is that elites will address public interests.

**Research design**

The data I use are part of the INTEREURO project. The project departs from a stratified random sample of 125 European legislative proposals (directives and regulations) between 2008 and 2010.\textsuperscript{1} The sample thus constitutes policy proposals from a period of increased dissatisfaction with the EU, during and after the financial crisis (Alexandrova et al., 2015). More detailed info about the sample can be consulted in the Online appendix and Beyers et al. (2014). Via an Online search in the electronic archives of six media outlets (European Voice, EurActiv, Agence Europe, Le Monde, the Financial Times, and Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung), the media coverage related to the 125 sampled cases was mapped.\textsuperscript{2} In the next step, all stakeholders were identified and all the statements these actors made were stored in a separate database (for details see the Online appendix). These statements are quotes made by elites that can be directly linked to one of the sampled proposals. All these entries were coded according to a technique that is highly similar to the political claim analysis developed by Koopmans and Statham (1999), whereby the unit of observation consists of an actor who puts forward a particular statement. The dependent variable measures whether the statement referred to the interests of a diffuse array of citizens and/or broad segments of public opinion, such as ‘citizens’, ‘consumers’, ‘patients’, or ‘taxpayers’. For instance, one media statement in the dataset appealing to public interests was made by Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas on the directive proposal on petrol vapor recovery during refueling of passenger cars at service stations [COM (2008) 812]: ‘This directive will improve the protection of European citizens’ health by contributing to the attainment of agreed EU air quality standards’ (see the Online appendix for more examples). \textsuperscript{3}
One drawback of media sources is that media statements from political elites are a result of media selection processes (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Harcup and O’Neill, 2001; Van Aelst et al., 2008). I cannot grasp these selection processes and their effect on the nature and content of the statements with the data at hand. This article thus strongly relies on the conceptualization of the news media as an arena in which political elites can represent their constituents and communicate with relevant stakeholders (Van Aelst and Walgrave, 2016). Of course, the news media are not a neutral arena and, as mentioned, tend to prioritize conflict and drama, which facilitates politicization (Van Dalen, 2012; De Bruycker and Beyers, 2015). A limitation of my approach is the exclusion of statements that were publicly made but never reported in the selected news outlets, which confines the external validity of the findings. One benefit of this technique is that a pre-selection by journalists filters out much noise and allows me to focus on relevant statements that had some impact in the public arena. Moreover, this approach allowed me to rely on one single data source for studying different types of political elites (Beyers et al., 2015).

In total, I identified 4227 statements in the media articles as pertaining to the sampled legislative proposals. Statements that did not directly relate to one of the sampled legislative proposals were excluded from further analyses (n=994). The analysis relies on statements made by MEPs, EC officials, and Council officials (n=2148). Statements made by other elites, such as national members of parliament, journalists or regulatory agencies (n=82), were excluded due to limited observations. Statements from interest groups (n=1013) were excluded to avoid endogeneity with the actor expansion variable and because it is questionable whether interest groups can be considered political elites. From the remaining 2164 statements, 14 percent appealed to public interests, that is, they referred to the interests of a diffuse array of citizens or the general public, such as ‘taxpayers’, ‘patients’, ‘consumers’, or European citizens in general.

I operationalized politicization based on the following three variables. First, polarization is measured by calculating the ordinal dispersion index of positions taken in all statements on a specific legislative proposal (see the Online appendix). Second, to measure actor expansion, all interest groups, social movements, firms, and non-governmental societal stakeholders that were active on the sampled set of proposals were identified. These variables were constructed from three distinct sources, including
interest group interviews, media analysis, and interviews with EC officials. To test hypothesis 3, actor expansion was further specified in mobilization by business and civil society groups (see Wonka et al., 2015; Beyers et al., 2015). Third, public salience was measured based on the European Election Survey dataset (Van Egmond et al., 2011). For every sampled proposal, I coded the number of survey participants in 27 EU member states that considered the policy area of the legislative proposal as ‘the most important problem’ that faces its domestic government (see the Online appendix for more information). The three hitherto mentioned elements of politicization are combined in one measure according to Hutter and Grande’s (2014) formula:

\[
\text{Politicization} = \text{salience} \times (\text{actor expansion} + \text{polarization})
\]

The entries in the dataset I analyze below represent 2176 statements on one of the 125 sampled legislative proposals. In the next section, I first explore the evidence from bivariate descriptive analyses. Afterwards, I analyze a multiple regression analysis with appeals to public interests as the dependent variable. A binary logit model is computed because the study inquires whether elites appeal to public interests and not how extensive these appeals are. Moreover, the extensiveness of these appeals is endogenous to media attention. Model I presents the regression analysis with Hutter and Grande’s politicization index. Model II analyses the three politicization variables separately. Model III distinguishes between actor expansion by business groups and by civil society groups \((H3)\). Clustered standard errors were employed at the level of legislative proposals to account for the nesting of the data in legislative proposals. As a control variable, I included dummies for the different media outlets in which elites made statements. This is because different news outlets may be more or less inclined to report statements about public interests and because the newsworthiness of issues and their related claims may vary according to country and outlet. Second, elite type (European Commission/ MEP/ Council) is included as a control variable in the analysis because the three EU institutions have different incentive-legitimization structures (De Bruycker, 2016a: 602-603) and therefore their constituting elites have different motives to appeal to public interests in the news. In addition, the position that elites adopted in a statement in favor of or opposed to the tabled legislation was included as a control because appeals to public interests may be an artifact of the policy goals pursued. That is, populist Euroskeptic
accounts are likely to wield references to ‘the people’ as a means to criticize and attack policy initiatives (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011), while Europhile elites may use such claims to defend policy initiatives. Finally, the models also control for whether elites made the statement in the three months preceding the 2009 EP elections since they may have used appeals to public interests as an electoral strategy to win the hearts and minds of voters. A closer description of all the variables used in the model can be consulted in the Online appendix.
Results

First, I examined the relationship between claim-making about public interests in the media and politicization. Figure 2 gives an overview of (a) the politicization index and its relationship with (b) claims about public interests in the news. The data were sorted so that the proposals that were the most politicized are situated to the left side of the figures. The politicization index of Hutter and Grande and the number of appeals by elites to public interests are positively and significantly correlated (r=0.3; p=0.00). This positive relationship is exemplified by the somewhat similar trend in Figures 2a and 2b. If we look at Figure 2b we see only a few proposals where appeals to public interests ‘peaked’. For only three proposals I could identify more than 20 media claims articulating public interests (the three ‘peaks’ in Figure 2b). These three proposals include (1) the 2008 directive proposal on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare [COM (2008) 414], (2) the 2008 regulation proposal regarding roaming on public mobile telephone networks [COM (2008) 580], and (3) the 2010 regulation proposal on the EU citizens’ initiative [COM (2010) 119]. For 47 percent of all the sampled policy proposals, elites did not refer to public interests in the news. In most EU policy processes, elites thus hardly ever address public interests in the media. For instance, on the 2010 regulation proposal on financial rules applicable to the annual budget of the Union [COM (2010) 815], no appeals to public interests were made.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The regression models presented in Table 1 yield a satisfactory fit, and the variance inflation test (VIF) for multicollinearity reports satisfactory results (VIF<5). Based on the AIC values, we can conclude that Model III yields the best fit. In Model I, the politicization index has a clear positive and significant effect on the likelihood of elites making appeals to public interests. To interpret these results more substantively, I looked at the effect of the separate politicization variables in Model II and III. First, policy proposals within a policy area that European citizens consider as ‘the most important problem’ are more likely to attract statements that refer to public interests, which confirms hypothesis 1. This finding shows that elites are rhetorically responsive, in the sense that they address citizens’
interests on issues that are also important to citizens. Moreover, when issues are salient, it is simply clearer to elites what European citizens want, which facilitates their appealing to public interests (Page and Shapiro, 1983; Wlezien, 2004). However, this finding could also mean that elites manipulate the salience of an issue by openly appealing to public interests (Zaller, 1992). It could thus be part of some political strategy to elicit public salience. This top-down logic is less plausible, though, since the impact of the selected (elite-oriented) media outlets on European public opinion is probably rather limited.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Second, I found that polarization does not significantly attract more claims that address public interests, which rejects hypothesis 2. I expected that political elites rely on claims about the public interest as a strategic frame to defend their position when conflict occurs. Additionally, elites’ appeals to public interests were expected to stimulate conflict expansion, since they signal to a broad audience that their interests are at stake (Daviter, 2011; Schattschneider, 1960). This expectation is not confirmed in the analysis. One explanation for this nil finding is that more polarization makes the public interest, as such, more contentious. Namely, the public is more divided and the interests of different segments of the public may be pitted against each other when issues grow polarized. More conflict could thus mean that competitors refrain from referring to public interests because what exactly the public interest constitutes is more ambiguous.

Third, the effect of actor expansion on claim-making about public interests is not significant in Model II. This finding illustrates that intense levels of mobilization do not necessarily mean that public debates revolve around public interests. I further explore this effect in Model III, which distinguishes between mobilization by business and civil society interests. The model demonstrates that the effect of stakeholder mobilization on claim-making about public interests depends on the nature of the interests that mobilize. While the involvement of civil society groups stimulates elites to address public interests, the presence of business lobbyists makes appeals to public interests less likely, which confirms hypotheses 3a and 3b. This effect is illustrated in Figure 3, which portrays the differences in the predicted probabilities that an EU elite will appeal to public interests for different levels of civil society (left) and
business mobilization (right). Business associations, corporations, and trade unions promote specific (economic) interests and therefore typically seek to constrain the scope of conflict, limiting the prevalence of public interests in media debates (Culpepper, 2010; Dür and Mateo, 2013; Kriesi et al., 2007). Civil society groups, on the contrary, advocate public interests and ideals and thereby stimulate elites to openly appeal to public interests.

While the involvement of civil society groups strengthens the alleged link between public and elites, business mobilization seems to weaken it. The fact that intense mobilization of these different types of stakeholders renders different effects could also be a result of the types of issues or policy areas in which they are active (De Bruijcker, 2016b). To control for this, a mixed effects model was estimated with random intercepts for the policy area and policy proposal level (see the Online appendix). This robustness check confirms that results related to public salience, business and civil society mobilization are not artifacts of the issues and policy areas in which they are situated.4

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

These findings, however, do not confirm that stakeholder mobilization causes or hinders elites from addressing public interests in the news. It is also possible that the decision of stakeholders to become active (or not) is a reaction to claims elites make in media debates. This top-down logic is, however, less likely. Namely, once elites publicly adopt a policy position, they are inclined to stick to it and are thus less susceptible to lobbying efforts. Lobbying is more meaningful as early in the policy process as possible, before elites publicly take a stance. Most stakeholders will thus proactively mobilize to shape and anticipate elite rhetoric rather than react to elite claims. Although the bottom-up logic of stakeholders affecting elites appealing to public interests is more plausible, more research is needed to substantiate this causal link.

In addition, the control variables yield interesting results. First, when looking at the different types of political elites, MEPs stand out as the most prominent representatives of public interests in EU legislative processes. They are significantly more likely to appeal to public interests compared to EC and Council officials. Second, elites who support EC policy proposals are more likely to appeal to public
interests than elites that oppose policy proposals. The proponents of EU policy initiatives use appeals to public interests slightly more than opponents. Third, whether elites made a statement during election times has no effect on their tendency to refer to public interests, even when comparing different types of elites in an interaction effect. This suggests that elites do not use appeals to public interests as an electoral strategy. Finally, I also included fixed effects for the different media outlets in the regression model. All the hitherto mentioned results thus consider the variance accounted for by the media outlets in which elites made statements. The non-significant coefficients indicate that different media outlets do not substantively differ in terms of claims that refer to public interests. To check for potential biases introduced by the selection of national media, I ran the same model, but with only the EU level media statements (n=1866). This rendered the same significant results.

**Conclusion: A tale of two worlds?**

In this article I examined the conditions under which elites involved in EU policy processes openly address public interests. I conceptualized the articulation of public interests as an ingredient in the relationship between elites and European citizens and as a tool for policy elites to signal to citizens that their voices are being heard or disregarded. Furthermore, I demonstrated that elites are more prone to address public interests when issues grow politicized. More specifically, elites tend to address public interests on publicly salient issues and issues on which civil society groups intensively mobilize. When issues are crowded with business lobbyists, however, elites are less inclined to openly address public interests. Moreover, the analyses demonstrated that MEPs stand out as the most vigorous representatives of citizens’ interests in EU policy debates when compared to EC and Council officials. In sum, these findings paint a picture of two different worlds in EU public policy (see also Beyers et al., 2015; Culpepper, 2010): one politicized world where civil society intensively mobilizes, in which citizens are vigilant and public interests carry the day, and another depoliticized world where elites remain silent about public interests and where business lobbyists thrive. Most EU policy processes belong to the latter world, i.e. they are not politicized and attract little or no reference to public interests by elites.
While the study of public interest articulation is novel, this article contributes to the growing literature on EU politicization by further exploring the consequences and meaning of the politicization phenomenon (see De Wilde et al., 2016; Hutter and Grande, 2014; Zürn, 2016). This study is among the first to empirically examine politicization across a large-n sample of EU policy processes. The analyses demonstrated that the politicization of EU policy processes coincides with an increased weight of public interests in EU legislative debates. Moreover, this article further unpacked the constituting dimensions of politicization by distinguishing between different types of actor expansion. Future studies could consider the prevalence of public interests in policy debates as an important aspect of the overall politicization process. The involvement of business lobbyists, on the other hand, seems to be a countervailing force within politicization, constraining the prevalence of public interests in EU policy debates.

Finally, this article also brings new research questions to the fore. First, to further clarify the normative implications of the presented findings for democratic representation in the EU, future research could disentangle the causal dimensions of the relationship between politicization and elite rhetoric. A next evident step in further elucidating the substantive meaning of the presented findings involves an analysis of policy responsiveness, or how claims about public interests and their link with politicization are translated in policy outcomes.

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Notes

1. Given that 16 of the 125 sampled proposals were highly interconnected, their media coverage should be seen as part of one legislative initiative (consisting of two to four legislative proposals), which in the analysis resulted in 116 distinct policy cases (see Beyers et al. 2014). Therefore, Figure 2 portrays 116 and not 125 cases.

2. These outlets were selected because they are known to extensively cover EU-related matters and give an audience to a diverse set of actors active in EU legislative processes. Moreover, these outlets have been studied in former prominent projects on stakeholder representation in the EU, which allows for cumulative knowledge building (Mahoney, 2008; Thomson, 2011). To account for some national variation, a mix of both national and EU outlets were selected. One caveat of the selection is that it exclusively focuses on elite outlets. Admittedly, the inclusion of popular outlets (e.g. tabloids) might have resulted in a more representative sample. However, a pilot study conducted in Belgium demonstrated that in such newspapers no to very little coverage on EU legislation could be found. The inclusion of such outlets would thus have resulted in a limited number of additional observations. Moreover, information in elite-oriented outlets may still reach a broader audience through inter-media agenda-setting processes (Golan, 2006) or the dispersion of information via opinion leaders (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1966).

3. All this coding was conducted by two trained researchers, and the inter-coder reliabilities are satisfactory, with Krippendorff’s alpha reliability coefficients of .82 and higher (based on double coding of a randomly selected set of 100 media statements).

4. Because there might be a trade-off between business and NGO mobilization, I estimated Model III with an interaction between both types of mobilization. This interaction is insignificant; apparently, elites are no more or less likely to appeal to public interests when both types of interest groups mobilize simultaneously. Also, the interaction between salience and business mobilization (or civil society mobilization) is insignificant. This indicates that it makes no significant difference whether interest organizations mobilize on publicly salient issues.
References


Tables and figures

Figure 1. Politicization and appeals to public interests.
Figure 2. Politicization and public interests appeals for each legislative proposal (Y-axis; n=116).  

Note: (a) politicization index; (b) appeals to public interests per proposal.
| Table 1. Binary logistic regression of whether or not elites appeal to public interests |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|
|                                              | (I) | (II) | (III) |
|                                              | β   | β   | β    |
|                                              | S.E. | S.E. | S.E.  |
| Intercept                                    | -3.50*** | -3.98*** | -3.59*** |
|                                              | (0.49) | (.69) | (.74)  |
| ** Politicization index**                    | 0.06** | 0.06** | 0.06** |
|                                              | (0.03) | (.03) | (.03)  |
| Stakeholders mobilized (log)                 | .06  | -.06 | -.06  |
|                                              | (.20) | (.20) | (.20)  |
| Business mobilization (log)                  | .35  | .35  | .35   |
|                                              | (.16) | (.16) | (.16)  |
| Civil society mobilization (log)             | .27** | .27** | .27** |
|                                              | (.12) | (.12) | (.12)  |
| Polarization index                           | .35  | .35  | .35   |
|                                              | (.81) | (.81) | (.81)  |
| Public salience (log)                        | .30***| .20**| .20** |
|                                              | (.12) | (.09) | (.09)  |
| ** Type of political elite**                 |      |      |      |
| Council and member state officials           | -1.56*** | -1.63*** | -1.69** |
|                                              | (0.30) | (.32) | (.29)  |
| Members of the European Parliament           | .75***| .81***| .71** |
|                                              | (0.19) | (.17) | (.17)  |
| European Commission (ref.)                   |      |      |      |
| ** Issue position**                          |      |      |      |
| Favor                                        | 1.09*** | 1.02*** | 1.04*** |
|                                              | (0.25) | (.25) | (.27)  |
| Partly opposes                               | .15  | .17  | .21   |
|                                              | (.37) | (.39) | (.40)  |
| No clear position                            | .09  | -.01 | .00   |
|                                              | (.32) | (.32) | (.31)  |
| Opposed (ref.)                               |      |      |      |
| ** News source**                             |      |      |      |
| Euractiv                                     | .43  | .50  | .55*  |
|                                              | (.36) | (.40) | (.32)  |
| European Voice                               | .28  | .38  | .23   |
|                                              | (.23) | (.24) | (.22)  |
| FAZ                                          | -.80 | -.85 | -.83  |
|                                              | (.74) | (.75) | (.78)  |
| Financial Times                              | -.41 | -.21 | -.05  |
|                                              | (.51) | (.55) | (.54)  |
| Le Monde                                     | -.39 | -.33 | -.15  |
|                                              | (.69) | (.78) | (.74)  |
| Agence Europe (ref.)                         |      |      |      |
| ** Election time**                           |      |      |      |
| Yes                                          | -.01 | -.02 | -.08  |
|                                              | (.27) | (.25) | (.27)  |
| No (ref.)                                    |      |      |      |
| LL                                           | -726.83 | -716.27 | -688.43 |
| P > chi2                                     | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00  |
| AIC                                          | 1479.65 | 1462.53 | 1408.86 |
| Missing n                                    | 16   | 16   | 16    |
| n                                            | 2148 | 2148 | 2148  |

Coefficients are presented with robust standard errors in parenthesis. Significance levels: *α ≤ 0.10, **α ≤ 0.05, ***α ≤ 0.01
Figure 3. Predictive margins of the probability a statement refers to public interests for different levels of mobilization with 95% confidence intervals.

Note: (a) civil society mobilization; (b) business mobilization.