

# **The consequences of politicisation of the EU for voting behaviour**

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MAPLE ERC Consolidator Project

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*First draft, please do not cite*

## **Abstract**

The purpose of the present paper is to understand the consequences of politicisation of Europe by investigating the circumstances within which “Europe” may condition the economic vote. Specifically, we test the hypothesis that following the Eurozone crisis, individuals become more aware of the consequences of EMU for the supranationalization of economic policy-making. This would lead to a decline in economic voting in Eurozone members, and in particular in bailed out countries. We test this hypothesis at two different levels: first, we examine the longitudinal trends of economic voting from 2002-2015, distinguishing between pre-and post 2009 in order to see whether the increased politicisation following the Eurozone crisis conditioned the economic vote. Secondly, we make use of a unique dataset on media content during the the electoral campaigns of the last 16 years to shed light on whether exposure to major mainstream newspapers which focus on EU issues affects individuals’ magnitude of economic voting. Our data cover elections in three bailed out countries, namely Ireland, Portugal and Spain, as well as Germany, as a benchmark case. Despite some data limitations, our research suggests that economic voting increased following the Eurozone crisis in the bailout countries. Yet, individuals who are more aware of the salience of the EU tend to use economic voting to a lesser extent. Our research sheds light on the consequences of politicisation of the EU for democratic accountability in member states.

## ***Introduction***

This paper seeks to contribute to the analysis of the consequences of politicisation of “Europe” for national democracy and in particular on the magnitude of economic voting in legislative elections. The economy plays a key important role in elections in democracies worldwide. Voters assess it in different ways: rather more retrospectively than prospectively, and less egotropically than sociotropically (Campbell et al.,1960, Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2009). These assessments push them to reward or punish the government at the ballot box. Indeed, rewarding or punishing a government for economic performance can be seen as a cornerstone of democratic accountability. Yet, for there to be democratic accountability, it is fundamental that perceptions of control of economic policy are clear, for citizens to be able to hold incumbents responsible for economic performance. Indeed, the extent of “clarity of responsibility” has been identified as a possible moderator of the strength of economic vote (Powell and Whitten, 199, Anderson, 2006).

In this paper, we examine the possibility that European Monetary Union may constitute an “institutional” blurring of responsibility for economic decision-making in the EU, given that it is a supranationalisation of monetary and (increasingly) fiscal policy to the EU level, and that this has become particularly evident since the Eurozone crisis.

The last decade of European integration, with its growing salience on economic and in particular Eurozone crisis issues constitutes an ideal setting to understand whether the growing salience and polarisation of the EU economic issues may alter the vote calculus and in particular diminish the economic vote *in national legislative elections*. For all EU member states generally and Eurozone countries in particular, the Eurozone crisis constituted a learning process whereby citizens became more aware of the supranational commitments which the EU and in particular the European Monetary Union implied (Ruiz-Rufino and Alonso 2017, Sanchez-Cuenca 2017). Moreover, all the changes made to European governance since the onset of the crisis have been toward *more* supranationalisation of policy. Namely, the introduction of the Six Pack, the Fiscal Compact and the Two Pack, mean that rules and discretion have been structurally Europeanised in a post-bailout scenario (Laffan and Schlosser, 2016). Within this generalised increasing awareness of the supranationalisation of policy among EU countries it is fair to assume that this realization occurred especially in countries which underwent bailouts (Lewis-Beck and Lobo, 2016). The reason for this is that in countries

like Greece, Ireland or Portugal, the governments were overtly, albeit temporarily, forced to surrender economic and financial decision-making to the troika. This may have made the transfer of authority quite visible for citizens in these countries, and anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that. Indeed, in 2012, the leader of the junior party in the Portuguese government coalition, Paulo Portas, recognized that Portugal had “provisionally lost part of its sovereignty” when it asked for a bailout.<sup>1</sup> Also, in Greece, in the summer of 2015, 61% of voters rejected a bailout agreement in a national referendum. Despite this result, following this referendum Prime Minister Tsipras negotiated 12 billion euros in expenditure cuts in return for a third bailout.

Therefore, the main goal of this paper is to investigate the circumstances within which “Europe” may condition the economic vote. We develop and test hypotheses at two different levels. First, we focus on four key Eurozone countries (Germany, Ireland, Portugal and Spain) and examine the longitudinal trends in economic voting in order to see whether there has been a decline in economic voting following the onset of the Eurozone crisis. We choose these countries to investigate economic vote in countries who are members of the Eurozone, independent of whether they underwent a full (Ireland, Portugal), partial (Spain) bailout or not (Germany). Then, for the same four countries, we make use of a unique media dataset on content of two mainstream newspapers during the month before elections to understand whether exposure to newspapers which focus on EU issues affects individuals’ use of retrospective perceptions on the economy to hold the government accountable. The literature on the importance of the media for explaining attitudes towards the EU is long and wide-ranging and has highlighted extensively the importance of salience of the EU for citizens’ political attitudes (de Vreese and Boomgarden, 2006; de Vreese, 2004; Koopmans 2014; Pfetsch et. al. 2008). The reason for looking at media exposure and perceptions of the supranationalisation of the economy is due to the fact there is a learning curve related to understanding the consequences of EMU for perceptions of control of economic policy. This paper is innovative at several levels. Firstly, because it uses post-election surveys, whereas most analyses with similar goals have mostly considered European election surveys. Secondly, because we do not consider aggregate but individual level data.

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<sup>1</sup> Paulo Portas quoted in Jornal De Negocios, 11 July 2012. Accessed online at: [http://www.jornaldenegocios.pt/economia/detalhe/portas\\_quotportugal\\_bem\\_mais\\_longe\\_do\\_precipitacutecioquot\\_devido\\_ao\\_quotnotaacutevel\\_esforcedilo\\_dos\\_portuguesesquot](http://www.jornaldenegocios.pt/economia/detalhe/portas_quotportugal_bem_mais_longe_do_precipitacutecioquot_devido_ao_quotnotaacutevel_esforcedilo_dos_portuguesesquot)

Our paper will proceed as follows: we first set out the literature review, explaining how this paper fits with the existing literature on economic voting during the Eurozone crisis. Next, we formalise our hypotheses. Then we detail the data which was used to test each hypothesis, as well as the methods employed. The results presented, as well as the discussion constitute our main contribution to the question of the consequences of politicisation of the EU for the vote calculus, and in particular economic voting. Taken together, they give us an indication of how well accountability works in European states today.

### ***What do we know about the consequences of the EU and the Eurozone crisis on electoral behaviour?***

Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004, 2007), who pioneered the study of how Europe could impact on domestic electoral behaviour called the phenomenon “a sleeping giant”: even though citizens had meaningful attitudes toward EU issues, they were not offered with real party alternative, so Europe could not make a difference in national. Hooghe and Marks (2009) set the terms of the debate on politicisation of the EU when they argued that the process of European integration would not solely be defined by jurisdictional design (as argued by neo-functionalist theorists) but also - and largely - by the increased contestation at the party and *mass* level. As a result, citizens' relation to Europe would shift from a “permissive consensus to a constraining dissensus”. Since then, the magnitude of politicisation, which pre-supposes an increase in salience and polarisation in the topic has been the focus of several studies. Namely, whether politicisation has indeed occurred, whether Maastricht was a turning point, if politicisation is proceeding at an ever increasing pace following successive transfers of authority to the EU, and on the drivers of politicisation, namely identity vs. interest (de Wilde and Zurn 2012, Zurn 2013, Statham and Trezn 2013, Risse 2015, Hoeglenger 2016; Kriesi 2007, Hutter et. al. 2016).

There has been less research on the consequences of politicisation. Yet, when these are investigated, they mostly concentrate on the consequences of politicisation *for the process of European integration*, rather than domestic politics, which is the focus of our paper.

The repercussions of EU-salience in national elections have been conceived in

different ways. On the one hand, De Vries (2007, 2010), measured the impact of the EU issue vis-a-vis other issues. In that respect, several avenues have been pursued: to compare EU issue voting in West and Central/Eastern Europe (de Vries and Tillman, 2010); to see how EU issue voting compares between national and EP elections (de Vries and Hobolt, 2016);

Another set of studies has considered specifically consequences of the Eurozone crisis for voting. Some authors, either using aggregate data or European election study data do not find a difference in the economic vote which occurs pre and post Eurozone crisis (Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck (2014); Talving (2014). On the contrary, Hernandez and Kriesi (2016), using party electoral performance data before and after the crisis in 30 countries determined that prime ministers' parties are systematically damaged by the crisis, besides being harmed because they are in government. Giuliani and Massari (2017) also use similar data and reach similar conclusions. Moving to the individual national elections data level, Vidal (2018) analyses the change in voting behaviour in Spain before and after the Eurozone crisis and the author finds that the change in voting behaviour, and especially the choice for the new parties which arise, is a combination of economic voting and dissatisfaction with the overall political system.

Another way of investigating the impact of politicisation of the EU in political behaviour would be to think of it as a mechanism which could contribute to the "blurring of responsibility" within the national legislative elections. Generally speaking, it has been shown that global economic interdependence plays a role in constraining citizens' responses to domestic economic performance, with the consequence that the economic vote is mitigated when (perceived) economic interdependence is higher (Hellwig, 2007; Fernandez-Albertos (2006).

The hypothesis of the "clarity of responsibility" impairing the economic vote was first conceptualised by Powell and Whitten (1993). They suggested that voters' assignment of responsibility to the government is not merely an individual-level idiosyncrasy or rationalisation, but rather "strongly reflects the nature of policy-making in the society and the coherence and control the government can exert over policy" (p. 398). This article was path-breaking in introducing the importance of such constraints to explain the cross-national dynamics of economic vote. Later on, Anderson (2006) went beyond the degree of clarity of responsibility within a national government, and shifted the analytical focus to "vertical" responsibility, namely by considering whether multiple levels of government and/or significant decentralisation to subnational levels of

government diminishes economic voting (p.451).

In electors' minds, the progressive transfer of authority to the EU, which has been accelerating since Maastricht, and gained further ground in the Eurozone crisis, may be conceived as a blurring of responsibilities which make it harder to make meaningful choices. Following in that literature's path, Lobo and Lewis-Beck (2012) used data from the 2009 European Election Survey to show that in Southern Europe (Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal) the national economic vote diminishes, to the extent the EU is held responsible for the economy. The more the EU is perceived as dominating in the government decision-making, the likelier it would be that short-term factors of voting behaviour may be mitigated. Thus, finding the EU responsible for the Eurozone crisis may *decrease* the economic vote. But it may also be that the mere fact that electors in all Eurozone member countries have become increasingly aware that monetary decisions are taken in Brussels could be changing the vote calculus at home.

### ***Hypotheses***

Following our goals and the literature review we formulate the following two hypotheses: The first concerns the longitudinal analysis of economic voting in Germany, Portugal, Ireland and Spain. Here we are interested in observing the magnitude of the economic vote as the salience of the Eurozone increases, after 2009.

*H1. Countries which underwent bailouts will hold their government less accountable for economic policy and therefore economic voting will decline in these countries.*

This hypothesis follows from what we have discussed in the state of the art, namely in terms of understanding how citizens – in particular in bailout countries - may perceive the supranationalisation of decision-making from 2009 onwards and therefore hold their government less accountable for economic policy.

*H2. Individual voters who have received more information about the EU are less likely to hold their government accountable for national economic performances.*

Here we investigate the mechanism through which we believe that awareness of the supranationalisation of decision-making takes place. Those citizens who are most exposed to EU information are likely to be the ones who hold their government less accountable for economic performances, given that they become aware of the –blurring

of responsibility- or supranationalisation of economic policy-making. This hypothesis is meant to understand the way in which salience of the EU may be explanatory of changes in the importance of the economy for the vote.

[Table 1 about here]

### *Data and Analysis*

In order to test our hypotheses, we use individual level data collected in post-election surveys. For the first hypothesis, we use data from Germany, Ireland, Portugal and Spain for elections held in the period 2001-2016. We compiled a dataset with 39.493 observations that include 16 different elections from the four countries. As detailed in Table 1, for each country at least one election before the starting of the economic crisis and one election after is included. We were also able to harmonize the coding of the variables employed across electoral studies to increase the comparability between countries and elections.

For hypothesis 2, we analyse the same four countries, but are interested in interacting media exposure with economic perceptions. Unfortunately, detailed information about media exposure is not present in all the surveys used to test hypothesis 1. We are therefore forced to use only a subgroup of them: Germany (2009, 2013), Ireland (2007, 2011), Portugal (2005, 2009) and Spain (2011, 2015 2016). Even though we can still rely on studies from the four countries for this second part of the analysis, the time points vary considerably and refer to different moments of the economic crisis. This will limit the generalizability of our results.

Finally, for data on EU saliency in the media, we rely on a unique media dataset that includes, for each country, information about the articles published by two mainstream newspapers during the month prior to all legislative elections between 2002 and 2017. For each newspaper on each election year an index of EU saliency has been computed based on the articles' content.

Across all the models we run, we used the same dependent variable that takes value 1 if in the last elections the respondent voted for one of the parties that composed

the outgoing government, and 0 if she voted for any other party. All the models also include the same main independent variable, namely the respondent's retrospective sociotropic economic perceptions. This variable collects the respondent's evaluation of her country's economic situation compared with the past, and can take the following values 1 "Got a lot worse", 2 "Got a little worse", 3 "Stayed the same", 4 "Got a little better" 5 "Got a lot better" (see also Table A in the Appendix)<sup>2</sup>. Despite these communalities, however, our models are differentiated across hypotheses and datasets.

To test hypothesis 1, the first step of our analysis is to run four different logit models, one for each country. We included in the models, besides sociotropic retrospective economic perceptions, the following socio-economic and political controls: gender, age, marital status, education, religiosity and party identification (see Table A in the Appendix for operationalization). In order to understand the change in magnitude of economic voting occurred during the Eurozone crisis, we added an interaction term between the respondent's evaluation of the economy and a variable that registers the period of the election (0= Pre-crisis period; 1=Crisis period). The aim is to understand whether, and in which direction, the relevance of the economic vote changes with the Eurozone crisis. In other words, the interaction term will tell us if and how the crisis has affected the extent to which voters use economic changes as vote criterion in the national elections. Table 2 shows the results of the four logit models.

[Table 2 about here]

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<sup>2</sup> Regarding our main independent variable, it needs to be noted that, whereas the coding of the answer options is consistent across all the electoral studies, the text of the question is not. In particular, the differences both between and within countries refers to the span of time respondents are requested to take into account when evaluating the changes in the economic situation of the country. Thus, in the German studies, respondents were asked to evaluate economic changes "in the last one or two years". In the Portuguese studies, the time span is one year (or twelve months). In Ireland, differences can be found between elections: for 2002, 2007 and 2011, the respondent is asked to take into account the whole life-time of the government, while in 2016 only "the past twelve months". The same applies to the Spanish case, where for 2004 and 2008 the text of the question indicates six months as time span to take into account, while for 2011, 2015 and 2016 it refers to the past "four years".



As we can see, for the three bailout countries the interaction term is significant and has a positive sign, meaning that the economic vote was weaker in the elections before the start of the Euro crisis than during it. In the case of Germany, the interaction's coefficient is also positive, but the statistical significance is not reached, probably because of the low number of post-election surveys that we can rely on for this country.

To ease the interpretation of the results, Figure 1 plots, for each country and each period, the average adjusted predictions of the likelihood to vote for incumbent parties across the different values of our main independent variable. In other words, the figure shows how the likelihood to vote for a party in the government (y-axis) changes depending on the respondent's evaluation of the national economy (x-axis). For all the four countries the line that refers to the crisis period has a steeper slope than the line that represents the pre-crisis one. This means that, contrary to our expectations, during the Euro crisis the evaluation of the national economy is more relevant as vote criterion than it was before the crisis started.

These results are substantially confirmed even when we disaggregate the data by year. We repeated the previous analysis interacting economic perceptions with a variable that collects the year of the elections. Table 3 presents the coefficients of these new interactions for each of the country taken into account<sup>3</sup>. For Ireland, Portugal and Spain the reference time category is 2011; we chose this year because it registers the peak of the economic crisis and it is likely to represent a break in the citizens' idea of their country's economic sovereignty. Unfortunately, Germany did not held election on 2011, so we are forced to use 2009 as a reference category to catch the effect of the crisis. Figure 2 plots the predicted probabilities. As in Figure 1, grey lines refer to pre-crisis elections, while black lines refer to crisis ones.

[Figure 1 about here]

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<sup>3</sup> The reader can find the tables with the full models in the Appendix (Tables B to E). The Appendix also provides the distribution of the economic perceptions for each year/country (Figure A). It is also worth noting that for the German case the results presented in Tables 2 and 3 are identical, given that for this country we can rely only on one pre-2009 and one post-2009 election.

A pattern can be clearly identified: in the more recent elections economic vote was stronger than in the pre-crisis ones. This is true first of all in the Irish and Spanish cases. Looking at Figure 2, it is evident that for Ireland the line for 2016 elections has the steepest slope, and the interaction term in Table 3 confirm that for this year the economic vote is significantly stronger than for the 2011 baseline. At the same time, in both 2002 and 2007 elections the economic vote in Ireland is weaker than in 2011. The lines that refer to these two years in Figure 2 are virtually identical, confirming that 2011 was a watershed for the relevance of economic perceptions on vote, even though in the opposite direction compared to what we were expecting. The peak of the crisis increases the salience of the economy in politics, making voters more likely to use their economic perceptions as vote criterion.

A similar pattern can be found in the Spanish case. The interaction terms in Table 3 show that the size of the economic vote is the same for 2004, 2008 and 2011. However, also in this case the crisis has an effect, given that for the elections of 2015 and 2016 citizens relied on their economic perceptions to a greater extent than they did in 2011. In fact, the lines for 2015 and 2016 have the steepest slopes. For Portugal, the results are less clear. In this case, even though Figure 2 shows that for the 2015 elections economic evaluations mattered more than for the 2011 baseline (and, indeed, more than for all the other elections), the coefficients in Table 3 tell us that these differences are not statistically significant. Finally, Figure 2 shows that in Germany, consistently with the other countries, a slightly steeper line for 2013 elections than for 2009 ones, but the interaction term in Table 3 is not statistically significant.

[Tables 3 about here]

All in all, this analysis showed that, in the four countries taken into account, there was not a decrease in the economic vote during the economic crisis. The trend seems to be toward an increase of the relevance of the economic perceptions for the vote, given

that in crisis period voters were more likely to punish/reward the national incumbent for the economic changes. We have to reject our Hypothesis 1.

[Figure 2 about here]

However, even though our expectations about the longitudinal dynamic of the economic vote are not met, the individual level mechanism described by our Hypothesis 2 can still be valid. The economic vote depends on the perception that the national government is responsible for the country's economic performance. This principle is likely to be shaken when citizens become aware of the high degree of interdependence of the national economies of EU countries and the limited room of manoeuvre of national governments. Consistently with this reasoning, our H2 predicts that voters that received more information about the EU are less likely to blame/credit the national government for the conditions of the national economy. And this can be so independently from our results on the longitudinal impact of the economic crisis, for which the effect of the responsibility blurring on the economic vote can be counteracted by other (and more powerful) factors like the increased salience of the economic remarks in the public debate. In this part of the analysis, therefore, we are interested in isolating the effect of information about the EU, excluding other possible contextual confounding factors that are hard to rule out when adopting a longitudinal perspective.

To test our second hypothesis, we make use of the four-country dataset used to test hypothesis 1 and link it to data on the saliency of EU issues in the national news during electoral campaigns. Unfortunately, for this step of the analysis we cannot rely on all the sixteen post-electoral studies collected, given that not all surveys included detailed information about respondents' media consumption. Consequently, we are forced to only use post-election survey data for Germany (2009, 2013), Ireland (2007, 2011), Portugal (2005, 2009) and Spain (2011, 2015, 2016).

To take into account the amount of information about the EU the respondents are exposed to, we rely on a unique media dataset that includes data from the articles of two mainstream newspapers in each country, for the month prior to all legislative elections between 2002 and 2017. For each newspaper on each election year we have information

on the level of EU saliency<sup>4</sup>. We computed an index based on the articles' content. In particular, using automatic content analysis, the articles were coded as “about the EU” whenever the words “EU” or “European” appeared in the title or in the body. For each newspaper in each election year, the EU saliency index corresponds to the percentage of articles coded as “about the EU” on the total of analysed articles<sup>5</sup>. Table 4 provides the values of the EU saliency index for all newspapers/year.

[Table 4 about here]

As a first step to test the effect of the exposition to EU news on economic vote, we simply compare respondents that regularly use at least one of the two mainstream newspapers included in our dataset with respondents that do not read newspapers. Given that newspapers have usually a bigger impact on political sophistication than other media (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996), the former respondents should possess a higher amount of information about the EU than the latter. Consequently, we should expect a lower use of economic vote among people that regularly read mainstream newspapers. To test this proposition, we run a single logit model equal to the previous ones, apart from the fact that in this case we interacted the economic perceptions with a dummy variable that has value 0 if the respondent does not read newspapers and value 1 if the respondent read one of the mainstream newspapers of which we have content data about. The model also includes country dummies. The results are provided in Table 5.

[Table 5 about here]

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<sup>4</sup> For each country, we selected the most circulated right-wing newspaper and the most circulated left-wing one.

<sup>5</sup> The content analysis only took into account the following newspaper sections: national politics, economy, international politics, op-eds, front and last page. Two alternative measures of EU saliency have been calculated. The first one is based on manual identification of each article as “about the EU” by a team of native-language coders. The second measure is based on automatic Topic Modelling (for more details, see Costa Lobo and Kartalis, 2017). Both these measures highly correlate with the key words measure used in this paper and their use in the following analysis does not alter the results.

In line with our expectations, it seems that more informed people are less likely to use economic vote. The negative sign of the interaction term, and its statistical significance, point to the fact that, compared with people that do not read newspapers, readers of mainstream newspapers are less likely to keep national government accountable for the economic situation of the country<sup>6</sup>. The differences in terms of expected probabilities can be observed in Figure 3.

[Figure 3 about here]

In principle, these results are compatible with our argument that people that are more informed about the EU are less likely to use economic vote. However, it could also be argued that people that do not read newspapers can get information from other media; in this sense, the previous results could depend on the type of media that the respondent uses rather than being the consequence of the amount of information about the EU she gets. To deal with this possibility, in the next step of the analysis we link the actual content of the newspapers with the respondents' electoral behaviour.

As in the previous models, the dependent variable we use is the vote for incumbent parties and the main independent variable collects respondents' perceptions about the economy. The latter is also interacted with a variable that contains the EU saliency index for the newspaper that the respondent reads (the most)<sup>7</sup>. The control variables are the same than in the previous model.

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<sup>6</sup> Table F in the Appendix provides the results by country. For Ireland the interaction term is negative and statistically significant, for Spain it is negative and only marginally significant ( $p=0.07$ ), while the significance is not reached for Germany. Finally, in the case of Portugal the interaction term has a positive sign and no statistical significance.

<sup>7</sup> Obviously, in this analysis we included only respondents that stated that their preferred newspaper was one of the two mainstream newspapers included in our media dataset. For Spain (2011, 2015, 2016) the question in the survey is worded in a slightly different way. Namely, it asks about which newspaper the respondent prefers to follow the political news. Similarly, for Portugal (2005, 2009) the respondent is asked to indicate which newspaper she reads the most during the electoral campaign. For Ireland (2007, 2011), participants can give multiple answers, given they are asked about all the newspaper they regularly use. So, in these case respondents were coded as users of one of the mainstream newspapers included in the media dataset if they regularly use it, but they do not use the other. The same criterion has been used for Germany (2009, 2013).

[Table 6 about here]

The results are provided in Table 6 and are in line with our H2. The interaction term of the model is negative and statistically significant, meaning that the higher the saliency of the EU in the newspaper that the respondent usually reads, the lower is her likelihood to use the changes in the economy as vote criterion<sup>8</sup>. To ease the interpretation of the results, we can look at the marginal effect graphed in Figure 4.

[Figure 4 about here]

On the vertical axis we have the effect that the economic perceptions of the respondent have on her likelihood to vote for an incumbent party. On the horizontal axis we have the saliency of the EU in the newspaper that the respondent reads (the most). As we can see, the relation is negative: the higher the saliency, the lower the effect of economic perceptions on vote. In particular, it seems that when the respondent reads a newspaper which has more than 30% of articles about the EU, her perceptions about the economy have no effect on her vote. In accordance with our argument, the more the citizens are informed about the European Union, the more they realize economic competences have switched to the supranational level, and the less likely they are to punish/reward national incumbents for country's economic performances.

However, these results have limited general implications. The analysis only includes the readers of the two mainstream national newspapers on which we have data about EU saliency, while excluding people that use other kind of newspapers. Therefore, we cannot exclude that no-mainstream information could have a different effect on voters' behaviour, considering the likely different tone of EU articles of, for example, tabloids or minor newspapers. Still, these results represent evidence that, at least in the subpopulation we took into account, the politicisation of the European Union reduces the

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<sup>8</sup> When running models by country, the interaction term is still negative and statistically significant for Spain, negative but not significant for Germany and Portugal, and positive and not significant for Ireland. The complete results are shown in Table G of the appendix.

blame attribution to the national government for the state of the economy, producing consequences on national politics and vote.

### ***Conclusions***

This paper set out to understand the consequences of politicisation of the EU by investigating the circumstances within which “Europe” may condition the economic vote in national legislative elections.

In order to do so, we conceptualise politicisation of the EU and especially the Eurozone crisis as an instance of “blurring of responsibility” (Powell and Whitten, 1993). We posit that if EU citizens increasingly perceive that economic decision-making has become more supranational and/or they realise that the economy of the country they live in is increasingly integrated with others, they should hold the national government *less* responsible for economic performance. We expected this to be true especially after the onset of the Eurozone crisis, to the extent that salience and awareness of these dynamics may have increased from 2009 onwards. For the same reasons, we also expected that those individuals most exposed to media which give salience to the EU would employ economic perceptions to a lesser extent in the vote calculus.

In order to test these hypotheses we used individual level data fielded in the context of post-election surveys to consider the trajectory of four key protagonists of the Eurozone crisis, namely Germany, Ireland, Portugal and Spain, and finally to consider those citizens most exposed to newspapers who discuss the EU. Our analysis of the change in economic vote over time does not point to a decline in the economic vote. However, when we consider the actual exposure of citizens to media which increasingly discussed EU issues in the four countries concerned, we do find that economic voting declines among those newspaper readers. This apparent contradiction can be due to contextual confounding factors, like the relevance of economic remarks in the public debate, difficult to rule out when adopting a country-year level of analysis.

In any case, the evidence regarding our H2 provides ground for the mechanism we theorized: an increased awareness of economic constraints deriving from EU/Euro membership makes voters less likely to blame/credit national governments for country

economic performances. The data limitations which we found, in particular when considering the micro level analysis of economic voting, makes more research needed for a proper understanding of the important phenomenon at work. However, taken together, the evidence collected contributes to understand the consequences which the politicisation of the EU is having in decreasing one of the main heuristics for the domestic vote calculus.

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## TABLES AND FIGURES

**Table 1.** Election studies for the longitudinal analysis<sup>9</sup>

<b>Country</b>	<b>Election</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Period</b>
Germany	2009	2,095	Pre-crisis
Germany	2013	1,908	Crisis
Ireland	2002	2,367	Pre-crisis
Ireland	2007	1,435	Pre-crisis
Ireland	2011	1,853	Crisis
Ireland	2016	1,000	Crisis
Portugal	2002	1,303	Pre-crisis
Portugal	2005	2,801	Pre-crisis
Portugal	2009	1,317	Pre-crisis
Portugal	2011	1,000	Crisis
Portugal	2015	1,499	Crisis
Spain	2004	1,212	Pre-crisis
Spain	2008	1,204	Pre-crisis
Spain	2011	6,082	Crisis
Spain	2015	6,242	Crisis
Spain	2016	6,175	Crisis

<sup>9</sup> Five electoral studies, namely Ireland (2002), Portugal (2002, 2005), Spain (2008) and Germany (2009) were obtained from CSES Module 1-3 Harmonized Trend File (Heiko et al. 2016). In addition, we added 11 more election studies from different sources: for Spain (2004), Ireland (2007) and Portugal (2009), despite the fact they were included in the CSES trend file, we had to use the original national datasets, given the impossibility to import relevant variables due to the lack of common respondent identifier. For the election studies that refer to Ireland (2011), Germany (2013) and Portugal (2015), we also had to use the original national datasets, given they belongs to module 4 of the CSES and were therefore excluded from the Module 1-3 Harmonized Trend File. Finally, for the elections of Ireland (2016), Spain (2011, 2015, 2016) and Portugal (2011), that were not included in any of the CSES modules, we had to rely on the post-election surveys of, respectively, the Irish National Election Studies (INES), the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) and the Instituto de Ciências Sociais da Universidade de Lisboa (ICS).

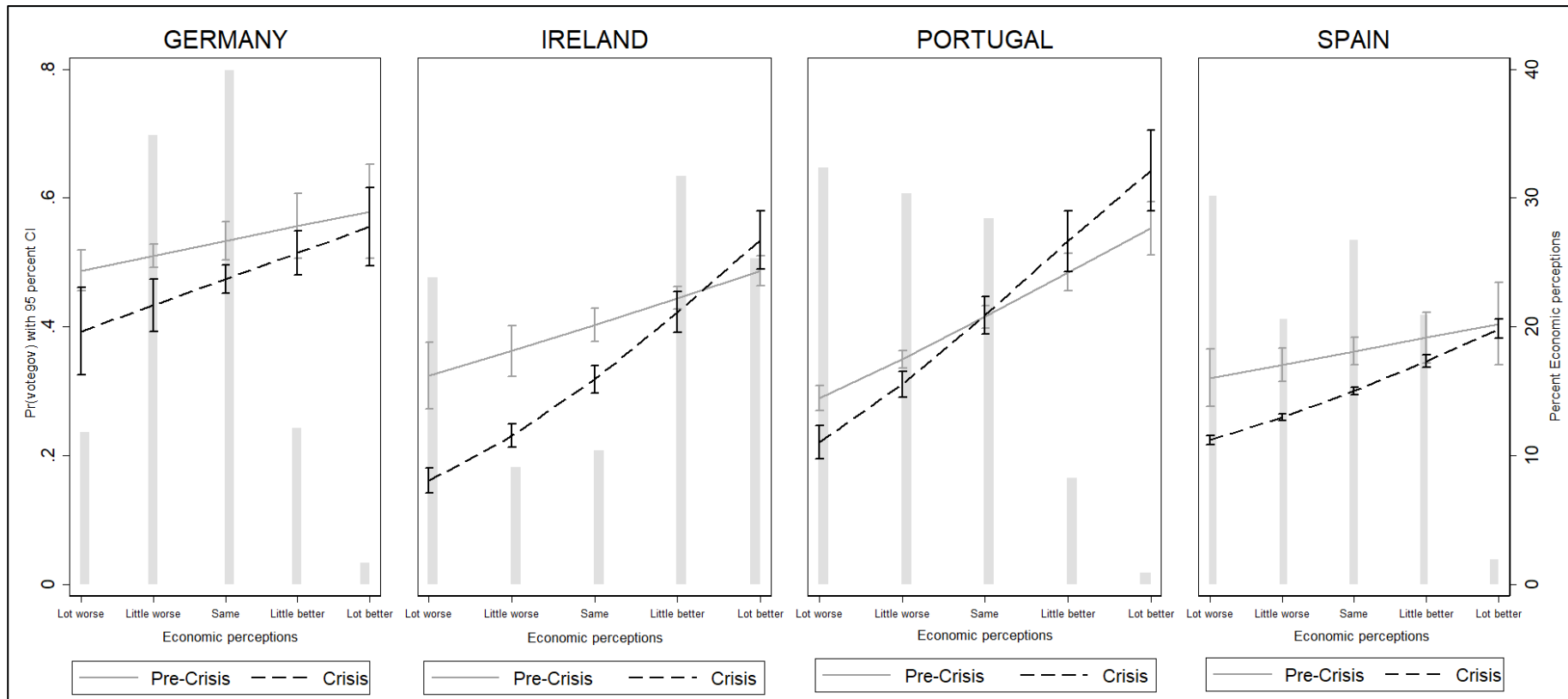
**Table 2.** Economic vote in pre-crisis and crisis period - Logit Models

	Germany	Ireland	Portugal	Spain
Economic perceptions	0.18 (0.10)	0.21*** (0.05)	0.48*** (0.05)	0.19 (0.12)
Crisis period	-0.86* (0.43)	-1.51*** (0.23)	-0.94*** (0.24)	-1.34*** (0.34)
Economic perceptions X Crisis period	0.13 (0.15)	0.35*** (0.06)	0.32** (0.10)	0.25* (0.12)
Gender	0.17 (0.11)	0.08 (0.07)	0.14 (0.09)	0.08 (0.06)
Age	0.01*** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Religiosity	0.31** (0.11)	0.26 (0.13)	0.24 (0.17)	0.51*** (0.07)
Marital status	-0.05 (0.11)	0.08 (0.08)	0.15 (0.09)	0.02 (0.06)
Education	-0.23 (0.14)	-0.28*** (0.06)	-0.09 (0.07)	-0.23*** (0.04)
Party identification	2.36*** (0.09)	2.18*** (0.09)	2.74*** (0.09)	3.60*** (0.07)
Constant	-1.16** (0.44)	-0.93** (0.30)	-2.28*** (0.36)	-1.45*** (0.36)
Observations	2749	4882	4519	14692
Pseudo $R^2$	0.413	0.245	0.401	0.515

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Figure 1.** The economic vote pre and during the Eurozone crisis.



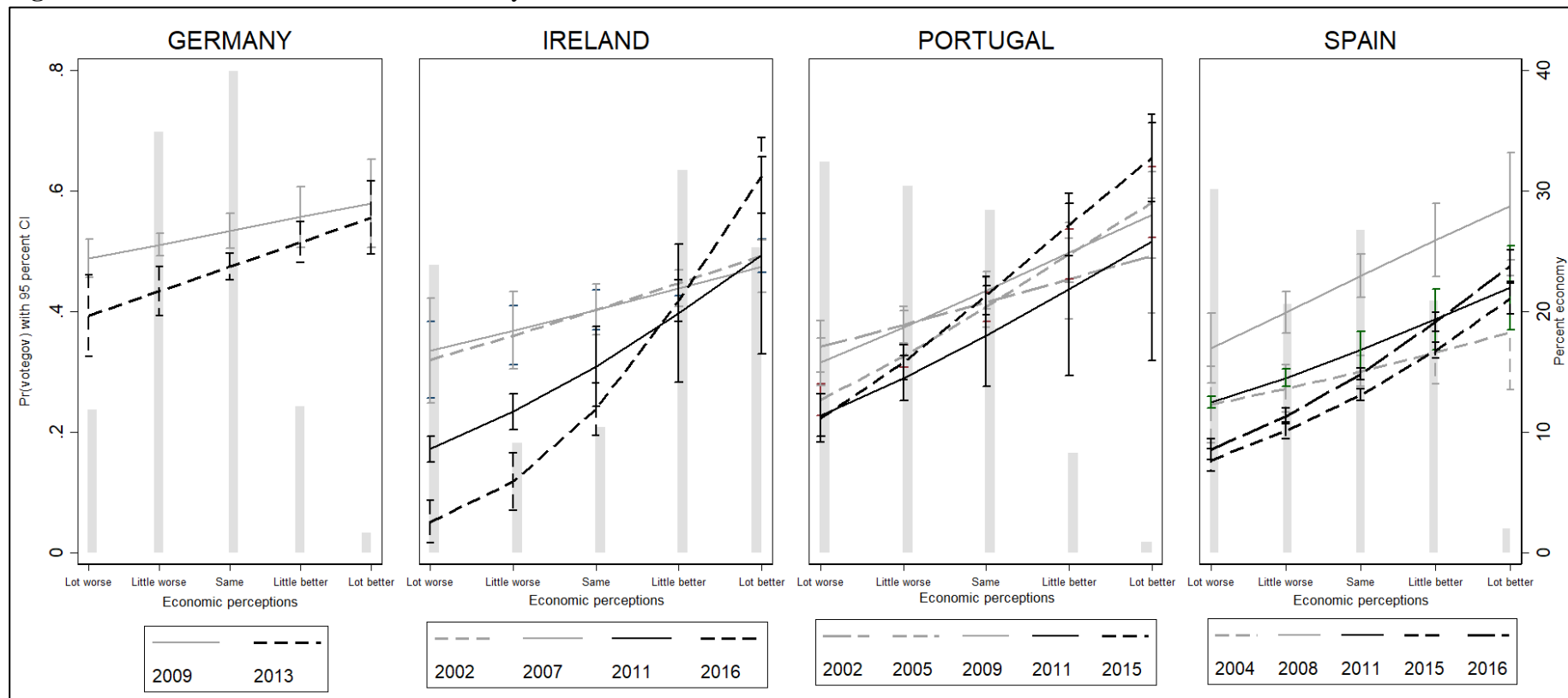
**Table 3.** Economic vote across elections - Logit Models

	Germany	Ireland	Portugal	Spain
Economic perceptions	0.18 (0.10)	0.49*** (0.11)	0.55** (0.20)	0.45*** (0.08)
Economic perceptions X 2002		-0.26* (0.13)	-0.28 (0.23)	
Economic perceptions X 2004				-0.15 (0.21)
Economic perceptions X 2005			0.05 (0.21)	
Economic perceptions X 2007		-0.30* (0.14)		
Economic perceptions X 2008				-0.07 (0.18)
Economic perceptions X 2009	Ref.		-0.12 (0.22)	
Economic perceptions X 2011		Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
Economic perceptions X 2013	0.13 (0.15)			
Economic perceptions X 2015			0.26 (0.23)	0.30** (0.10)
Economic perceptions X 2016		0.57** (0.18)		0.35*** (0.10)
Observations	2749	4882	4519	14692
Pseudo $R^2$	0.413	0.248	0.404	0.526

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Figure 2.** The economic vote over-time in key Eurozone countries



**Table 4.** EU saliency index

<b>Country</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>EU saliency</b>
Germany	2009	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	22.88184
Germany	2013	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	24.92737
Germany	2009	Süddeutsche Zeitung	17.10214
Germany	2013	Süddeutsche Zeitung	17.98407
Ireland	2002	Irish Independent	13.97575
Ireland	2007	Irish Independent	12.18558
Ireland	2011	Irish Independent	14.56103
Ireland	2016	Irish Independent	17.7234
Ireland	2002	Irish Times	15.73591
Ireland	2007	Irish Times	17.92903
Ireland	2011	Irish Times	20.37787
Ireland	2016	Irish Times	22.51969
Portugal	2002	Diario de Noticias	21.54802
Portugal	2005	Diario de Noticias	16.8942
Portugal	2009	Diario de Noticias	12.40264
Portugal	2011	Diario de Noticias	19.42568
Portugal	2015	Diario de Noticias	25.38976
Portugal	2002	Público	21.83353
Portugal	2005	Público	22.70214
Portugal	2009	Público	20.29703
Portugal	2011	Público	26.09833
Portugal	2015	Público	29.12858
Spain	2004	El Mundo	20.41208
Spain	2008	El Mundo	23.5
Spain	2011	El Mundo	21.79436
Spain	2015	El Mundo	20.1817
Spain	2016	El Mundo	27.64298
Spain	2004	El País	23.40126
Spain	2008	El País	20.11791
Spain	2011	El País	32.19568
Spain	2015	El País	24.08377
Spain	2016	El País	30.25712



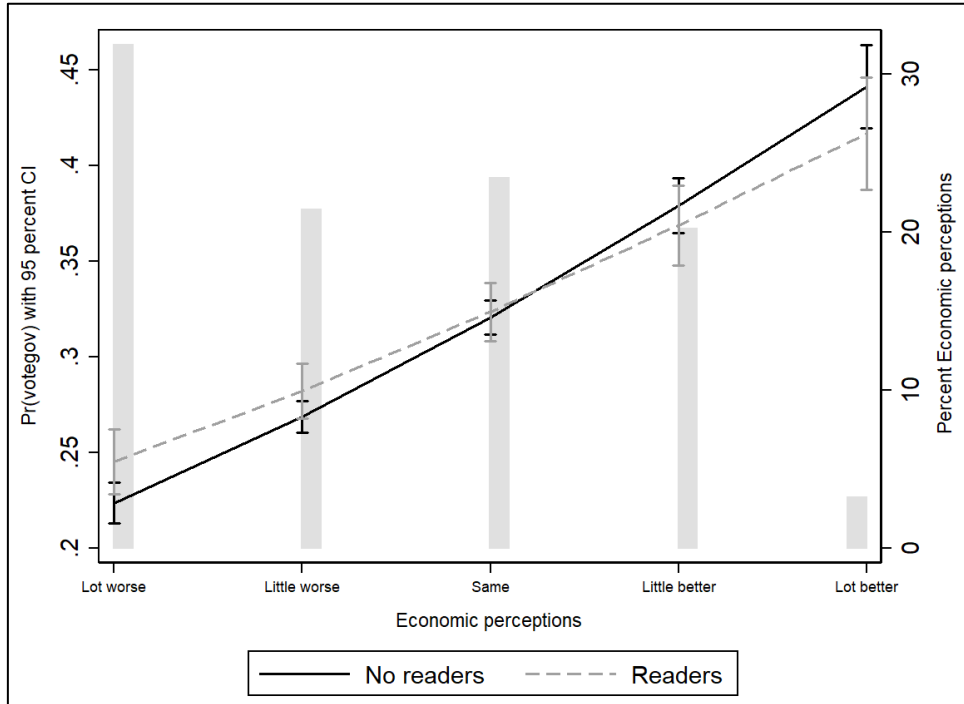
**Table 5.** Economic vote and newspaper readership - Logit Models  
Vote for Government parties

Economic perceptions	0.46*** (0.03)
Reader	0.33* (0.15)
Economic perceptions X Reader	-0.10* (0.05)
Gender	0.13* (0.06)
Age	0.01*** (0.00)
Religiosity	0.46*** (0.08)
Marital status	0.10 (0.06)
Education	-0.25*** (0.04)
Party identification	3.16*** (0.07)
Country	
Ireland	-0.62*** (0.17)
Portugal	-0.06 (0.17)
Spain	-0.39** (0.15)
Constant	-2.33*** (0.23)
Observations	11575
Pseudo $R^2$	0.427

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Figure 3.** Economic vote and newspaper readership.



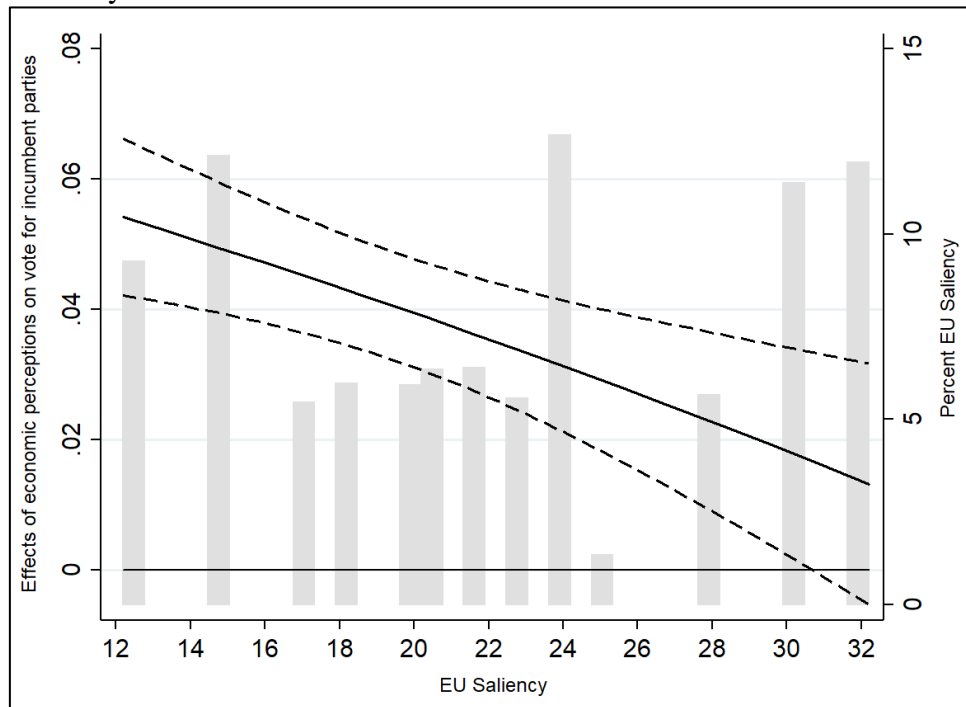
**Table 6.** Economic vote and exposition to EU news - Logit Models

Vote for Government parties	
Economic perceptions	0.77*** (0.12)
EU saliency	0.07*** (0.02)
Economic perceptions X EU saliency	-0.02*** (0.01)
Gender	0.04 (0.10)
Age	0.00 (0.00)
Religiosity	0.45** (0.14)
Marital status	0.03 (0.11)
Education	-0.27*** (0.08)
Party identification	2.70*** (0.10)
Ireland	-0.60* (0.24)
Portugal	-0.19 (0.27)
Spain	-0.36 (0.25)
Constant	-2.94*** (0.58)
Observations	3433
Pseudo $R^2$	0.403

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Figure 4.** Marginal effect of economic perceptions on vote across different levels of EU saliency



**APPENDIX**

**Table A.** Variable coding

<b>DEPENDENT VARIABLE</b>		
Vote	(0)	Other
	(1)	Government party
<b>MAIN INDEPENDENT VARIABLE</b>		
Economic perceptions	(1)	Got a lot worse
	(2)	Got a little worse
	(3)	Stayed the same
	(4)	Got a little better
	(5)	Got a lot better
<b>INDIVIDUAL LEVEL CONTROLS</b>		
Gender	(1)	Male
	(2)	Female
Age		Age of the respondent
Religiosity	(0)	Not religious
	(1)	Religious
Education	(1)	Primary education
	(2)	Secondary education
	(3)	Post-secondary education
Party Identification	(-1)	Other parties

	(0)	No identification
	(1)	Government parties
<b>TIME LEVEL INTERACTION VARIABLES</b>		
Period of the election	(0)	Pre-crisis period
	(1)	Crisis period
Year of the election		Year the elections were held
<b>MEDIA INTERACTION VARIABLES</b>		
Reader	(0)	Respondent does not read newspapers
	(1)	Respondent reads one of the biggest mainstream newspaper
EU saliency		Percentage of articles about the EU in the newspaper the respondent usually read (the most)

**Table B.** Economic vote across elections in Germany - Logit Model

	Vote for Government parties
Economic perceptions	0.18 (0.10)
2013	-0.86* (0.43)
Economic perceptions X 2013	0.13 (0.15)
Gender	0.17 (0.11)
Age	0.01*** (0.00)
Religiosity	0.31** (0.11)
Marital status	-0.05 (0.11)
Education	-0.23 (0.14)
Party identification	2.36*** (0.09)
Constant	-1.16** (0.44)
Observations	2749
Pseudo $R^2$	0.413

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table C. Economic vote across elections in Ireland - Logit Models**

Vote for Government parties	
Economic perceptions	0.49*** (0.11)
2002	1.29*** (0.30)
2007	1.43*** (0.37)
2016	-2.15*** (0.57)
Economic perceptions X 2002	-0.26* (0.13)
Economic perceptions X 2007	-0.30* (0.14)
Economic perceptions X 2016	0.57** (0.18)
Gender	0.09 (0.07)
Age	0.00 (0.00)
Religiosity	0.24 (0.13)
Marital status	0.09 (0.08)
Education	-0.28*** (0.06)
Party identification	2.17*** (0.09)
Constant	-2.26*** (0.31)
Observations	4882
Pseudo $R^2$	0.248

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table D. Economic vote across elections in Portugal - Logit Models**

Vote for Government parties	
Economic perceptions	0.55** (0.20)
2002	1.26** (0.43)
2005	0.19 (0.39)
2009	0.89* (0.42)
2015	-0.31 (0.45)
Economic perceptions X 2002	-0.28 (0.23)
Economic perceptions X 2005	0.05 (0.21)
Economic perceptions X 2009	-0.12 (0.22)
Economic perceptions X 2015	0.26 (0.23)
Gender	0.13 (0.09)
Age	0.01 (0.00)
Religiosity	0.25 (0.17)
Marital status	0.16 (0.09)
Education	-0.07 (0.07)
Party identification	2.73*** (0.09)
Constant	-2.94*** (0.48)
Observations	4519
Pseudo $R^2$	0.404

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table E.** Economic vote across elections in Spain - Logit Models

Vote for Government parties	
Economic perceptions	0.45*** (0.08)
2004	0.10 (0.59)
2008	0.85 (0.44)
2015	-1.67*** (0.24)
2016	-1.44*** (0.22)
Economic perceptions X 2004	-0.15 (0.21)
Economic perceptions X 2008	0.07 (0.18)
Economic perceptions X 2015	0.30** (0.10)
Economic perceptions X 2016	0.35*** (0.10)
Gender	0.09 (0.06)
Age	0.01*** (0.00)
Religiosity	0.51*** (0.08)
Marital status	-0.01 (0.06)
Education	-0.17*** (0.04)
Party identification	3.52*** (0.07)
Constant	-2.72*** (0.21)
Observations	14692
Pseudo $R^2$	0.526

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

**Table F.** Economic vote and newspaper readership by country - Logit Models

	Germany	Ireland	Portugal	Spain
Economic perceptions	0.48** (0.18)	1.12*** (0.17)	0.41*** (0.09)	0.45*** (0.03)
Reader	0.68 (0.70)	1.42** (0.48)	-0.78 (0.53)	0.53* (0.22)
Economic perceptions X Reader	-0.12 (0.25)	-0.75*** (0.18)	0.25 (0.20)	-0.13 (0.07)
Gender	0.40 (0.25)	-0.06 (0.15)	0.34* (0.17)	0.08 (0.07)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01*** (0.00)
Religiosity	-0.32 (0.26)	0.36 (0.31)	0.38 (0.31)	0.67*** (0.10)
Marital status	-0.26 (0.25)	0.05 (0.16)	0.27 (0.17)	0.11 (0.07)
Education	-0.63* (0.28)	-0.45*** (0.12)	-0.14 (0.14)	-0.18*** (0.05)
Party identification	2.15*** (0.18)	2.11*** (0.18)	2.71*** (0.17)	3.65*** (0.10)
Constant	-1.39 (0.85)	-2.50*** (0.68)	-2.77*** (0.67)	-3.16*** (0.23)
Observations	521	1304	1234	8516
Pseudo $R^2$	0.367	0.243	0.361	0.482

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p&lt;0.05, \*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\*\* p&lt;0.001

**Table G.** Economic vote and exposition to EU news by country - Logit Models

	Germany	Ireland	Portugal	Spain
Economic perceptions	0.55 (1.24)	0.31 (0.31)	2.28* (1.04)	2.81*** (0.46)
EU Saliency	-0.03 (0.19)	-0.09 (0.07)	0.10 (0.14)	0.32*** (0.05)
Economic perceptions X EU Saliency	-0.01 (0.06)	0.00 (0.02)	-0.08 (0.05)	-0.09*** (0.02)
Gender	0.09 (0.37)	-0.19 (0.17)	0.86* (0.37)	0.10 (0.17)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)
Religiosity	-0.42 (0.43)	0.60 (0.37)	0.11 (0.53)	0.70*** (0.19)
Marital status	-0.26 (0.40)	0.07 (0.19)	0.40 (0.38)	-0.06 (0.18)
Education	-0.41 (0.40)	-0.38** (0.14)	-0.10 (0.31)	-0.16 (0.12)
Party identification	2.06*** (0.26)	2.06*** (0.19)	3.01*** (0.35)	3.15*** (0.17)
Constant	0.17 (3.73)	0.19 (1.23)	-6.30* (2.86)	-12.01*** (1.63)
Observations	227	1012	342	1852
Pseudo $R^2$	0.363	0.227	0.481	0.532

Standard errors in parentheses

\* p&lt;0.05, \*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\*\* p&lt;0.001



**Figure A.** Distribution of economic perceptions

