

Research Proposal: EU citizens in the European Public Sphere An empirical analysis of European Union news

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Summary

This paper presents a Ph.D. research design that focusses on the presence and inclusion of European citizens in the European public sphere of Germany. This project reviews different models of the public sphere that have formerly been developed in the context of the nation state and outlines their normative expectations concerning the representation of citizens. The conceptual results of this

part will then be linked to the notion of a European, or more precisely, EU public sphere. Next, based on this conception, it is proposed that a quantitative empirical analysis of the EU news coverage in German opinion-leading newspapers will be carried out.

Introduction

Democratic legitimacy originates from the people, where *people* refers to the **citizens** of a political community. In the context of the European Union (EU), the involvement of citizens in European governance was not of primary importance for policy makers (see Dalton and Duval 1986, p. 113; van Deth 2008, p. 242). However, politicians have become more aware of the importance and necessity of civic involvement and support for the European integration. One major benchmark that aimed to bring

the EU closer to its citizens was the establishment of the **European citizenship** with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. The European citizenship also implies that the EU is no longer merely a community of states, but should become a political community as well. Furthermore, it postulates the demand of accountability of EU governance. This research aims to answer the question whether EU citizens also become visible in the European public sphere.

Theoretical Background

The notion of the **public sphere** provides a framework for understanding how an exchange between office holders and citizens can take place (Gerhards et al. 1998, p. 28). The public sphere acts as an "intermediary system" (Habermas 2006, p. 412) that **mediates between the state and society**. A variety of differently nuanced normative theories of the public sphere have been derived originating from democratic theories (see Ferree et al. 2002). Those models propose diverse criteria for the public sphere to fulfil its democratic function. One aspect in which they vary concerns the presence of citizens in the public sphere. Four models of the public sphere that significantly differ in this regard can be identified: the discursive, liberal, participatory and elitist public sphere. This research aims to examine the **presence of EU citizens in the European public sphere** in the light of these models. Their main normative assertions and resulting implications for the representation of citizens in the public sphere are briefly outlined in the table below.

	Discursive Public Sphere	Liberal Public Sphere	Participatory Public Sphere	Elitist Public Sphere
Role of citizens in the public sphere	- informal actors are ought to represent citizens interest - their presence is especially required when normative issues are addressed and less relevant during political daily business	- collective actors should be able to participate and represent citizens' interests - a variety of interests and opinions in society should be reflected	- citizens and social movements should permanently be present in the public sphere - voices of ordinary citizens should be present	- a direct participation of citizens in the public sphere is neither needed nor desired - political parties should facilitate between elites and citizens
Actor structure of the public sphere	1. Governmental system: - government - parliament - political parties - political administration - judicature 2. Intermediary system (Periphery) 2.1 Formal actors / (Output periphery) - power-regulated actors / organised interest groups 2.2. Informal actors (Input periphery) - autonomous actors - civil society (non-organised) - social /grassroots movements	1. Governmental system: - government - parliament - political parties - political administration - judicature 2. Intermediary system - collective actors	1. Governmental system: - government - parliament - political parties - political administration - judicature 2. Intermediary system - social /grassroots movements - organised interest groups 3. Ordinary Citizens	1. Governmental system: - government - parliament - political administration - judicature 2. Intermediary system - political parties

Research Questions

RQ 1: To what **extent** are EU citizens visible in the European public sphere?

RQ 2: Which **normative model of the public sphere** does best describe the representation of citizens in the European media coverage?

RQ 2.1: Regarding the **actor structure** of the public sphere theories, which model does best describe the presence of EU citizens in the European public sphere?

RQ 2.2.: In which **situational contexts** do EU citizens make an appearance in the European public sphere?

RQ 2.3: **How** do EU citizens become visible in the European public sphere?

RQ 3: To the degree citizens are granted access to the public sphere by the gatekeeping mechanisms of the media, how do they **position** themselves with regard to European integration?

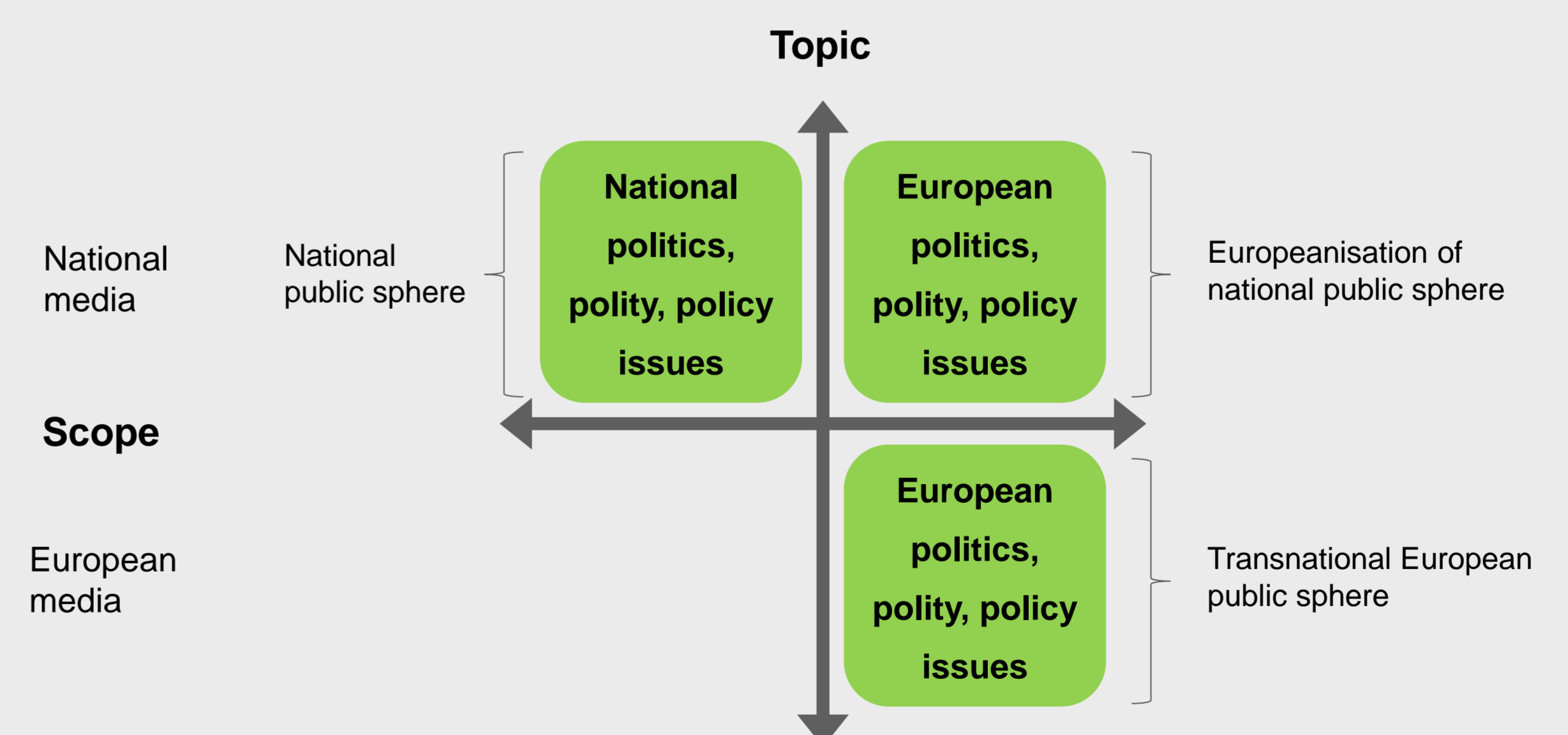
RQ 3.1. What are the **topical contexts** in which EU citizens become visible in the European public sphere?

RQ 3.2: Are references to EU citizens in the public sphere **valanced** positively or negatively?

Research Design

This research will focus on the **Europeanisation of the national public spheres**, where the scope is limited to the nation state and does not cover all EU member states at once. The scope will be limited to one member state, namely Germany.

- **Media sample:** *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (broadsheets) (*European Voice* as analytical benchmark)
- **Case selection:** references to EU, its politics, policies and/or institutions in newspaper article (coverage of national politics, polity and policy issues as analytical benchmark)
- **Time frame:** reflect EU integration as a political community: right to vote in European Parliament elections (1979), the introduction of the EU citizenship (1992) and the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) → stratified sampling procedure



References

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