

Selective EU Framing on Twitter: Party Leaders Across Six Member States, 2007–2022¹

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Abstract

This article brings framing more directly into the study of EU politicisation by examining how political party leaders communicate the European Union on Twitter. It argues that research on politicisation should pay greater attention not only to the salience of EU issues and the actors involved, but also to how the EU is interpretively constructed in elite communication. The article therefore distinguishes between two questions: which frames dominate elite EU communication, and which party-level and contextual factors are associated with the presence of EU framing more generally. To address these questions, we analyse tweets posted by party leaders in Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia between 2007 and 2022, combining manual content analysis with time-series cross-sectional regression. The analysis identifies five EU-related master frames: economic, cultural/identity, sovereignty, democracy-legitimacy, and security. EU framing in leaders' EU-related tweets is generally sparse. Nearly 85 per cent of tweets contain none of these frames, and when framing is present, it is dominated by economic and security perspectives. The likelihood that a tweet contains framing is structured primarily by ideology: TAN-oriented and especially radical-right parties emerge as the most consistent framing entrepreneurs, while government status and party size matter little; among the crisis variables, only Brexit is robustly associated with heightened framing. The article thus shows that elite EU meaning-making on social media is selective, episodic, and politically structured, and that framing is an important complementary dimension of politicisation strategies.

Keywords: Politicisation; EU; framing; Twitter; party ideology; radical right

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1. Introduction

As Zürn (2019, p. 977) notes, the theory of politicisation has made a steep career in the last two decades. While the origins of this research agenda are older, it flourished particularly after the formulation of post-functionalism, which places politicisation at the centre of European integration theory (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Politicisation is said to have transformed the EU's political climate from a 'permissive consensus' to a 'constraining dissensus' by making public preferences crucial for EU decision-making outcomes. EU issues have become more salient, subject to wider public scrutiny and increasingly polarised (de Wilde et al., 2016). Politicisation has thus become one of the most intensely discussed concepts in EU studies, and a key lens for understanding recent transformations in the integration process (de Wilde et al., 2016; Hurrelmann et al., 2015).

A rich body of research documents the trends and drivers of EU politicisation, mainly in Western and Southern Europe. Studies generally find a long-term increase in the politicisation of EU issues in national political and societal discourse, particularly since Maastricht (de Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Grande & Hutter, 2016; Kovář, 2026; Statham & Trenz, 2013). This increase is not linear but marked by 'punctuated politicisation' (Hutter et al., 2016, p. 280) and considerable cross-national variation (de Wilde et al., 2016; Grande & Hutter, 2016; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019), with higher levels of politicisation in countries with stronger public Euroscepticism (Rauh & de Wilde, 2018). Politicisation typically intensifies during 'triggering' events such as treaty revisions, European Council summits, referendums, Commission appointments, enlargement, EP elections and EU-wide crises (de Wilde et al., 2016; de Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019).

The dominant explanation links the general increase in politicisation to the growing authority of the EU (de Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Statham & Trenz, 2013). Transfers of authority from the national to the EU level push EU issues onto domestic agendas, but politicisation does not follow automatically: it requires political entrepreneurs willing and able to mobilise EU conflicts (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Political actors selectively politicise EU issues when they expect comparative advantages (Hutter et al., 2016; Rauh, 2014), making parties central intervening agents between institutional authority shifts and politicisation dynamics (de Wilde & Zürn, 2012). Beyond trends and drivers, research has also explored the consequences of politicisation for responsiveness (Anders, 2021; Blauburger & Martinsen, 2020; de Bruycker, 2019; Koop et al., 2022; Rauh, 2019), public support for EU and national institutions (Ares et al., 2017; Carmo Duarte, 2024), the enforcement of EU policies (Mérand, 2021; Miró, 2021; van der Veer, 2022), the quality of EU-level democracy (de Bruycker, 2019; de Wilde & Lord, 2016; Rauh, 2019) and the structure of political conflict in Europe (de Wilde & Zürn, 2012; Hutter & Grande, 2014; Kriesi et al., 2012).

Most of this work, however, operationalises politicisation through its three classic dimensions – salience, polarisation and actor expansion – and pays less

attention to the substance of politicised debates. Recent contributions suggest that a fuller understanding of politicisation requires examining how actors talk about the EU and make sense of integration through frames and narratives (Braun et al., 2019; Gellwitzki & Houde, 2022; Hurrelmann et al., 2015). Yet framing analysis has been deployed only rarely within this research agenda. Its analytical potential remains largely untapped (Pareschi, 2023, p. 64). Only a limited number of studies systematically link EU politicisation to EU framing (de Wilde, 2012; de Wilde & Lord, 2016; Hutter et al., 2016; Wendler, 2014). We still know relatively little about which frames structure elite communication about the EU and which political actors are most active in deploying them across time and contexts.

Framing is not part of the conventional definition of politicisation because framing the EU differently does not mechanically entail higher or lower levels of politicisation. Nonetheless, actors' capacity to (de-)politicise EU issues crucially depends on how these issues are framed in public debates (Börzel & Risse, 2018; Palonen et al., 2019). Public opinion towards the EU is responsive to framing, priming and cueing (Hooghe & Marks, 2009), and processes of sense-making shape the form that politicisation takes (de Wilde et al., 2016). Existing studies show that different framing strategies can selectively accelerate some policy goals and insulate others, empower certain actors, and condition the disruptive effects of politicisation on decision-making (de Wilde, 2012; Voltolini et al., 2020; Wendler & Hurrelmann, 2022). The framing of specific issues also spills over to attitudes towards the EU's broader actorness (de Vreese & Klausch, 2011). Given the extensive evidence linking framing to public opinion and citizens' issue positions in EU politics (Azrout et al., 2013; de Vreese et al., 2011; Diez Medrano, 2003), integrating framing into the study of politicisation is essential for assessing how politicisation affects support for European integration.

Taken together, these insights suggest that what matters for the trajectory of European integration is not only how much EU issues are politicised and by whom, but also how they are framed when they are politicised, that is, the interpretive contexts within which EU issues are embedded in the public sphere (Haapala, 2022). As de Wilde et al. (2016, p. 16) emphasised, more research is needed on the framing of EU governance in politicisation processes. We therefore argue that framing strategies should be treated as a core element of actors' strategies to politicise the EU (Diez Medrano, 2003; Helbling et al., 2010), complementing the classic dimensions of salience, polarisation and actor expansion.

This article investigates EU framing by political party actors in six EU member states. We analyse party leaders' communication on Twitter in Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia between 2007 and 2022 ($N = 181,615$), using automated and manual quantitative content analysis combined with regression analysis of time-series cross-sectional data. We focus on party leaders' official Twitter accounts because political parties and their leaders are key agents of politicisation (de Vries et al., 2021), and Twitter has become

a politically consequential arena of direct elite communication. Politicians use it both to amplify messages already expressed elsewhere and to bypass gatekeepers through more immediate and personalised intervention in public debate (Barberá & Zeitzoff, 2018; Castanho Silva & Proksch, 2021; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011; Jungherr, 2015, 2016). The issues politicians emphasise on Twitter, therefore, provide a useful indicator of their publicly expressed issue attention (Barberá et al., 2019), and in EU politics specifically, Twitter communication contributes to voters' understanding of politicians' issue positions alongside more traditional channels such as manifestos and press releases (Popa et al., 2020). Studying EU framing in this arena is substantively important not because Twitter exhausts elite communication about Europe, but because it captures one influential upstream site of political meaning-making. This matters especially given extensive evidence that framing affects how citizens interpret EU issues and evaluate EU policies (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; De Vreese & Kandyla, 2009; Scicluna, 2025). Analysing how party leaders frame the EU on Twitter thus helps illuminate one important channel through which EU politicisation is communicated, structured, and potentially transmitted to wider public debate.

The analysis addresses two research questions: (1) What are the most prominent frames used to portray the EU in elite-level Twitter communication? and (2) What are the main covariates of the presence of EU framing in such communication? By answering these questions, the article contributes empirically and theoretically to the literature at the intersection of EU politicisation and framing. Empirically, it offers a cross-national, longitudinal map of EU framing in elite communication, including both Western and Central-Eastern member states. Theoretically, it conceptualises framing as a distinct dimension of politicisation strategies and specifies how party-level characteristics and contextual factors structure the likelihood that political actors deploy EU framing in elite communication.

The analysis reveals three main findings about elite EU framing on Twitter. First, EU-related framing by party leaders is generally sparse: roughly 85 per cent of EU-related tweets do not contain framing. Second, when framing is present, economic and security perspectives dominate, while cultural/identity, sovereignty, and democracy-legitimacy frames appear more selectively. Third, variation in framing is structured primarily by ideology rather than by organisational resources or incumbency. TAN-oriented, especially radical-right, parties emerge as the most consistent framing entrepreneurs, although centrist actors also engage under specific conditions. Contextual effects are uneven, with Brexit standing out as the only crisis robustly associated with heightened framing, and we find limited evidence of a distinctive Central and Eastern European sovereigntist pattern. Taken together, these findings imply that elite EU meaning-making on social media is episodic and strategically deployed. The remainder of the article develops the theoretical expectations, outlines the research design, presents the empirical findings, and discusses their implications.

2. Framing European integration, EU politics and policies

Public discourses are structured through framing, which defines the meaning of issues and implicitly suggests normative evaluations and appropriate courses of action. In political conflict, where issues are inherently multidimensional, frames help actors organise and communicate competing interpretations. This is particularly relevant for unobtrusive issues that citizens rarely experience directly, because such issues offer political actors wider leeway to shape public perceptions. EU politics and policies have precisely this unobtrusive character, which makes the analysis of EU framing both empirically fruitful and theoretically consequential (Entman, 2003; Chong, 2019).

Against the backdrop of increasing EU politicisation, scholarship has documented multiple competing narratives of European integration and a broadening repertoire of justificatory frames used to argue for more Europe, less Europe, or alternative models of integration. National and European public spheres increasingly resemble a crowded arena in which institutions, parties, media and movement actors compete for discursive dominance by legitimising or contesting the EU polity and specific policies through diverse framing strategies (Bouza García, 2017; de Wilde, 2023). This emphasis on agency implies that EU framing is not merely reflective of structural conflict but also a strategic resource employed by actors seeking to shape the terms of public contestation.

Seminal contributions converge on a limited set of higher-order dimensions through which Europe is commonly framed. Comparative work on national narratives demonstrates that integration has been cast as democratisation and modernisation, as post-war moral rehabilitation, or as a threat to sovereignty and identity, depending on the national context (Diez Medrano, 2003). Building on broader typologies of EU portrayals, party-focused research distinguishes cultural/identity frames (including nationalist and multicultural-universalist variants), economic frames (including labour/social protection and prosperity), and a residual group of utilitarian frames that stress effectiveness, security or ecological problem-solving (Crespy & Verschueren, 2009; Helbling et al., 2010). Narrative approaches further underline that no single story now unifies the EU in the way that earlier peace-centred accounts did, and that legitimacy increasingly rests on overlapping and context-dependent narratives of Europe (Manners & Murray, 2016).

Longitudinal and comparative analyses of politicised debates suggest that sovereignty, identity and solidarity have become especially salient axes of contestation, with identity-related framing gaining prominence over time in several national settings (Grande & Hutter, 2016; Hutter et al., 2016; Hutter & Kersch, 2014). Media-centred and EP election-focused research similarly points to recurring conflicts over democratic quality, integration versus disintegration,

immigration, and the national-supranational divide. However, the salience of these frames varies across arenas and episodes of heightened contestation (de Wilde & Lord, 2016).

A key finding across this literature is that framing shifts across crises and policy domains in ways that remain structured by broader ideological cleavages. The Eurozone crisis activated socioeconomic and responsibility narratives, while the refugee and Schengen crises intensified identity and border-security frames; later episodes added sovereigntist and legitimacy-related arguments and, in some contexts, conspirative portrayals of supranational power during the pandemic (Börzel & Risse, 2018; Pirro & van Kessel, 2018; Roch, 2023). Studies of specific EU instruments and policy domains show that dominant frames vary systematically with policy substance: fiscal and budgetary conflicts invite economic responsibility narratives, while freedom of movement, migration and enlargement debates more often activate identity, sovereignty and solidarity frames (de Wilde, 2012, 2023; Economides et al., 2024).

Finally, while European integration is a shared political project, its public meaning is filtered through national narratives rooted in distinct historical experiences and political cultures. This variation underscores the value of comparative designs that can capture how discursive opportunities and constraints shape the politicisation of Europe across different member states (Diez Medrano, 2003; Gellwitzki & Houde, 2022).

Building on this scholarship, our theoretical point of departure is that EU framing is both ideologically embedded and strategically deployed. Because EU issues are often unobtrusive and complex, political actors can shape public meaning by selecting which dimensions of European integration to highlight—economic performance and redistribution, identity and culture, democratic legitimacy, sovereignty, security, or transnational solidarity. In doing so, they do not merely describe the EU but actively construct the evaluative criteria through which integration is judged and contested in public debate (Entman, 2003; Helbling et al., 2010).

The literature suggests that the most analytically productive way to connect frames to politicisation is to treat them as part of broader lines of conflict that structure contestation over Europe. Across time and countries, cultural/identity, economic and utilitarian frames recur as stable families of interpretive claims, while sovereignty, solidarity and legitimacy-oriented arguments often function as higher-level justificatory shortcuts that connect specific policy disputes to foundational questions about the appropriate form of political community (de Wilde, 2023; Grande & Hutter, 2016; Hutter et al., 2016). This implies that party or elite-level framing should display patterned variation aligned with the major dimensions of political conflict and, simultaneously, temporal sensitivity to crises that open new opportunities for reframing EU authority and policy outputs.

At the same time, existing research indicates that crisis episodes do not erase ideological structure; rather, they reweight which frames are most usable

and resonant in a given period. Socioeconomic frames have proven especially salient in fiscal and distributive conflicts. In contrast, identity and border-related frames have intensified during migration and security episodes, and legitimacy- and sovereignty-oriented arguments have surged when integration steps are publicly interpreted as reallocations of political authority (Börzel & Risse, 2018; Pirro & van Kessel, 2018; Roch, 2023). The theoretical expectation that follows is therefore not a single dominant frame of Europe, but a competitive and episodic framing environment in which enduring ideological predispositions interact with contextual triggers.

Finally, national narratives condition how these ideologically structured and strategically mobilised frames are articulated and received. Cross-national variation in historical self-understandings and experiences with European integration implies that identical partisan impulses may be expressed through somewhat different justificatory vocabularies across member states. A comparative approach is thus required to distinguish general ideological regularities in EU framing from country-specific narrative constraints and opportunities (Diez Medrano, 2003; Gellwitzki & Houde, 2022).

2.1 Formulating hypotheses regarding EU framing by political actors

Existing research suggests that EU framing by political actors is both ideologically structured and strategically adaptive. Building on this literature, we derive hypotheses about the party-level and contextual covariates of the presence of EU framing in EU-related tweets. Prior scholarship shows that different actors often rely on different frame repertoires when they engage EU issues. In the present study, however, these insights primarily serve to identify which types of parties and contexts are most likely to activate EU framing in political communication. Our inferential focus is therefore not on explaining why one specific frame is chosen over another, but on accounting for variation in the likelihood that EU-related tweets contain framing. A postfunctionalist perspective sharpens this argument by suggesting that EU enters visible party competition only when political actors choose to politicise it and find strategic advantage in doing so (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). This is especially relevant here because it helps explain not only how EU issues may be framed, but which actors are most likely to activate EU framing at all in public communication. Political parties do not merely differ in which issues they emphasise. They also differ in how likely they are to mobilise interpretive lenses that connect EU issues to broader lines of political conflict. Framing is therefore not random but embedded in ideological competition and strategic communication. In this article, this logic yields expectations about which party characteristics and contexts increase the likelihood that EU-related tweets contain

framing (de Vries & Edwards, 2009; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Hoeglinger, 2012, Voltolini et al., 2020).

Prior research shows that the political party framing of European integration is embedded in the left-right dimension of conflict. Left-wing parties are more likely to employ economic framing of European integration, the Eurozone or individual EU policies and instruments (Conti & Memoli, 2012; Hurrelmann et al., 2020; Statham & Trenz, 2013). Radical left actors often portray European integration as a neo-liberal project that encourages a 'race to the bottom' in terms of welfare entitlements and working conditions (Hutter & Kerscher, 2014). In contrast, centre-right and radical right parties frame EU issues much more often in culturalist and identitarian terms (Economides et al., 2024; van Kessel & Fagan, 2022). Parties towards this pole of the left-right spectrum more frequently employ sovereigntist and nationalist perspective frames when publicly addressing EU issues (Helbling et al., 2010), depicting the EU as a threat to national sovereignty and a cause of a crisis of cultural identity, particularly because it promotes open borders and supranational governance (Beaudonnet & Hoyo Prohuber, 2023; Ganesh & Froio, 2020). These patterns suggest that party placement on the left-right dimension shapes how strongly parties are incentivised to present EU issues through explicit framing rather than neutral reference alone. While these studies primarily document differences in frame repertoires, they also imply a broader expectation relevant in this article. Parties with clearer ideological stakes in European integration have stronger incentives to present EU issues through explicit framing rather than neutral reference alone. We therefore expect party placement on the left-right dimension to be associated with the likelihood that EU-related tweets contain framing.

There is broad agreement that political conflict in Europe is structured not only by the economic left-right dimension but also by a socio-cultural dimension commonly captured by the GAL-TAN framework (green-alternative-libertarian versus traditional-authoritarian-nationalist) (Hooghe & Marks, 2018; Kriesi et al., 2012). Because this dimension is closely tied to attitudes towards globalisation, national sovereignty, and transnational integration, it is especially relevant for the politicisation of the EU. From a postfunctionalist perspective, this makes the GAL-TAN divide especially important because it links European integration to identity-centred conflict and increases the incentives of TAN-oriented actors to politicise Europe in public communication (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Parties towards the TAN pole, which are often more Eurosceptic and disproportionately represented among the radical right (Hooghe & Marks, 2009), tend to portray EU issues in terms of threatened sovereignty, endangered national values, cultural insecurity, and, at times, Christian civilisational identity (Beaudonnet & Hoyo Prohuber, 2023; Carrieri & Conti, 2023; Ganesh & Froio, 2020). By contrast, GAL-leaning parties more often connect European integration to solidarity, multiculturalism, peace, the rule of law, and broader visions of a cosmopolitan or 'global' Europe

(de Wilde, 2023; Manners & Murray, 2016). While these studies primarily document differences in the substantive repertoires through which parties frame EU issues, they also imply a broader expectation relevant here: party placement on the GAL-TAN dimension should shape how strongly parties are incentivised to turn EU-related communication into explicit framing rather than neutral reference alone. We therefore expect party placement on the GAL-TAN dimension to be associated with the likelihood that EU-related tweets contain framing.

Some scholars argue that contestation over European integration is not fully reducible to either the left-right or GAL-TAN dimensions, but instead constitutes a partially independent line of political conflict that separates pro-EU and Eurosceptic parties (Bakker et al., 2020). Research in this vein shows that parties located at different positions on the integration dimension often rely on different ways of presenting Europe: pro-EU actors tend to foreground cooperation, peace, prosperity, or rule-based governance, whereas Eurosceptic actors more often invoke sovereignty, cultural identity, democratic unresponsiveness, or alternative visions of European order centred on national control (Börzel & Risse, 2018; Braun et al., 2019; Carrieri & Conti, 2023; Hurrelmann et al., 2020; McMahon, 2022; Roch, 2023). At the same time, far-left Eurosceptic actors may place greater emphasis on economic critiques of integration, while other Eurosceptic actors mobilise more explicitly nationalist or identitarian appeals (de Vries et al., 2021; de Wilde, 2023; Pirro & van Kessel, 2018). These studies again point to differences in frame repertoires, but they also suggest a more general expectation central to the present analysis: parties with clearer, more conflictual positions on European integration have stronger incentives to frame EU-related developments explicitly in their public communication. We therefore expect party placement on the European integration dimension to be associated with the likelihood that EU-related tweets contain framing.

The relationship between party positions and EU framing is not uniform over time and space (Pirro & van Kessel, 2018). Crisis periods are especially important in this regard because they not only raise the salience of EU issues but also create incentives and opportunities for political actors to interpret developments in politically advantageous ways. Prior research shows that different crises have privileged different frame repertoires: the Eurozone crisis was often communicated through socio-economic conflict, the refugee crisis through cultural and identitarian lenses, Brexit through sovereignty and democratic-legitimacy claims, and the Covid-19 pandemic through narratives of elite distance, centralisation, and political distrust (de Wilde, 2023; Pirro & van Kessel, 2018; Roch, 2023). In the present study, however, the key implication of this literature is not that each crisis mechanically generates one specific frame, but that crisis contexts heighten conflict, uncertainty, and the demand for interpretation, thereby making explicit EU framing more likely in political communication. Given that parties adapt their communicative strategies within

ideological constraints in order to maximise political advantage (Hänggli & Kriesi, 2012), crisis periods should be associated with a higher likelihood that EU-related tweets contain framing. Studying framing in the context of crises is particularly important because crisis communication can shape citizens' attitudes towards the EU and intensify political contestation (Ferrara et al., 2023). Based on the previous discussion, we formulate the following tentative hypotheses:

- H1: Party placement on the left-right dimension is associated with the likelihood that EU-related tweets contain framing.
- H2: Party placement on the GAL-TAN dimension is associated with the likelihood that EU-related tweets contain framing.
- H3: Party placement on the European integration dimension is associated with the likelihood that EU-related tweets contain framing.
- H4: Crisis contexts are associated with the likelihood that EU-related tweets contain framing.

Political parties also exhibit variation in how they frame political issues contingent upon their status as governing or opposition actors (Helbling, 2014; Helbling et al., 2010; Hurrelmann et al., 2020; Kovář, 2023). Prior research on both legislative and non-legislative political activities (Bäck et al., 2021; Baumann et al., 2015), as well as on social media engagement by politicians (Font, 2023; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011), underscores the importance of individual-level characteristics, such as gender, age and education, as relevant factors influencing political activity. Accordingly, these variables are incorporated as control measures in all subsequent analyses to account for their potential confounding effects.

3. Research design and analytical strategy

3.1 Framing theory and conceptual approach

To study the presence of EU framing in party leaders' EU-related tweets, we draw on framing theory (Goffman, 1986). Framing theory conceptualises frames as interpretive structures that guide the perception and communication of reality by selectively emphasising some aspects while omitting others, effectively drawing boundaries around 'what is at issue', much like a picture frame (Gamson, 2004). These structures function through the processes of selection, organisation, presentation, and emphasis, thereby shaping the salience of specific elements of an issue (Entman, 1993). According to Entman (1993), framing involves highlighting particular facets of perceived reality within a communicative context to advance a specific problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or policy recommendation. Frames thus fulfil four core functions: (1) defining problems

by identifying causal agents and their actions; (2) diagnosing causes by attributing responsibility; (3) making moral judgments by evaluating agents and their effects; and (4) suggesting remedies by proposing and legitimising solutions.

Building on this sociological foundation of framing (Goffman, 1986), frames are not inherent to issues or events themselves but are constructed through the interpretive processes of framing actors (D'Angelo et al., 2019). Issues and events acquire meaning through the frames within which they are embedded and communicated (Hackett, 1984). The central premise of framing theory is that how an issue is framed significantly influences public understanding and perceived importance (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). There are two types of frames. Generic frames are broadly applicable across a range of issues, temporal contexts, and geographic settings. In contrast, issue-specific frames are tailored to particular political topics or policy domains. Early research on the framing of political issues predominantly focused on the prevalence of generic frames across diverse topics and temporal contexts. Building on more recent scholarship (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), this study draws on issue-specific frames to identify the presence of EU framing in party leaders' EU-related tweets. In line with past research, the framing of the EU can concern two specific aspects. It can involve the EU's policies and instruments as well as its nature and existence (polity contestation) (De Wilde et al., 2013; Michailidou, 2015). Thus, the framing analysis of the EU concerns what the EU is and what it does (Pareschi, 2023).

3.2 Frame identification, coding, and limitations

Frame identification can proceed via two approaches: the deductive approach, which derives frames from existing literature prior to analysis, and the inductive approach, which allows frames to emerge organically from the data (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). While scholars have advocated using predefined frames to enhance the reliability and comparability of findings (Chong & Druckman, 2007), this approach may overlook contextually salient emergent frames. This study employs a combined strategy, primarily relying on deductive identification and incorporating inductive validation through examination of the dataset to identify relevant EU-related frames. Building on this approach, five EU-related master frames (Snow & Benford, 1992) – economic, cultural, sovereignty, democracy-legitimacy, and security – were identified using the deductive-inductive approach. Although this study limits its analysis to five master frames, it remains grounded in established literature. The inductive component not only confirmed the relevance of the deductively identified frames but also reinforced the external validity of prior research.

The coding scheme used to identify the presence of EU framing in tweets follows Entman's (1993) functional approach, operationalising frames through the presence of frame-specific reasoning and/or framing devices. A key measurement

decision in this study concerns the threshold for identifying frame presence. In much framing research, a stronger inference of framing rests on the co-occurrence of at least two indicative elements within the same coding unit (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). We do not apply that criterion here because tweets are extremely short texts and, until 2017, were limited to 140 characters. Requiring multiple indicators within a single tweet would therefore risk systematically under-identifying framing in short-form political communication. Instead, a frame is coded as present when a tweet contains at least one frame-specific reasoning or framing device.

This choice has implications for how the measure should be interpreted. Our coding captures frame presence in a relatively thin sense, appropriate for short tweets, rather than full argumentative articulation in the stronger classical sense of framing theory. More precisely, the measure is best understood as identifying the activation of a framing lens, that is, the invocation of a particular interpretive perspective through which the EU is presented, rather than a fully elaborated frame containing a complete problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and remedy proposal within a single tweet. Because the threshold for coding is relatively broad, the line between a topical reference and a frame cannot always be perfectly sharp. At the same time, the coding does not classify any EU-related mention as framing. A frame is identified only when a tweet contains frame-specific reasoning or a framing device tied to one of the five master frames. The use of a predefined coding scheme, manual coding, and satisfactory intercoder reliability scores helps reduce the risk of conflating topical references with frame activation, even though that risk cannot be eliminated entirely. The findings should therefore be interpreted as evidence on the presence and distribution of frame activation in EU-related tweets, rather than as a measure of fully developed framing in longer, more discursive forms of political communication. Table B2 in Appendix B provides examples of the primary reasoning and framing devices used as indicators for the five frames under investigation.

Based on our coding scheme, each EU-related tweet was systematically coded using manual quantitative content analysis to determine whether it contained EU framing, operationalised as the presence of at least one of the five identified frames, as indicated by the presence or absence of their reasoning and framing devices¹. Manual content analysis remains the methodological benchmark for framing research (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013), particularly because it can capture subtle, context-dependent categories that are often difficult to detect with automated techniques. This coding strategy allowed us to identify whether EU framing was present in individual tweets and, in a descriptive step, to examine how the five frame categories were distributed across the dataset. The unit of analysis was the individual tweet, rather than discrete framing or reasoning devices, acknowledging that a single tweet may contain multiple frames (Entman, 1993). Intercoder reliability was assessed separately for each frame on a sample of

250 randomly selected EU-related tweets spanning the six countries. We obtained the following Krippendorff's α values: 0.92 for the economic frame, 0.86 for the cultural frame, 0.89 for the sovereignty frame, 0.79 for the democracy frame, and 0.87 for the security frame. These values indicate satisfactory reliability, in line with Krippendorff (2013), who identifies 0.667 as the minimum acceptable value and recommends a value of at least 0.8.

3.3 Main Twitter dataset

To examine the presence of framing in EU-related tweets, we rely on an original dataset of tweets posted by party leaders of the main political parties in the six analysed countries during the period under study. To be included, a political party had to gain representation in its national parliament at least twice after Twitter's establishment in March 2006 (Sartori, 2005). The details regarding the dataset collection, content analysis, and coding used to identify EU-related tweets are provided in Appendices A and B. The list of all included parties is in Appendix C. The analysed period ranges from January 1, 2007, to December 31, 2022. We selected this period because it allows for a longitudinal investigation of EU framing and for testing the hypotheses mentioned above. This period also coincided with Twitter's gradual emergence as a vital communication tool for politicians in the analysed countries. Overall, the dataset contains 14,528 EU-related tweets. Due to space limitations, the justification for the focus on party leaders and the case selection is included in Appendix D.

3.4 Operationalisation of variables for explanatory analysis

After identifying framing through content analysis, we turned to our second research question, which concerns the covariates of framing presence in EU-related tweets. To address this question, we complement the 'Twitter dataset' with a dataset containing individual- and party-level variables of interest. Our dependent variable is dichotomous and captures whether an EU-related tweet contains framing, operationalised as the presence of at least one of the five identified frames. The independent party-level variables are operationalised as follows. The placement on the left-right, GAL-TAN, and European integration dimensions is operationalised using the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys (Jolly et al., 2022). All three variables are continuous: the left-right and GAL-TAN dimensions range from 0 (extreme left/libertarian) to 10 (extreme right/nationalist), and the positions on the European integration dimension range from 1 (strongly opposed) to 7 (strongly in favour)². We also control for government/opposition status. It is coded dichotomously,

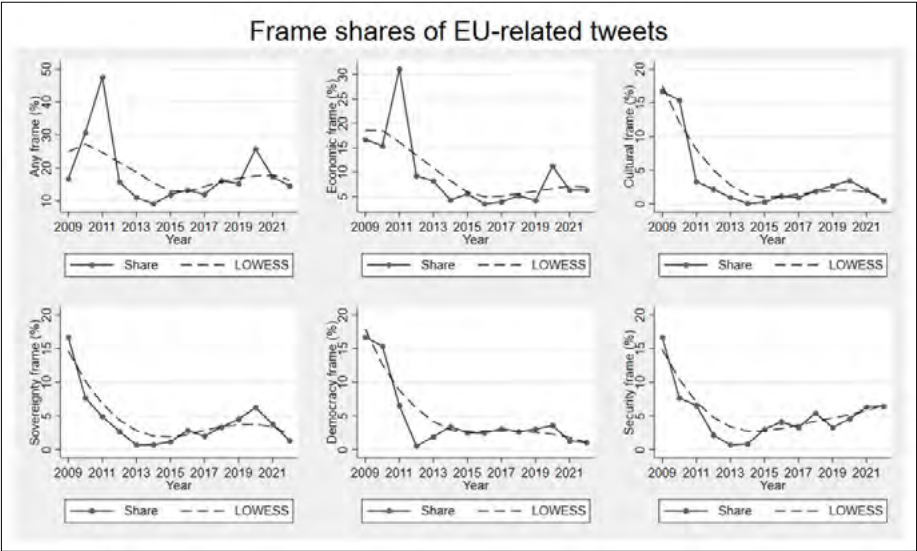
indicating whether the politician belonged to a governmental party at the time the tweet was posted. The data are collected through the Comparative Political Data Set (Armingeon et al., 2024). To respond to our second research question on the variation of framing across crisis periods, we operationalised crisis duration based on prior existing literature (de Wilde, 2023; Kalsie & Pandey, 2020; Kovář, 2023; Roch, 2023). Accordingly, the Eurozone crisis was dichotomously coded to last between October 15, 2009 and May 15, 2014, the refugee crisis to last between June 1, 2015 and March 31, 2016, Brexit to last between June 23 2016 and January 31, 2020 and the Covid-19 to last between March 11, 2020 and May 5, 2023.

4. Results

4.1 Temporal Trends in EU Framing

EU framing, operationalised as the presence of at least one of the five investigated frames in each tweet, is relatively rare. As Figures 1 and 2 show, nearly 85% of EU-related tweets are devoid of any framing. However, this proportion fluctuates over the analysed period. In 2010, the share of frameless tweets declined to 70%, and further dropped to approximately 50% in 2011. These early figures should be interpreted with caution, as they are partly influenced by the relatively low volume of EU-related tweets in the dataset's initial phase. Following this period, the prevalence of framed tweets declined, reaching a nadir in 2014 when over 90% of EU-related tweets lacked any of the five frames. Since 2015, the share of tweets containing at least one frame has gradually increased, peaking at nearly 26% in 2020 and remaining relatively stable thereafter. This trend is further visualised in the first pane of Figure 1, which plots the annual share of EU-related tweets featuring framing alongside a locally weighted scatterplot smoothing (LOWESS) line³. The smoother highlights the overall decline after 2011, the modest upward trajectory beginning in 2015, and the absence of any consistent linear increase in framing over time.

Figure 1:
Annual share of EU-related tweets featuring at least one frame (2009–2022)



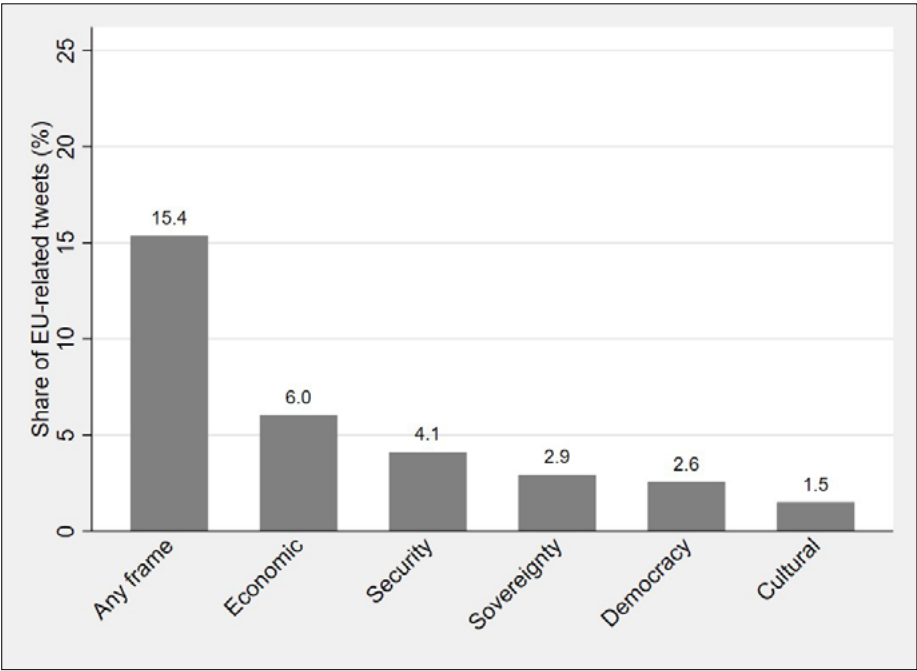
Source: The author.

These findings suggest that while EU framing in EU-related tweets experienced brief periods of increased visibility, it has generally remained limited across the analysed period. The overall trend indicates a fluctuating yet consistently low level of framing, with a modest resurgence beginning in 2015. The consistently low levels of framing in EU-related tweets, coupled with the platform's structural tendencies toward brevity and immediacy, suggest that Twitter is primarily used for informational dissemination rather than strategic framing in EU politics. This aligns with broader research indicating that political actors often employ Twitter to signal positions, share updates, or react to events, rather than to construct sustained narrative frames (Chen et al., 2021).

Figure 1 (in panes 2-6) and Figure 2 also present the relative shares of the five frames within EU-related tweets. The economic frame is the most frequently present among the five frames, comprising approximately 6.0% of EU-related tweets. This suggests that economic concerns are the most frequently invoked thematic lenses when political leaders frame EU matters on Twitter in the six analysed countries. The frame exhibits a pronounced peak around 2011, likely reflecting heightened public discourse at the beginning of the Eurozone crisis (though the high share is also partly attributable to the small number of EU-related tweets at the time). A sharp decline and a prolonged period of low and stable usage follow this surge. The pattern suggests that economic framing was event-driven, with limited persistence beyond the immediate crisis context. The

LOWESS smoother confirms the absence of a linear increase over time, instead revealing a distinct shift beginning around 2016. From this point onward, the salience of the economic frame rises modestly and then stabilises, maintaining a consistent presence in nearly 7% of EU-related tweets. This level of visibility, while lower than its crisis-era peak, indicates that economic concerns remain a non-negligible component of EU discourse.

Figure 2: Distribution of EU-related tweets by frame



Source: The author.

The security frame follows with a share of 4.1%, indicating a moderate level of attention to issues commonly associated with migration, terrorism, or geopolitical threats. It peaks early in the dataset, around 2009–2010, and then declines sharply. The LOWESS confirms this initial downturn and shows no evidence of a sustained upward trajectory over the whole period. However, beginning around 2016, it reveals a nearly linear upward trend that stabilises in the final years, suggesting a renewed and steady engagement with security-related themes. This pattern likely reflects the influence of recurring geopolitical disruptions and migration pressures. The frame’s consistent and slightly rising presence points to a durable, if not dominant, role in EU-related discourse. In line with existing research, security-related arguments are a recurring feature of EU discourse, frequently invoked in the context of crises, enlargement, and migration agreements (Barth & Bijsmans, 2018; Börzel & Risse, 2018; de Wilde, 2023).

The sovereignty frame appears in 2.9% of EU-related tweets, reflecting occasional engagement with questions of national autonomy and EU authority. However, these concerns are significantly less prevalent in EU-related tweets from political leaders than in those reported from other data sources (Barth & Bijsmans, 2018; Pirro & van Kessel, 2018). After a steep decline in salience between 2009 and 2013, the trend remains low for several years. From 2016 onward, however, the trajectory shows a nearly linear increase, indicating a gradual and sustained reactivation of sovereignty-related discourse. This upward movement likely corresponds with developments such as Brexit, rule-of-law conflicts, and the broader rise of Eurosceptic narratives. While the overall share remains modest, the steady growth suggests that sovereignty concerns are becoming more frequent in elite-level EU communication.

The democracy frame, present in 2.6% of EU-related tweets, suggests limited but notable discourse around democratic legitimacy and institutional accountability of EU institutions, decision-making, and policy output. The share trend line shows an evident decline in salience from 2009 to approximately 2013–2014, after which it stabilises at a consistently low level. This trajectory is confirmed by the LOWESS, which mirrors the early drop and subsequent flat pattern. Unlike other frames that show signs of reactivation or upward movement in later years, the democracy frame remains persistently subdued throughout the second half of the period. This indicates that democratic concerns, while present, do not gain renewed traction in elite-level EU-related Twitter communication over time. This subdued role of democracy-related arguments aligns with broader research, which finds that while concerns about legitimacy and accountability are acknowledged, they are generally less prominent in EU debates than frames centred on sovereignty, identity, or security (Barth & Bijsmans, 2018; de Wilde, 2023; Wendler, 2014).

Finally, the cultural frame is the least represented, appearing in only 1.5% of EU-related tweets, suggesting a marginal role for identity and cultural narratives in elite-level EU discourse. Its salience drops sharply between 2009 and 2013 and remains low thereafter. The LOWESS trend confirms this trajectory, showing a steep early decline followed by a flat pattern with minimal variation. Unlike other frames, cultural references do not regain prominence, suggesting limited resonance or strategic relevance in political leaders' EU-related Twitter communication. This marginal role of cultural framing contrasts with research highlighting identity and cultural conflict as recurrent dimensions of EU politicisation, often intertwined with sovereignty debates (Diez Medrano, 2003; Hutter et al., 2016; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; Wendler, 2014). Its weak presence in elite-level Twitter discourse, therefore, suggests that such narratives resonate less here than in other arenas of EU contestation.

Overall, these distributions indicate that economic and security concerns dominate EU-related discourse on Twitter, while cultural and democratic themes

remain marginal. The generally low salience of all frames suggests that political leaders primarily use Twitter to respond to events and share information, rather than to engage in sustained, strategic framing. This pattern underscores the platform's role as a reactive arena for elite communication, where framing is episodic and closely tied to high-salience moments rather than long-term agenda-setting.

4.2 The covariates of EU framing

We next examine the covariates of EU framing. Our dependent variable is dichotomous, indicating whether an EU-related tweet contains framing. We estimate logit, probit, and linear probability models to assess the consistency and robustness of the results. As an additional robustness check, and to address potential small-sample bias given the relative rarity of framing for some actors, we also estimated Firth logistic models, which reduce small-sample bias and produce finite estimates in cases of separation (Firth, 1993; Rainey & McCaskey, 2021). Because Firth logit does not allow clustered standard errors, which are important given the hierarchical structure of our data, these estimates are treated as supplementary rather than as the main specification. All models include country and year fixed effects. In the remainder of the analysis, we therefore base our interpretation on Model 1 (logit), which is easier to interpret than the probit and complementary log-log models and offers advantages over the linear probability model. Figure 3 visualises the coefficient estimates from the main logit specification, while Figure E1 in Appendix E presents the corresponding marginal effects. Full regression results from all model specifications are reported in Appendix E.

The results show that ideology is the strongest and most consistent predictor of EU framing. On both the left-right and GAL-TAN dimensions, the main coefficients indicate that parties located further to the right and closer to the authoritarian-nationalist pole are more likely to employ framing in their EU-related tweets. At the same time, the significant squared terms indicate that these relationships are not strictly linear. Figure E1 in Appendix E qualifies the coefficient estimates by showing that the predicted probability that an EU-related tweet contains framing is highest for leaders of parties located around the centre of both dimensions. In substantive terms, this suggests that while right-leaning and TAN-oriented actors are generally more prone to frame EU issues, centrist actors also appear more likely to engage in EU framing under some conditions, although the present analysis does not allow us to identify the precise mechanism behind this pattern.

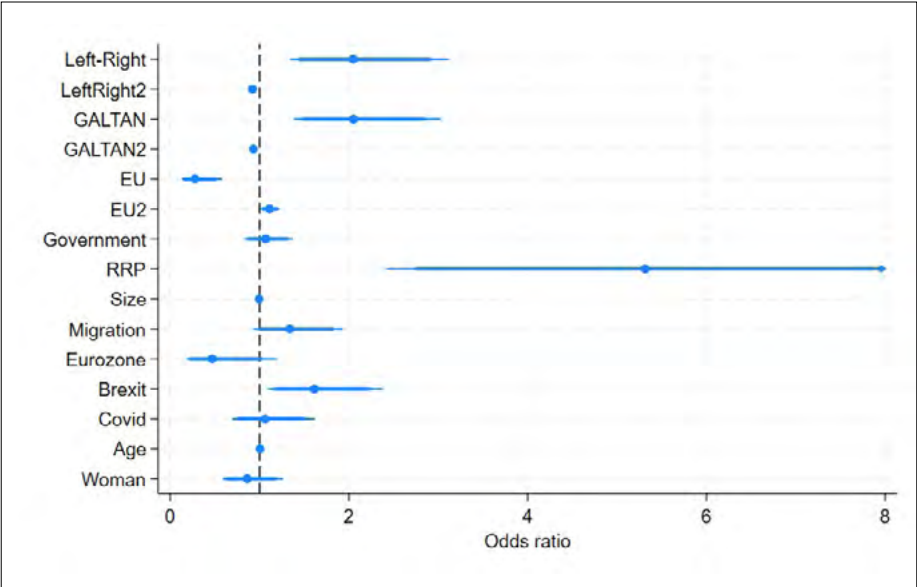
Positions on the European integration dimension also matter, but in a different way. The negative main effect and positive squared term suggest a curvilinear relationship. However, the corresponding marginal-effects plot indicates that this

pattern is driven primarily by higher framing among Eurosceptic actors rather than by equally strong framing at both extremes of the integration dimension. In that sense, the European integration dimension matters less as a symmetric, curvilinear structure than as an indication that parties critical of integration are especially likely to frame EU issues explicitly. Party characteristics show more limited effects. Government participation and party size are not significantly associated with the presence of framing in EU-related tweets. By contrast, radical right parties stand out as key entrepreneurs of EU framing. Across all models, they are several times more likely than other parties to produce EU-related tweets that contain framing. The predicted probability that an EU-related tweet contains framing is around 50 per cent for radical right parties, compared with about 16 per cent for party leaders of parties not classified as radical right.

The association between crisis events and EU framing is more mixed. Brexit is consistently associated with a higher likelihood of framing, with the predicted probability that a tweet contains framing increasing from approximately 18 to 26 per cent. By contrast, the Eurozone and migration crises show significant effects only in the Firth logit model, which does not account for data clustering, indicating that these results are not robust across specifications. The Covid-19 crisis is not significantly associated with EU framing. This suggests that the framing of the EU in response to crises is conditional rather than automatic: heightened salience alone does not guarantee that party leaders will frame EU issues explicitly on Twitter. Instead, the effects of crises appear to depend on political opportunity structures and on whether a given crisis can be credibly linked to broader lines of contestation over Europe.

Overall, these findings align closely with postfunctionalist theory, which expects the politicisation of Europe to be driven primarily by parties at the TAN pole and, in particular, by the radical right (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). The elevated framing activity among radical-right leaders in our data reflects their role as particularly active entrepreneurs of EU contestation. At the same time, the curvilinear effects on the left-right and GAL-TAN dimensions qualify any overly simplistic reading of this expectation, showing that EU framing is not monopolised by a single ideological camp. Rather, while radical-right actors are particularly active, centrist actors also selectively and strategically engage in EU framing under specific conditions.

Figure 3:
Coefficient plot of covariates of EU framing in tweets



Note: Based on Model 1. Full regression tables and marginal-effects plot are reported in Appendix E.
Source: The author.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

This article examined how leaders of political parties in six EU member states framed the European Union in Twitter communication between 2007 and 2022. Combining manual content analysis with time-series cross-sectional regression, it addressed two linked questions: which frames dominate elite portrayals of the EU, and which party-level and contextual factors are associated with the presence of EU framing. Three findings stand out. First, EU framing in party leaders' EU-related tweets is generally sparse: nearly 85 per cent of EU-related tweets contain no identifiable framing. Second, when framing is present, it is dominated by economic and security perspectives, while sovereignty, democracy-legitimacy, and cultural frames appear more selectively. Third, the likelihood of framing is structured primarily by ideology rather than by party size or government participation, with radical-right and TAN-oriented actors emerging as especially consistent framing entrepreneurs. Brexit is the only crisis robustly associated with heightened framing.

These findings have several broader implications for the study of EU politicisation and political communication. Most immediately, they suggest that Twitter may be a more limited arena for sustained EU meaning-making than some

accounts of digital politicisation imply. Party leaders clearly use the platform to mention Europe, but much less often to embed EU issues in explicit interpretive frames. This points to a form of communication strongly shaped by immediacy, signalling, and reactive commentary, which aligns with broader accounts of Twitter as a medium favouring short-form, rapid, and less-elaborated elite communication (Chen et al., 2021; Jackson & Lilleker, 2011). In this respect, the article contributes not only to research on EU politics but also to debates on how platform form conditions the style and depth of elite political communication. The implication is not that Twitter is irrelevant to politicisation, but that politicisation on short-form social media often operates through selective activation rather than sustained framing.

The descriptive patterns also matter for the literature on the content of EU contestation. The dominance of economic and security frames suggests that elite EU communication on Twitter remains anchored primarily in pragmatic and immediate concerns, rather than in the deeper identity-based or sovereignty-centred narratives that have often been highlighted in research on parliamentary debate, media discourse, and broader politicisation dynamics (Hoeglenger, 2016; Hutter et al., 2016; Hutter & Kriesi, 2019; Wendler, 2014). In that sense, the article does not simply show that framing is sparse. It also shows that when framing does occur in this arena, it is concentrated in a relatively narrow subset of issue interpretations. This suggests that elite contestation over Europe on Twitter may be less about sustaining broad ideological narratives and more about selectively attaching EU-related developments to concrete problem definitions that are politically salient at a given moment.

The results also speak directly to postfunctionalist accounts of European integration. Hooghe and Marks argue that Europe becomes politically contested when party actors choose to inject it into visible competition, and that identity-centred conflict is especially important in structuring such politicisation (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). The present findings broadly support that view. Radical-right and TAN-oriented actors emerge as the most consistent entrepreneurs of EU framing, which fits the expectation that parties with stronger incentives to mobilise sovereignty, identity, and transnational conflict are especially likely to politicise Europe in public communication. At the same time, the curvilinear results on the left-right and GAL-TAN dimensions qualify an overly simplistic reading of postfunctionalism. The findings do not suggest that EU framing is monopolised by a single ideological camp. Rather, they indicate that while radical-right actors are particularly active, centrist and pro-European actors also engage in framing under specific conditions. One plausible interpretation is that centrist actors activate EU framing when EU issues become broadly salient and require problem-solving, legitimating, or defensive responses in public debate. However, the present design cannot determine whether such framing is primarily reactive to radical-right entrepreneurship or reflects a distinct mechanism of mainstream

EU contestation. Politicisation on social media is therefore not reducible to a single-party family, even if it is clearly structured by the asymmetries highlighted in postfunctionalist theory.

A further implication concerns the relationship between party politics and elite communication. When EU framing occurs, it is not random, stylistic, or merely a by-product of platform use. Instead, it is associated above all with ideological and party-family variables, whereas organisational resources such as party size and incumbency matter much less. This suggests that competitive political incentives shape not only whether parties talk about Europe, but whether they do so in explicitly interpretive ways. In that sense, the article contributes to political communication research by showing that elite messaging about the EU on social media remains deeply embedded in party competition, even in a medium often associated with speed, personalisation, and informality.

The findings should, however, be interpreted in light of the study's design limits. The coding strategy captures frame presence in a relatively thin sense: it identifies the activation of a framing lens rather than a fully elaborated interpretive package. This threshold is appropriate to the short format of tweets, but it also means that the analysis does not capture the full argumentative depth that framing may take in longer texts. At the same time, this limitation makes one of the article's central findings more striking rather than less. Even with a relatively low threshold for frame presence, nearly 85 per cent of EU-related tweets remain frameless. The study should therefore be read as evidence on the presence and distribution of frame activation in short-form elite communication, not as a measure of fully developed framing across all political arenas. In addition, the country sample is regionally unbalanced: five of the six cases are from Central and Eastern Europe, with Germany included as a Western European benchmark. The findings should therefore be interpreted primarily as evidence on elite EU framing across a CEE-centred comparative sample rather than as representative of the EU as a whole.

The crisis findings also merit a cautious interpretation. Brexit is the only crisis consistently associated with heightened framing, whereas the Eurozone crisis, the refugee crisis, and Covid-19 show no robust effects across specifications. This suggests that crises do not mechanically translate into intensified EU framing by party leaders. One possible reason is that, although the Eurozone crisis is reflected descriptively in an early peak of economic framing, its effects may have been concentrated in particular countries, parties, or frame types rather than increasing the overall likelihood of framing across the full sample once common temporal dynamics are taken into account. Instead, their effects appear conditional on political opportunity structures, partisan incentives, and the extent to which a given crisis can be clearly linked to broader lines of contestation over Europe. That conclusion is important for research on politicisation because it cautions against assuming that salience shocks automatically generate framing.

Even when Europe becomes more visible, elite actors do not necessarily respond by developing explicit interpretive constructions of EU politics.

Future research could extend this argument in several directions. Comparative work across platforms would help clarify whether the relative sparsity of framing is specific to Twitter's short-message format or whether it also characterises other forms of elite online communication. Because this study captures Twitter as it existed between 2007 and 2022, before its 2023 rebranding as X and subsequent changes in platform governance and communication dynamics, the findings should be generalised cautiously to later periods. Future research should also examine whether similar patterns of EU framing persist under these altered platform conditions. Broader country coverage would make it possible to assess more systematically whether the patterns identified here reflect more general features of EU politics or are partly conditioned by the six-country design. Finally, qualitative and mixed-methods research could complement large-N content analysis by examining how party elites themselves understand the strategic value or limits of framing EU issues in digital communication. Taken together, the findings suggest that framing should be treated as a complementary dimension of politicisation, but one whose expression depends heavily on both platform form and party competition. Elite EU contestation on social media is not absent, but it is selective, episodic, and politically structured.

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Appendix A: Information on the collection and summary of the dataset of tweets

To begin with, we identified the personal Twitter accounts of all analysed party leaders following a protocol to identify and verify Twitter accounts. We first manually looked up each party leader on Twitter. The verification protocol involved comparing profile pictures with those on the party and/or government website, examining the number of followers, scrutinising the lists of followers, and reading the content of the tweets to eliminate parody and fake accounts (see Haman & Školník, 2021; van Vliet et al., 2020). All tweets were collected through Twitter's API using Python's Snsrape library (JustAnotherArchivist, 2018-2023). We have only collected original content (tweets and replies) but not indirect content (retweets) (Antypas et al., 2023). The literature on Twitter use suggests that retweets only serve to redistribute information published by other users and as a matter of endorsement (Fazekas et al., 2021; Metaxas et al., 2021). Politicians also very often only reproduce what their party colleagues post (Larsson, 2015). From this perspective, retweets do not help achieve the objective of our research, which is to examine EU politicisation through issue salience and framing strategies. For each politician's account included in the analysis, we scraped the complete corpus of tweets and replies they published during their term of office as party leader. A team of graduate students and the research team members, who were fluent in the languages of the tweets, read all tweets in their entirety and coded them based on the quantitative content-analytical coding scheme. The only exceptions were tweets from Estonian and Slovenian politicians. These were translated into English and coded thereafter. We used Google Translate with the Google API and the R package *translate* (Lucas & Tingley, 2014). This approach has been shown to provide valid and reliable data in cross-national and cross-language comparative studies (Lucas et al., 2015; Reber, 2019).

The entire tweet is the unit of analysis for coding EU-related tweets. EU-related tweets were coded according to the coding scheme presented in Appendix B below. In a nutshell, tweets were coded as EU-related if they contained at least one of the following keywords: EU, European Union, Union, Brussels, European integration, and/or similar keywords explicitly or even implicitly referring to the EU level of politics. Only one explicit or implicit occurrence is necessary to code a tweet as EU-related. Crucially, even tweets that do not explicitly mention one of the keywords can be coded as EU-related if their content is clearly about EU politics (see Fazekas et al., 2021 for a similar approach).⁴ Other tweets are coded as not EU-related. We have decided to use manual quantitative content analysis after employing several dictionaries used in past research to identify EU-related content in plenary debates as well as social media data (Font, 2023; Lehmann, 2022; Rauh, 2015; Rauh & De Wilde, 2018). Unfortunately, these dictionaries performed poorly compared with manual coding (which we treat as the gold standard). After using manual and computer-assisted coding for 1000 randomly

selected tweets, we calculated Krippendorff’s α to check for inter-coder reliability (assuming that manual and automated coding are two independent coders). The results of Krippendorff’s α comparing different dictionaries are as follows: for the dictionary used in Lehmann (2022), it is 0.63; for the dictionary used in Rauh (2015), it is 0.66; and for the dictionary used in Font (2023), it is 0.72. Only in the case of the latter dictionary do these values fulfil the reliability criteria to be used for more than just tentative conclusions (Krippendorff, 2013). For our analyses, we therefore decided to use the human-coded dataset. However, we also conducted robustness checks – within the explanatory part of our analysis – on the computer-coded dataset. Our results remained largely stable across those analyses. Eventually, based on the random sample of 1000 tweets coded by multiple research assistants and the authors, we calculated inter-coder reliability for the coding of EU-related tweets and obtained Krippendorff’s α value of 0.92. This suggests that our coding scheme and coder training achieved a highly reliable measure.

Table A1: Summary of descriptive statistics for the dataset of tweets

	Obs.	Mean	Std. Err.	Min	Max
Left-right	14,528	5.730	.0186233	1	9.3125
GAL-TAN	14,528	5.193	.020974	1	9.8125
European Integration	14,528	5.211	.0136597	1.3125	6.947369
Party size	14,528	14.494	.0782112	0	39.18
Age	14,528	50.537	.0748868	28	75
EU frame	14,528			0	1
No EU frame	12,296	84.6%			
At least one EU frame	2,232	15.4%			
Economic	14,528			0	1
Absent	13,652	94.0%			
Present	876	6.0%			
Cultural	14,528			0	1
Absent	14,310	98.5%			
Present	218	1.5%			
Sovereignty	14,528			0	1
Absent	14,104	97.1%			
Present	424	2.9%			
Democracy	14,528			0	1
Absent	14,157	97.4%			
Present	371	2.6%			
Security	14,528			0	1
Absent	13,931	95.9%			
Present	597	4.1%			
Radical right	14,528			0	1

	Obs.	Mean	Std. Err.	Min	Max
Not radical right	11,361	78.2%			
Radical right	3,167	21.8%			
Government-Opposition	14,528			0	1
Opposition	9,777	67.3%			
Government	4,751	32.7%			
Migration crisis	14,528			0	1
No	13,144	90.5%			
Yes	1,384	9.5%			
Eurozone crisis	14,528			0	1
No	13,340	91.8%			
Yes	1,188	8.2%			
Covid-19	14,528			0	1
No	13,076	90.0%			
Yes	1,452	10.0%			
Brexit	14,528			0	1
No	7,748	53.3%			
Yes	6,780	46.7%			
Education	14,528			1	5
Elementary school/High school	1,690	11.6%			
Bachelor's degree	40	0.3%			
Master's degree	8,350	57.5%			
Doctoral degree	2,847	19.6%			
Post-doctoral degree	1,601	11.0%			
Woman	14,528			0	1
Man	11,511	79.2%			
Woman	3,017	20.8%			

Appendix B: Coding scheme and description of variables

Table B1: General coding information for every tweet

Tweet_number	A unique identifier of each tweet in the dataset.
Account_name	The official name of the person's account on Twitter.
Pol_affiliation	Political party affiliation of the person.
Party_ID	A unique identifier of the person's political party.
Author_ID	A unique identifier of the person.
Account_handle	The official wording of the person's Twitter handle.
Tweet_date	The date on which the tweet was posted.
Tweet_content	The rendered full text of the tweet.
Input_Twitter_account_URLs	The URL of the person making the tweet.
Word_count	The number of words in the full text of the tweet.
Year	The year when the tweet was made.

Date_of_birth	Date of birth of the person making the tweet.
Age	Age of the person tweeting on the day of making a particular tweet.
Education	Education of the person tweeting. An ordinal variable: 1=elementary school/high school, 2=bachelor's degree, 3=master's degree, 4=doctoral degree, 5=post-doctoral degree.
Woman	Sex of the person making the tweet: 0=man, 1=woman.
Country	The country of origin of the person making the tweet: Czechia, Estonia, Germany, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.
Country_ID	A unique identifier of the country of origin of the person making the tweet.
Government_Opposition	0=opposition political party (either formal coalition partner or party explicitly supporting the government while staying outside the government); 1=government political party. Please collect information from available resources and cross-validate it using the Comparative Political Data Set, Representative Democracy Data, and the ParlGov project.
Left_Right	Codes for speaker's political party left-right position based on the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys.
GAL_TAN	Codes for speaker's political party GAL-TAN position based on the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys.
European_Integration	Codes for the speaker's political party EU dimension position based on the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys.
Radical_right	Code for radical right political parties: 0=no 1=yes. See more below. Belonging to radical right party family based on the PopuList.
Party_size	The vote share of a party in the previous national parliamentary elections. Collected from national electoral/statistical offices.
Crises	*Eurozone crisis 15/10/2009-15/5/2014 *Migration crisis 1/6/2015-31/3/2016 *Brexit 23/06/2016-31/12/2020 *Covid-19 crisis 11/03/2020- 5/5/2023

Table B2. Framing the EU: Key Discursive Devices Across the Five Frames

	Examples of reasoning and framing devices signalling the presence of the frame
Economic frame	(Un)employment; Decreasing wages; Retrenchment of the welfare state; Social security erosion; Social benefits (e.g., claims that EU membership increases or threatens national benefits); Competitive job market; Economic wealth and growth; International competitiveness; Budgetary considerations; Common Market benefits; Global economic challenges; Redistributive concerns; Market liberalisation; Welfare state protection; Social dumping; Recession; Prosperity; Devaluation; Exchange rate; Monetary chains; Economic achievements; World's largest trading bloc; Net recipients; Net contributors; Inability to solve economic problems; Comparisons to more successful economic blocs; Austerity agenda; Bailout packages; Opposition to the Euro; Too liberal; Too protectionist; Economic failings of European integration; Economic uncertainty; Opposition to bailing out financially troubled EU members Eurozone crisis discontent; Job opportunity; EU's role in stimulating economic growth; Welfare gains; Job creation; Market efficiency; EU as a driver of prosperity; Critique the EU for failing to meet economic expectations; Market efficiency; Welfare gains; Stimulating the economy; Common Market; Dismantles the welfare state; Failing to deliver economic outcomes; Cohesion funds contributions; Worker protection and employment; neoliberal Europe; Europe of free trade; taming globalisation; The EU as a buffer against global market forces; Economic damage; Job losses; Economically inefficient; Economic decline; Paymaster; Critique of EU economic governance; Economic mismanagement; Economic downturn; Economic advantages and disadvantages of integration; Social justice
Security frame	The EU as a peace project; Contribution to internal security (e.g., crime, corruption); Contribution to external security (e.g., peace, regional stability); Peace; Crime prevention; Regional stability; European security; War; Peace; Balance of power; Fear of the past; Security; Military capacity; Elimination of the threat of war as the most significant achievement; Arguments about the obsolescence of integration due to the end of the Cold War; Arguments about the need for European integration due to geopolitical power struggle; Portrayal of EU policies as undermining national security; Portrayal of EU as promoting national security; Defending Europe from threats such as terrorism, geopolitical instability, or internal disorder; Integration as a security-enhancing mechanism; EU as a protective shield for its member states; EU providing collective security; Safety; Security; Protection; Internal threats; External threats; Stability; Peacekeeping; Crisis management; Geopolitical resilience; Protecting Europe from internal and/or external threats; Safety provided by the EU; Security-enhancing mechanism; Shield against instability; Peace and order; Resilience; Peace and stability; Preservation of Western order;
Cultural frame	Mass immigration; Xenophobia; Loss of national traditions and values; Islamisation of Europe; Defence of Christian heritage; Diversity and inclusion; Humanitarian values; Civil and political rights; International solidarity; Removal of cultural barriers; Fostering understanding between peoples; Maintaining distinct national identities; undermining traditional religious values; Cultural homogeneity; Multiculturalism; Closing of borders; Fortress Europe; Islamisation caused by European integration; liberal elites are dismantling authentic European culture; erosion of "authentic" European identity; Promoting multiculturalism and liberalism at the expense of native Europeans; EU's role in preserving cultural heritage; Europe-wide shared values, traditions, or identity; European integration as a means of cultural continuity and cohesion; EU as a guardian of European identity; Critique the EU for failing to uphold cultural values; Alternative visions of Europe rooted in shared heritage; limiting alien immigration; The EU as culturally protectionist and exclusionary; European civilization; Western civilization; Shared history; Inherited values; Social cohesion; Judaeo-Christian inheritance; Humanist inheritance; Europe as a cultural entity; Greco-Roman roots; Shared traditions and values that must be defended; Christianity as the foundation of European identity; Greco-Latin roots; Europe as a religious and ethnic collective; Cosmopolitanism; Cultural diversity; Fatherland; Civilizational clash; Leitkultur; EU gender ideology; EU progressivism; Cultural incompatibility; Threat to European identity; Christian roots; Cultural openness

Democracy frame	European integration undermines national democracy; Inefficient bureaucracy; Bureaucratic nature; Poor governance of EU institutions; Governance quality; Decision-making capacity; Institutional effectiveness; Snail pace; Eurosclerosis; Bureaucratic obstacles; Criticism of EU focus on irrelevant issues while neglecting those that people care about; Non-transparent decision-making processes; Labyrinthine political system; Silent minorities; Minimum debate; Inadequate consultation procedures; Technocracy; Technocratic body; Distant from citizens; Secret conclave; Backroom deals; Dangers of technocratic elitism; Democratic deficit; Concerns about impact of integration on national democracy; Rotten EU political elites; Undermining democracy by recognizing non-native political subjects; Sacrificing European identity for globalist or technocratic goals; Elitist project; Integration enhancing democratic governance; Critique or support the EU based on its democratic credentials; Democratic deficits or democratic legitimacy as central concerns; Representation gaps between elites and citizens; The need for reform to align EU governance with democratic principles; Democratic credentials; Representation gap; Undemocratic; Democratic critique; Concerns about legitimacy and representation; Critiques of institutional design and elite dominance; Transformation grounded in democratic principles; Kafkaesque maze of red tape; Undemocratic, Unaccountable elites; Run by bureaucrats; EU as a space of shared democratic values; EU as an area of human rights, rule of law, and individual freedoms; Contrasting Europe with authoritarian regimes; Shared democratic values; European people; Independent judiciary; EU as a guarantor of liberal democratic values; Responsiveness of political actors; Liberty, justice, and democratic governance; Detached from citizens; In need of institutional reform; Elite conspiracy; EU as a distant; Authoritarian Brussels; Unelected, opaque, and technocratic power center; Democracy only exists within nation-states; Unaccountable and authoritarian EU institutions; Bloated bureaucracy; Anti-Elitism; Bureaucratic moloch; Unelected eurocrats; Disconnected from the people.
Sovereignty frame	Threats to national independence and institutions; Preservation of national sovereignty; Opposition to the loss of national identity; Interventionist Brussels; Supranational chains; Subordination; Blackmail; Sacrifice; Power-sharing; Quasi-state; Federalism; Dethronement of the national currency; Integrity of the nation state; Loss of national sovereignty; Concerns about impact of integration on national sovereignty; Decision-making autonomy; Europe of nations; United States of Europe; Zahlmeister; Ignoring the will of the people; Support for reformist or pragmatic visions of the EU; Straightjacket impeding on member state sovereignty; Hindering national self-determination; Dictate from/of Brussels; EU as a failed guardian of borders and national sovereignty; EU as undermining national sovereignty; EU must be closer to the citizens; Centralism, Centralisation; Sovereign nation state; Undermining the sovereignty of nation-states; Erosion of national sovereignty; EU as a hegemonic actor; EU centralisation; domination; domination of large EU member states; Critique of EU centralisation; destabilizing imperial force; integration imposes hegemony; medieval empire; Holy Roman Empire; Imperial center; Democracy as rooted in national sovereignty; Lack of subsidiarity; National legislatures as powerless; Opposition to federalism; Reclaiming sovereignty; Transfer of sovereignty to the EU level; Autonomy of nation-states; Super state; Loss of control; Defend national interest against supranationalism; Restoration of national sovereignty

Appendix C: Political party selection

Table C1: Included political parties

Czechia	ČSSD; KDU-ČSL; KSČM; ODS; TOP09; ANO 2011; Piráti; SPD; STAN
Estonia	Eesti Reformierakond; Eesti Keskerakond; Erakond Isamaa ja Res Publica Liit / Isamaa; Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond; Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond
Germany	CDU; SPD; FDP; Die Linke; Bündnis 90/Die Grünen; CSU; AfD
Poland	PiS; PO; PSL; SLD; Kukiz'15; .N
Slovakia	KDH; LSNS; Most-Híd; OLaNO; SaS; SDKÚ-DS; SME RODINA; SMER; SNS
Slovenia	DeSUS; Levica; NSi; SAB; SD; SDS; SLS; SMC; SNS

Appendix D: Justification of case (country) selection and the focus on party leaders

In this study, only party leaders serving during their respective terms of office are included in the analysis, following established methodological precedents (Carrieri et al., 2023; Franzmann et al., 2020). This decision is based on several considerations. First, party leaders are significantly more likely to maintain active Twitter accounts, and their official personal accounts are generally easier to identify than those of rank-and-file members or backbenchers (see Appendix A for the account identification protocol). Moreover, party leaders tend to use social media more strategically for mobilisation than ordinary members (Ceccobelli, 2018), and they serve as the primary public representatives of their parties (Skogerbø & Larsson, 2021). Upon assuming leadership roles, politicians are expected to articulate the party's positions. While we acknowledge that issue salience is not determined solely by party leaders—particularly in contexts of intra-party disagreement (Wiesner, 2022)—they are nonetheless more likely than other members to communicate official party stances and shape the public agenda (Auel & Raunio, 2014; Pedersen, 2022). Additionally, rank-and-file members are more prone to expressing dissenting views and alternative issue priorities on social media platforms (Castanho Silva & Proksch, 2021). Finally, the comprehensive identification of Twitter accounts for all parliamentarians across the countries analysed exceeds the scope and feasibility of this study. Therefore, this paper assumes that by focusing on party leaders, we can capture the party's dominant viewpoint.

The six countries were thus selected to represent a diverse range of political, economic, and cultural contexts, as well as Twitter use, within the EU. The final issue concerns country selection. We include five CEE countries and Germany. The choice of countries is driven by the need to ensure meaningful variation in key explanatory variables, both party-level and country-level, that may shape the extent of EU framing, to test our hypotheses (Green-Pedersen, 2012; Hutter & Grande, 2014). At the same time, to improve the representativeness of our results, we sought to ensure variation in Twitter penetration among people and politicians

across CEE countries (European Commission, 2023). In Poland, Twitter is utilised as frequently as it is in Western Europe. Czechia and Slovenia are positioned in the middle among CEE countries, whereas Slovakia and Estonia have the least Twitter engagement among politicians. (Haman & Školník, 2021). Finally, Twitter is widely used by the German population and politicians, and we utilise it as a regional benchmark for CEE.

Appendix E: Supplementary, alternative and model specifications

Table E1: Regression Estimates of Factors Influencing EU Framing

	Model 1 - Logit	Model 2 - Firth	Model 3 - Probit	Model 4 - Cloglog	Model 5 - LPM
Left-Right	2.046*** (0.440)	0.712*** (0.097)	0.416*** (0.107)	0.608** (0.208)	0.122*** (0.023)
Left-Right2	0.922*** (0.018)	-0.081*** (0.010)	-0.047*** (0.010)	-0.069*** (0.019)	-0.014*** (0.002)
GAL-TAN	2.051*** (0.407)	0.715*** (0.095)	0.373*** (0.097)	0.674*** (0.195)	0.069*** (0.018)
GAL-TAN2	0.931*** (0.018)	-0.072*** (0.010)	-0.037*** (0.010)	-0.068*** (0.019)	-0.007*** (0.002)
European integration	0.278*** (0.104)	-1.276*** (0.151)	-0.727*** (0.197)	-1.097** (0.354)	-0.186*** (0.043)
European integration2	1.113* (0.053)	0.107*** (0.017)	0.061* (0.025)	0.090* (0.045)	0.015** (0.005)
Government	1.068 (0.136)	0.066 (0.072)	0.018 (0.066)	0.089 (0.123)	-0.002 (0.014)
Radical right party	5.314*** (2.135)	1.661*** (0.217)	0.932*** (0.216)	1.475*** (0.374)	0.235*** (0.050)
Party size	0.995 (0.007)	-0.005 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.006)	-0.001 (0.001)
Migration crisis	1.340 (0.252)	0.289+ (0.151)	0.155 (0.102)	0.273 (0.172)	0.026 (0.021)
Eurozone crisis	0.470 (0.224)	-0.741*** (0.225)	-0.355 (0.248)	-0.727 (0.444)	-0.043 (0.043)
Brexit	1.614* (0.318)	0.473* (0.185)	0.272** (0.104)	0.432* (0.183)	0.047** (0.016)
Covid-19 crisis	1.062 (0.227)	0.054 (0.170)	0.036 (0.117)	0.042 (0.190)	0.006 (0.024)
Age	1.006 (0.007)	0.006 (0.004)	0.003 (0.004)	0.005 (0.007)	0.001 (0.001)
Bachelor's degree	2.976* (1.618)	1.115** (0.409)	0.621* (0.283)	0.921* (0.461)	0.129* (0.059)
Master's degree	0.610+ (0.174)	-0.493*** (0.114)	-0.285+ (0.149)	-0.427 (0.273)	-0.089** (0.033)
Doctoral degree	0.655 (0.229)	-0.420*** (0.125)	-0.248 (0.179)	-0.352 (0.338)	-0.087* (0.041)
Post-doctoral degree	0.651 (0.248)	-0.428** (0.157)	-0.260 (0.194)	-0.353 (0.371)	-0.092* (0.040)
Woman	0.862 (0.167)	-0.149+ (0.090)	-0.091 (0.096)	-0.126 (0.188)	-0.014 (0.019)
Constant	0.881 (0.728)	0.177 (1.020)	-0.033 (0.447)	-0.593 (0.760)	0.466*** (0.086)
N	14528	14528	14528	14528	14528
Adjusted R-squared					0.091
Pseudo-R-squared	0.094		0.095		

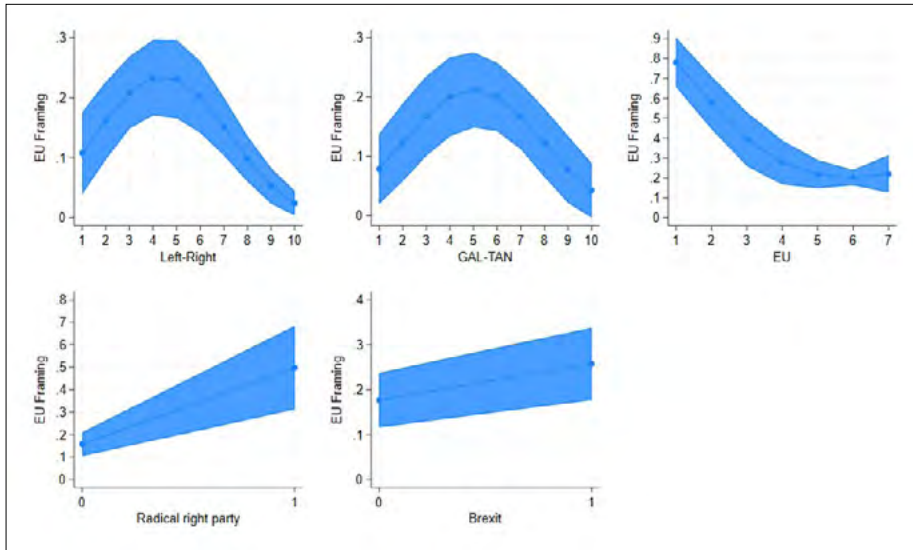
Notes: Raw coefficients (not exponentiated) except for Model 1 (odds ratios). Standard errors in parentheses. Heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors clustered at the party leader level. + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Table E2: Regression Estimates of Factors Influencing EU Framing

	Model 6 - Logit	Model 7 - Probit	Model 8 - Cloglog	Model 9 - LPM
Left-Right	2.046** (0.445)	0.416*** (0.107)	0.608** (0.209)	0.122*** (0.022)
Left-Right2	0.922*** (0.018)	-0.047*** (0.010)	-0.069*** (0.018)	-0.014*** (0.002)
GAL-TAN	2.051*** (0.417)	0.373*** (0.099)	0.674*** (0.201)	0.069*** (0.018)
GAL-TAN2	0.931*** (0.019)	-0.037*** (0.010)	-0.068*** (0.020)	-0.007** (0.002)
European integration	0.278** (0.110)	-0.727*** (0.208)	-1.097*** (0.372)	-0.186*** (0.045)
European integration2	1.113* (0.055)	0.061* (0.026)	0.090* (0.047)	0.015** (0.005)
Government	1.068 (0.149)	0.018 (0.071)	0.089 (0.136)	-0.002 (0.015)
Radical right party	5.314*** (2.133)	0.932*** (0.218)	1.475*** (0.370)	0.235*** (0.050)
Party size	0.995 (0.007)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.007)	-0.001 (0.001)
Migration crisis	1.340 (0.248)	0.155 (0.100)	0.273 (0.169)	0.026 (0.021)
Eurozone crisis	0.470 (0.227)	-0.355 (0.252)	-0.727 (0.451)	-0.043 (0.044)
Brexit	1.614* (0.320)	0.272** (0.103)	0.432* (0.186)	0.047** (0.016)
Covid-19 crisis	1.062 (0.226)	0.036 (0.116)	0.042 (0.190)	0.006 (0.024)
Age	1.006 (0.007)	0.003 (0.004)	0.005 (0.007)	0.001 (0.001)
Bachelor's degree	2.976* (1.857)	0.621* (0.322)	0.921* (0.549)	0.129* (0.066)
Master's degree	0.610 (0.186)	-0.285* (0.160)	-0.427 (0.291)	-0.089* (0.036)
Doctoral degree	0.655 (0.234)	-0.248 (0.181)	-0.352 (0.348)	-0.087* (0.041)
Post-doctoral degree	0.651 (0.255)	-0.260 (0.200)	-0.353 (0.381)	-0.092* (0.041)
Woman	0.862 (0.155)	-0.091 (0.088)	-0.126 (0.174)	-0.014 (0.018)
Constant	0.881 (0.727)	-0.033 (0.449)	-0.593 (0.753)	0.466*** (0.086)
N	14528	14528	14528	14528
Adjusted R-squared				0.091
Pseudo-R-squared	0.094	0.095		

Notes: Raw coefficients (not exponentiated) except for Model 6 (odds ratios). Standard errors in parentheses. Heteroscedasticity-robust standard errors clustered at the political party level. + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Figure E1: Marginal Effects of Key Covariates of EU Framing



Note: Based on Model 1.

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Endnotes:

- 1 To illustrate the coding logic, we treat a tweet such as ‘The German Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2020 begins’ as an EU-related mention without framing, because it refers to the EU but does not invoke any specific interpretive lens. By contrast, a tweet such as ‘It is in Poland’s interest economically to become a member of the € area. We can do that before 2025. It must be our decision.’ was coded as framed economically because it presents the EU through an economic lens. In other words, the coding distinguishes between mere reference to the EU and tweets that embed the EU in a more explicit interpretive perspective.
- 2 The surveys were collected at four points in time during our period of analysis: in 2006, 2010, 2014, and 2019. We always use the closest past survey to derive party positions and EU dissent. However, as a robustness check we also used linear interpolation to fill in the empty years.
- 3 LOWESS is a non-parametric smoothing technique which generates predictions based on data within a localised window of the time series, thus demonstrating significant flexibility in capturing its fluctuations. A window bandwidth of 0.8 was selected after visual inspection, providing an appropriate level of smoothing while avoiding overfitting the time series.
- 4 An example of such a tweet is, for instance, the following: “We have to ensure that the refugee quotas are abolished, as they are not a solution to the migration problem.” This is an English-translated tweet from a particular politician which appears in the dataset.