

Book Review

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POLITICIZING EUROPEAN INTEGRATION. STRUGGLING WITH THE AWAKENING GIANT

Author: Dominic Hoeglinger

Abstract

The systematic examination of the politicization of European integration in six Western European countries constitutes an impressive contribution of this book. The book also presents an imposing long-term quantitative-qualitative research method and it offers a number of theoretical propositions which could be extended to the study of politicization across Europe, in spite of the limitation of the study to selected Western European countries.

Keywords

European integration; methodology; Politicization; Western Europe; EU political parties

Irrelevant during the first decades of the EU project, increasingly salient after Maastricht and the French and Dutch failed attempts to pass the European Constitutional treaty via referendums, the politicisation of European Integration has arguably come to the fore for both European politicians and the public after the result of the June 2016 'Brexit' referendum. While the topic of politicisation of European integration has been getting traction in Political Science since the early 2000s and a number of important studies on this topic have appeared, Dominic Hoeglinger's *Politicizing European Integration* is a timely and informative book which adds a number of interesting insights to the scholarly debate on politicization of European integration, for at least two reasons.

First, Hoeglinger's study proposes to provide a systematic assessment of the actual extent of the domestic politicization of European Integration in Western Europe (p. 3). Whereas other authors offer such assessments, Hoeglinger's study relies on sizeable data derived not only from a large scale quantitative media-content analysis of the public debates on European Integration occurring between 2004 to 2006 in six Western European countries (UK, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Austria and Switzerland), but also from a similar analysis of national elections campaigns which have taken place in these countries since the 1970s and up to the 2000s (p.6). This reliance on an enormous amount of data allows the author to formulate and test a number of original and

interesting hypotheses, including, for example, the hypothesis that ideology is a crucial factor in shaping politicians' response to European integration (p.5), among the more substantive or ideological foundations that generally shape elites' attitudes to Europe (p. 5). Moreover, it allows Hoeglínger to go much deeper than previous authors, who usually do not go beyond 'black box' assumptions and fragmentary surveys, into developing dynamic analyses of the factors that influence European integration.

Second, Hoeglínger manages to present in a masterly way through *Politicizing European Integration* this huge amount of data and the complex theoretical propositions he builds based on these data. All the chapters of the book follow a compelling and useful framework, comprising a review of the literature and of the main hypotheses of this literature, an examination of the gaps of this scholarship, a discussion of theoretical choices made by the author and their justifications, an analysis of the data and of the ways in which these data support the authors theoretical propositions, and brief conclusions. The numerous tables inserted into the majority of the book's chapters improve the general readability of the study and contribute to the further systematization of the complex information presented by Hoeglínger. And overall, the consistent application of this framework through the book not only that it allows the author to deal in a meaningful way with an amazing quantity of information, but it also makes the book readable in spite of its complexity.

Politicizing European Integration contains an introduction, followed by seven chapters that address in a clear and functional matter key components of politicization. The book ends with brief conclusions, which restate the main findings of the study. The introduction sets up the background and methodology of the study, and it provides a useful outline of the book (pp. 1-10). It is followed by a chapter that discusses the challenges faced by those studying 'politicization' and the strategies followed by politicians to politicize the issue of European integration. This chapter also provides an operationalization of the concept of politicization of political debates around the dimension of European integration. (pp. 11-29). A subsequent chapter explores the public debates as sources of data allowing for the measurement of 'politicization' (pp. 30-41) and it discusses the research methodology as well as the criteria utilised by the author for selection of the media outlets which will be analysed in order to provide the empirical data for the study. (pp. 32-35). A third chapter discusses the dynamics of the public debate on Europe and it examines the ways in which the orientations of the participants to this debate are structured (pp. 42-59), while a fourth chapter provides a deeper analysis of the structure and orientations of various domestic actors and national political parties towards European integration, in the six western countries surveyed in the study (pp. 60-80). A fifth chapter moves the inquiry of the book into the issue-emphasis strategies of various political groups (pp. 81-90), while a sixth chapter offers an interesting analysis of the framing of European Integration by different national political parties (pp. 100-124). The seventh chapter starts to move the discussion towards the final conclusions, while presenting an interesting analysis on how strongly the issue of European integration is politicized over time and across the Western European political systems, in rapport to other salient issues (pp. 124-138). The brief final conclusions extend the tentative hypothesis related to the limited politicization of Europe introduced in the previous chapter, while linking this theme to the more recent crises that the EU project had to face after the 2008 global economic crisis (pp. 139-152).

Hoeglínger' convincing theorisation and narrative of the politicization of the European integration constitute the book's major strength. The narrow focus on selected Western European countries and on the past debates could also be seen by those interested in ampler theoretical generalisations as a major weakness. After all, the economic and political fluidity brought in by the global economic 2008 crisis and its accompanying developments within the EU, such as the 2009 sovereign debt crisis, the 2015 migration crisis, Brexit, or the myriad of national political debates around austerity measures or the EU responses to these crises offer a wealth of data which pinpoint to an increasingly

politicization of the EU integration within the EU member states. Moreover, an analysis of these data, and of the increasing populist turn in EU politics, might well point to different theoretical conclusions than those drawn by Hoeglinger, which are based on discourse analyses of public debates that occurred more than a decade ago. As such, these developments may deserve a more extended discussion than that offered in passing by the author in the final conclusions of the book. (pp. 139-144). Irrespective of these possible objections, it is hard for anyone to conceive that the Western European political landscape, honed as it was by decades of evolution, is susceptible of dramatic changes after any exogenous shock, no matter how big such shock could be. In addition, all the data utilised by Hoeglinger to construct his theoretical models and working hypotheses are derived from public debates which occurred when the EU project suffered similar, if not greater shocks than those witnessed post 2008. The long term perspective adopted by Hoeglinger allows him to construct convincing theoretical models, which could be easily tested by those who wish to extend these models to the political developments brought in by the successive post 2008 crises within the EU. And, even if the book was finalised before the British EU-membership referendum of 2016, neither Brexit, nor the recent political developments in Western Europe could be described as invalidating the main conclusion of the book.

Hoeglinger systematic study of politicization of EU integration does well what it sets out to do. It forwards our understanding of the politicization phenomenon in multiple ways, and it contains many interesting analyses and theoretical models which could be applied successfully to the study of the ways in which particular issues become politicized in Europe and beyond. The book offers good value for the money, and it is a valuable addition to this field of research, likely to be of great use to political scientists, postgraduate students and to everyone interested in European integration and more generally, in the works of politics within EU member states.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

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