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The effect of supranational economic constraints on MPs issue attention: the case of France

Cal Le Gall

Salzburg University (SCEUS) and IEP Grenoble (PACTE)
cal.le.gall@iepg.fr

Corentin Poyet

IEP Grenoble (PACTE)
corentin.poyet@iepg.fr

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Abstract

Research on the determinants of the issue content of parliamentary activities is recent but offers clear empirical results: opposition status, media salience and party issue ownership are the main predictors of MPs' questioning in the parliament. In this paper, we argue that integration into international markets and into the European Union should also affect issue attention by constraining national governments' abilities to influence the economy. All things being held equal, we thus expect economic integration to provide MPs incentives to deemphasize economic issues, who should then prefer to stress non-economic issues in the Parliament. To test this assumption, we selected the French case because integration within the world markets has significantly increased since the eighties, eventually providing us with a good case study. Using data from the Comparative Agenda Project (CAP) which provides oral questions and interrogations in the French Parliament from 1988 to 2007, we are able to look at the variation over time of parliamentary questioning on both economic and non-economic matters. To measure the degree of (European) economic integration, we use the KOF Globalization Index and the Index of Regional Institutional Economic Integration. Our study thus aims to further improve our knowledge of the impact of economic integration on politics, which is now only circumscribed to electoral and party behaviour.

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1 Introduction

Processes of economic integration – economic globalization and European integration – have significantly modified electoral and party politics in the last decades: there is now evidence that the integration of national economies within world markets has changed the structure of individual policy preferences (Hellwig 2013[15]) and has reduced the weight of economic issues within the individual vote calculus (Hellwig 2001[17], 2008[14]). Besides, several studies have shown that both European integration and economic globalization have led to party convergence on the economic dimension (Dorussen and Nanou, 2006[9]; Haupt 2010[13]; Nanou and Dorussen, 2013[28]; Steiner and Martin, 2012[33]) and have had an impact on issue emphasis in party manifestos (Ward et al. 2015[40]). Strikingly, there exists no study which investigates the effects of these processes on the work of members of the parliament (hereafter, MPs) in general, and on the attention MPs devote to issues in particular. Yet, there are reasons to believe that, if processes of economic integration affect voter and party behaviour, then it should also affect MPs' behaviour accordingly.

Throughout this article, we thus examine the effect of European integration and economic globalization on MPs behaviour, with a special focus on MPs issue attention. Specifically, we build on the argument that processes of economic integration constrain national governments' margins of manoeuvre in the economy, eventually affecting the policy preferences of political parties, voters and, thus, MPs. In the literature on economic globalization, there is general agreement that a greater integration of national economies into the world markets eventually leads to a harsher competition between governments to attract capital and companies in their national boundaries, ultimately reducing their capacities to tax mobile capital and choose regulatory policies as they wish (for example, see: Cai and Treismann 2005[7]; Plümper et al. 2009[29]). Meanwhile, the process of European integration – which is often referred to as an intense case of globalization – also arguably limits the economic leeway of national governments. It does so by means such as the stability and growth pact which allows the European Union (specifically, the European commission) to control domestic budgets and deficits; or through intergovernmental treaties which have given the European Union exclusive competence over customs, commercial policy, external trade and competition rules.

Starting from these premises, we make the claim that members of the parliament should be more prone (conversely, less likely) to politicize non-economic issues (conversely, economic issues) as supranational constraints intensify. Three lines of argument can predict such a behaviour: first, strategic MPs are assumed be eager to publicize issues (e.g. non-economic issues)

on which politicians have the upper hand to remain credible in the long run ([Nanou and Dorussen, 2013](#)). In a demand-side perspective, MPs are expected to follow the demands of their constituents to be reelected (Ström, 1997[34]). Yet, empirical evidence shows that citizens tend to demand more (conversely, less) from their government in the economic realm (conversely, in the non-economic domain) as economic globalization deepens (see for instance: Hellwig 2013). Finally, MPs are generally bound by party discipline and by issue ownership. Accordingly, individual MPs should politicize issues that are most prominent in their party groups and within their policy platforms (Walgrave and de Swert, 2007[37]). Yet, empirical studies inform us that both European integration and economic globalization give parties incentives to favour non-economic issues over economic issues in their party appeals ([Ward et al., 2015](#)). To sum up, there are good theoretical reasons to believe that MPs should pay more attention toward non-economic issues as supranational economic constraints increase.

So far, only few studies have examined the impact of supranational constraints on national parliamentary work, while there is no study, to our knowledge, on the effect of processes of economic integration on MPs' issue attention. Indeed, some studies show that European integration does add constraints to the work of national MPs (Auel and Christiansen 2015), but does not particularly weaken national parliaments since MPs are able to "use" European integration to expand their capacities (Auel and Neuhold 2016[1]). Yet, this literature solely focuses on the effect of European integration (alone) on the institutional margins of manoeuvre of MPs. In contrast, a burgeoning literature has started investigating the dynamics of MPs' issue attention (see for instance: Vliegthart and Walgrave, 2013[36]). Within a study on Denmark and Belgium, Vliegthart and Walgrave notably demonstrate that MPs' questioning activity is mainly driven "by the available information in their environment (media), by the preferences they and their competitors hold (party manifestos), and by the institutional position in which they are embedded (government agreement and political position)" (Vliegthart and Walgrave: 2013: 24). We concur with Vliegthart and Walgrave in arguing that these contextual factors matter, but we complement this work by making the case that processes of economic integration are structural factors underpinning MPs' issue attention through their impact on voters, political parties and, most probably, on media.

We test our theoretical predictions utilizing data from the *Comparative Agenda Project* (CAP). Specifically, we take advantage of the fact that the CAP database includes a specific measure of MPs' issue attention: parliamentary questioning. We decided to choose the case of France from 1988 to 2007 because the integration of the French national economy within the world markets has significantly increased since the eighties, reaching a top

in the late nineties. Accordingly, the French case provides variation over time on the main independent variable, i.e. degree of integration within world markets. In addition, threats to domestic control from supranational processes have long been pinpointed by political elites from both the left and the right because of France's *dirigiste* tradition which is characterized by a strong state involvement in citizens' daily lives (see for example: Hellwig, 2014). As a consequence, supranational constraints are arguably salient to French political actors. Also, in France, the executive initiates most laws and makes sure affiliated government MPs validate the latter (Frears, 1990[11]; Kerrouche, 2006[22]). Hence, the role of the French parliament is mainly devoted to government control rather than initiating legislative proposals (Lazardeux, 2005[24]; Lazardeux, 2009[25]). In this framework, the main instance of parliamentary control is MPs' questions/Interrogations to specific minister. Because of its growing importance within the set of parliamentary functions in France, parliamentary questioning is thus a pertinent indicator of issue attention. Despite the growing importance of questions, with notable exceptions (Brouard, 2013[5] ; Poyet, 2016[30] the literature did not focus on their content even if France is integrated in comparative studies. Finally, we use the *KOF Globalization Index* (Dreher et al., 2008) and the *Index of Regional Institutional Economic Integration* (EURII) (Dorucci et al., 2015[8]) to measure the degree of (European) economic integration. Note that the latter has yet never been used in such a study. Indeed, studies on the matter usually rely on qualitative index (Bürzel, 2005[3]).

The interest of the paper is twofold for legislative students. First, it will give new insights on the impact of European integration on the work of national parliaments. Most importantly, it provides a first attempt to include exogenous supranational (economic) constraints in the study of the dynamics of MPs' questioning activities. In contrast, the literature on loss of national governments' economic margins of manoeuvre resulting from processes of economic integration has largely ignored political elites' behaviour in general, and MPs in particular. Indeed, the current literature mainly investigates the impact of processes of economic integration on party manifestos and voting behaviour.

The remaining part of the paper is divided as follow. The next section will present the state of the art, while the third section will discuss the theoretical framework and put forward the hypotheses. The fourth section is dedicated to the presentation of the data. The empirical results will be displayed in the fifth section. Finally, we conclude the paper in the sixth section and open the doors for future studies.

2 Understanding the dynamics of questioning activity: the role of supranational constraints

In the early nineties, Wiberg (1995[41]) regretted that only few studies examined the political dynamics of parliamentary questioning. Since then, the research on MPs' issue attention in Europe has developed substantially and now offers clear results. In this article, we start from the common premise that MPs have limited resources and are thus constantly making tradeoffs as regards to their behaviour in the parliament. Accordingly, only a limited number of issues will get publicized in the parliament (Brouard, 2013; Jones, 2001[18]). Then, why do MPs decide to publicize specific issues during sessions of parliamentary questioning?

The current literature proposes several models to explain MPs' issue attention during sessions of parliamentary questioning. One of the most prominent explanatory variables is the institutional position in which MPs are embedded. Specifically, Vliegthart and Walgrave (2013) show that parliamentary questioning is conditional upon the government-opposition dichotomy. This dichotomy is a traditional distinction to explain MPs' behaviour in general, but it is even more important when predicting the dynamics of parliamentary questioning. First, opposition MPs have incentives to force members of government to state an opinion about issues that may be unpleasant and inconvenient for them (Wiberg and Koura, 1994[23]). Hence, opposition parties may set the parliamentary agenda by raising issues that are not already debated (Rozenberg and Martin, 2014[27]). On the contrary, questions may originate from the government. A majority MP might ask a question to give the cabinet the opportunity to publicize his opinion on an issue (Wiberg and Koura, 1994). Empirically, the literature shows that government and opposition MPs address systematically other issues in their control activities. Government MPs intervene about issues that have received ample attention in the government agenda (Vliegthart and Walgrave, 2009[39], 2013).

Most importantly, the current literature highlights the importance of the agenda setting to predict the dynamics of parliamentary questioning. In fact, MPs' issue attention is influenced by 1) by the agenda of the media; and by 2) the party agenda. On the one hand, past empirical studies show that media attention is strongly correlated to the parliamentary agenda, eventually affecting MPs' issue attention (Vliegthart et al. 2016; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006[38]). Empirically, it appears that the influence of media is contingent however. The kind of issue covered, the type of media and the direction of the coverage (favourable or not) do matter (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). The literature also explains that opposition MPs are

more likely to be influenced by the media agenda than government MPs (Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010[12]; Thesen 2013[35]; Vliegenthart et al. 2016). The rationale behind to explain this phenomenon is that the media is more likely to publicize negative, problematic, and controversial issues (Baumgartner and Chaques Bonafont, 2015[2]; Soroka, 2014[32]). Hence, it gives substance to MPs who wish to challenge the cabinet (Walgrave and Vliegenthart 2009). In addition, recent investigations show that the media has a greater influence in countries with a single-party government (Vliegenthart et al. 2016). Finally, other authors suggest that opposition party are more loyal to their party than government MPs (Walgrave and Vliegenthart 2009).

On the other hand, MPs are assumed to ask more questions on issues which are at the core of their party program (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2013). They are expected act in such a fashion because of 1) party discipline; 2) credibility in front of voters; and 3) issue ownership. First, individual MPs usually follow the line of their party groups because they might suffer costs - such as exclusion - if they depart from the line set up by their party groups. More simply, one can assume that MPs are share similar issue positions as their parties. Second, during electoral campaigns, parties and candidates promise that they will address certain issues if elected. For the sake of credibility and re-election, it is thus harder for an individual MP to address different issues in the parliament than during electoral campaigns. Finally, parties have generally more incentives to publicize issues that benefit them. In this framework, the theory of issue ownership predicts that voters generally prefer parties that are considered competent on a specific issue (see for example: Budge and Farlie, 1983[6]). Yet, the space devoted to an issue within party manifestos is traditionally seen as a strong indicator of issue ownership for parties (Walgrave and De Swert, 2007).

Finally, and perhaps most obviously, strategic MPs are simply expected to publicize issues that voters in general, and their constituents in particular, care about. In this framework, the traditional Downsian model of voting which asserts that parties maximize votes by adopting positions on policy dimensions which correspond to voters' preferences is the most simple model to explain such behaviours (Other references ?)

All in all, these studies suggest that the parliamentary agenda in general, and MPs' issue attention in particular, are thus conditional upon the issue preferences of 1) media 2) parties and 3) voters. Having said that, this result has to be taken with caution since the literature also explains that, at the individual level, MPs' issue attention is much more stable (Jones and Baumgartner, 2012[20]). More precisely, attention sticks to the same set of issues for a while before abruptly slipping to another set of issues (Brouard,

2013). According to this argument, MPs would not jump from one issue to another following, for example, the agenda set up by the media. Rather, individual MPs pay attention to a limited number of issues before abruptly shifting to a new set of issues. This phenomenon is most commonly labelled as the punctuated equilibrium theory (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005[19]).

In this article, we aim to supplement this literature by highlighting the effect of supranational economic constraints on MPs' parliamentary questioning in general, and on MPs' attention toward specific issues in particular. Until now, the literature has not considered the effect of these processes on parliamentary work, and has thus given the impression that MPs are not influenced by the evolution of the structural framework they are embedded. In that respect, we argue that the development of European integration and economic globalization might actually modify the punctuated equilibrium. Specifically, we rely on studies which show that supranational economic constraints modify the policy preferences of voters and political parties. Given this, we argue that MPs' issue attention should change accordingly.

So far, the literature which examines the effect of processes of supranational economic constraints on mass politics has focused on two aspects: party and voter behaviour (for an extensive review, see: Le Gall, forthcoming). As mentioned, these studies rely on the premise that the development of economic globalization reduces national governments' economic margins of manoeuvre at the domestic level. The rationale behind is as follows: increased capital mobility, in combination with more international competition for direct foreign investments arguably forces national executives to strengthen their domestic competitiveness. Yet, national governments' concentration on competitiveness may end up 1) diminishing levels of corporate and income taxations, and 2) reducing regulatory policies in order 1) to facilitate the installation of international companies within the national borders, and 2) to secure that foreign capital will be allocated within national boundaries. Empirical studies have supported this claim: for instance, Bretschger and Hettich (2002[4]) show that economic globalization has a negative impact on the level of corporate taxes; while Plümpert et al. (2009) demonstrates that international tax competition diminishes national governments' probability to tax mobile capital. Besides, it is also argued that economic integration also decreases the efficiency of macroeconomic tools traditionally used by national governments to strengthen their domestic economy on the short-term (Kayser, 2007[21]).

This loss of control over economic policy decisions is also explicit in the case of European integration, which is often depicted as an intense case of globalization (Scharpf, 2002[31]). Indeed, European institutions have gained more and more policy competences in the economic realm over the years: the

European Union has exclusive competences over commercial policy (Common Commercial Policy), external trade, customs and competition rules, while the European central bank controls monetary policies in Eurozone countries. In these domains, the European Union is the main governmental body to be able to yield legally binding acts, while member states need the approval of the European Union to legislate in those sectors. Besides, levels of national debts and deficits are also monitored by European institutions since the treaty European Union which came into force in 1993.

Following, many authors have made the case that this loss of economic margins of manoeuvre resulting from processes of integration has modified 1) issue emphases in party manifestos (Ward et al., 2015) and 2) citizens' policy preferences (Hellwig, 2001, 2008, 2013, 2014). First, studies which investigated the impact of European integration and economic globalization on party behaviour have largely agreed on the fact that party platforms have converged on the economic dimension (Dorussen and Nanou, 2006; Haupt, 2010; Steiner and Martin, 2012; Nanou and Dorussen, 2013). Specifically, it has been argued that this convergence was driven by the ideological and programmatic shift of social democratic parties toward the centre (Scharpf, 2002). Since traditional economic objectives of social democratic parties entail a decrease of the effects of business cycles and a more important redistribution of wealth, it might become difficult to compete on such policy proposals as economic integration deepens if they want to remain credible in the long run. Having said that, there is still a debate with regards to the impact of economic integration on which party brings this convergence (see for instance: Haupt, 2010).

Most importantly, Ward et al. (2015) have made the claim that economic integration arguably affects issue emphases in party manifestos. In this study, the authors contend that economic integration alters the range of economic options political parties can credibly offer. In turn, strategic parties which seek to remain credible over time are assumed to be less likely to 1) put emphasis on economic issues and 2) more likely to foster non-economic issues as economic integration deepens. Utilizing data from the *Comparative Manifesto Project* (CMP), Ward et al. (2015) confirm the validity of the two hypotheses: all types of parties (niche vs. mainstream; incumbent vs. opposition; old vs. young; big vs. small) tend to emphasize more strongly non-economic issues as economic globalization intensifies, while they are also more likely to ignore economic issues in more economically integrated areas¹. In this times-series cross-sectional study, they also confirm the idea that the

¹Note however that the authors do not distinguish between party ideologies. In other words, they do not test the idea that social democratic parties are more likely to ignore economic issues as economic globalization intensifies

weight of non-economic issues (conversely, economic issues) increases (conversely, decreases) in party manifestos alongside the authority of the European Union. To further corroborate this causal effect, [Ward et al. \(2015\)](#) also examine whether joining the European Union has had an effect on party issue emphases. To do so, they take advantage of the 2004 enlargement and use it as a treatment group. As expected, they find that joining the European Union leads to a clear increase of the space devoted to non-economic considerations in party manifestos. This study thus suggests that processes of integration have changed the structure of issue attention in party manifestos.

Second, the literature which focuses on individual preferences and voting behaviour argues that, by decreasing economic room-to-manoeuvre, processes of integration change the structure of citizens' demands regarding governmental policy actions. Specifically, the *constraint hypothesis* asserts that citizens will demand less from their government in the economy as integration deepens, whereas the *balancing demands hypothesis* asserts the opposite: citizens will demand more from their governments in more economically integrated areas. According to [Hellwig \(2013\)](#), voters are expected to react in such a way because it is simpler to make the connection between exposure to the world markets and reductions of policy room to manoeuvre on the economy, than connect the former with a reduction of the leeway of national governments in other issue areas such as health care and the environment. Accordingly, non-economic considerations (conversely, economic considerations) should be more important (conversely, less important) in individual calculus of voting as processes of integration intensify. In a recent study, [Hellwig \(2013\)](#) clearly indicates that individual preferences for government actions are determined by economic integration. indeed, individual preferences for government provision of non-economic policies (conversely, economic policies) such as healthcare, the environment and pensions increase (conversely, decrease) as economic integration intensifies. This result is validated using *International Social Survey Programme* (ISSP) in more than 20 advanced democracies. Besides, a large number of studies have also confirmed that economic globalization and, to a lesser extent, European integration, have changed how voters assess the actions of their representatives. First, many empirical studies have demonstrated that economic globalization and European integration decreases economic vote, i.e. the extent to which incumbents are judged on their economic records ([Hellwig, 2001, 2008, 2013](#); [Hellwig and Samuels, 2007](#); [Fernandez-Albertos, 2006\[10\]](#); [Costa-Lobo and Lewis-Beck, 2012\[26\]](#)). The effect of economic globalization - measured on the individual and aggregate level - is confirmed in many different settings and over time ([Hellwig, 2001, 2008, 2014](#); [Hellwig and Samuels, 2007\[16\]](#); [Fernandez-Albertos, 2006](#)), while the effect of European integration on the economic vote is only confirmed in 2009 in Italy, Greece,

Portugal and Spain ([Costa-Lobo and Lewis-Beck, 2012](#)). Finally, there is evidence that individuals who perceive the constraints of economic globalization more fiercely also tend to choose parties more on their positioning in non-economic dimension (e.g the authoritarian-libertarian axis) than others (see for example: [Hellwig, 2008](#)).

All in all, there is thus evidence that processes of economic integration - by increasing economic constraints of national governments - clearly diminish (conversely, increase) the importance of economic issues (conversely, non-economic issues) in 1) party manifestos; and in 2) individual preferences for policy actions and in vote choices. Given that MPs' issue attention is conditional upon voters' preferences and party manifestos ([Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2013](#)), we argue that strategic MPs should adapt to processes of economic integration accordingly. Specifically, MPs should publicize more (conversely, less) non-economic issues (conversely, economic issues) during sessions of parliamentary questioning as processes of economic integration deepen. Formally, this results in the following hypotheses:

Constraint hypothesis (H1): The deeper the degree of (European) economic integration, the less prone individual MPs will be to publicize economic issues during sessions of parliamentary questioning

Balancing demands hypothesis (H2): The deeper the degree of (European) economic integration, the more prone individual MPs will be to publicize non-economic issues during sessions of parliamentary questioning

Figure 1.1 summarizes the expectations of each strand of literature and presents the potential causal pathways which can explain how processes of economic integration act upon MPs' issue attention. The upper side of the figure exposes the causal mechanism linking processes of economic integration and national governments' margins of manoeuvre in the economy. More precisely, we start from the premise that European integration and economic globalization reduce the economic margins of manoeuvre of national governments (see for example: [Bretschger and Hettich, 2002](#); [Nanou and Dorussen, 2013](#)). Those increasing constraints should be translated in more (conversely, less) attention toward non-economic issues (conversely, economic issues) in 1) party manifestos, 2) voters' preferences and 3) media attention. Specifically, they are all expected to pay more attention to non-economic issues because of increasing supranational constraints, while the reverse is also expected. So far, there is nevertheless no evidence that supranational economic constraints have affected media attention, but if the latter react to citizens' preferences, then it should also be the case. Finally,

the lower side predicts that these phenomena should ultimately affect MPs' issue attention. More precisely, we assume that MPs will respond to changes in the degree of economic integration by changing the structure of their issue attention in the parliament.

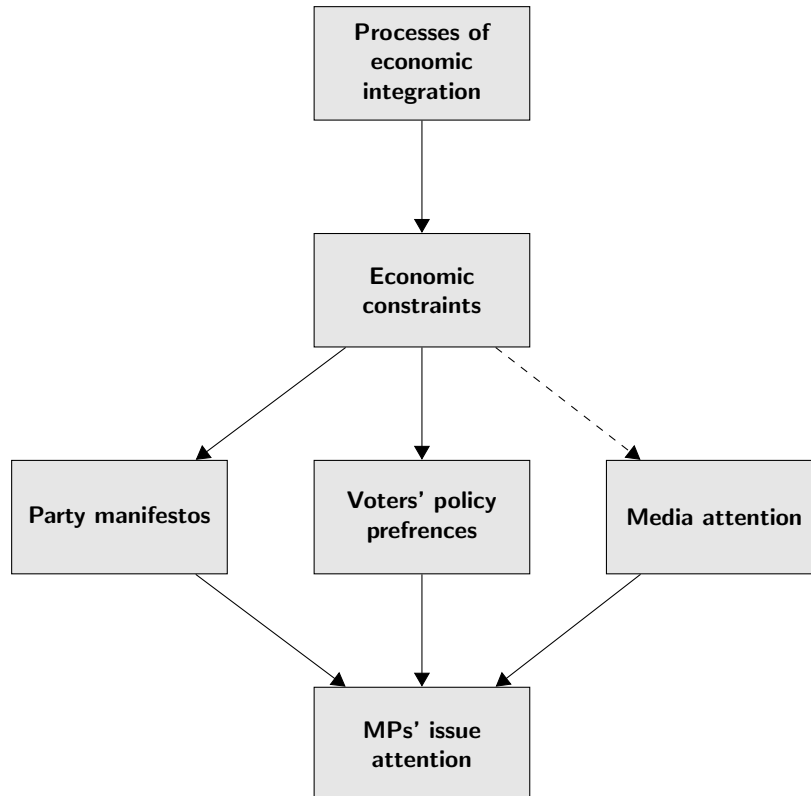


Figure 1: Causal pathways from processes of economic integration to MPs' issue attention

3 Empirical strategy

To test our hypotheses, we use a dataset of oral and written question from the *Comparative Agenda Project* (CAP) in the French *Assemblée nationale* (the lower house) between 1988 and 2007 (335.080 questions in total), collected by Sylvain Brouard (2013). All questions and interrogations of the period were coded so to capture the topic (salience) and the direction (polarization) of the question. We do not make the distinction between the type of question since most of the questions are written. Having said that, the questions have the same role in the parliament since their formal function

is similar.

Our dependent variable is the topic of the question, i.e. economic and non-economic. This characteristic was already coded by Brouard (2013) following the standardized coding scheme of the *Comparative Agenda Project* (Wilkerson et al. 2009[42]). The overall distribution of the question and their topic is summarized in figure 2. There are 20 topics within the CAP ranging from macroeconomics, defence, environment, energy, transportation to public lands and water management.

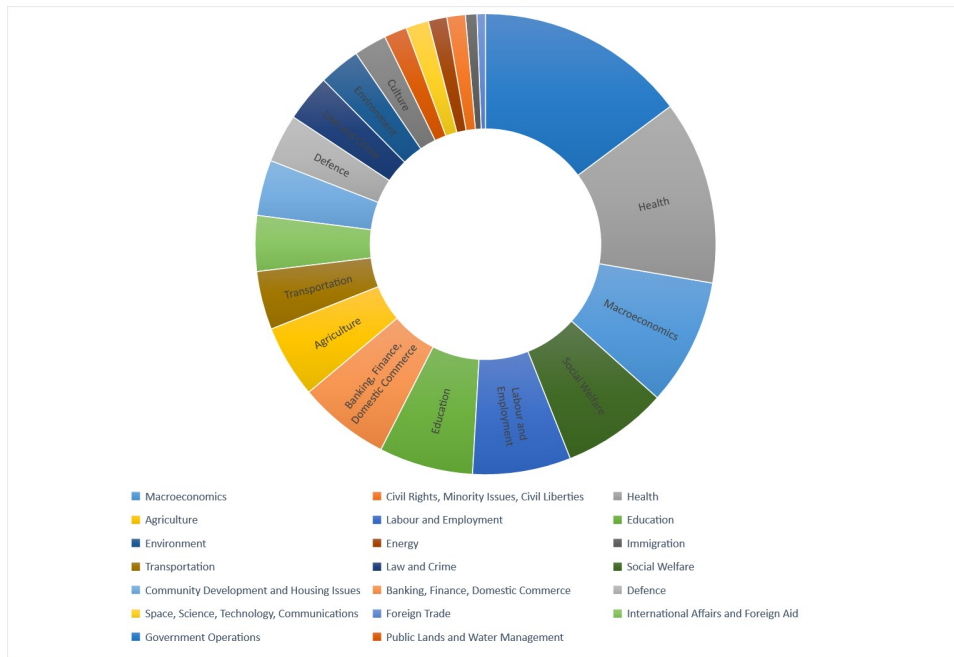


Figure 2: Distribution of topics during sessions of parliamentary questioning from 1988 to 2007.

Source: Comparative Agenda Project

Following our theoretical argument, we compute a dependent variable that captures whether the question deals with economic issues or non-economic issues. Note that this is not easy to clearly conceptualize an economic issue from a non-economic issue. Indeed, there are only few issues that can be defined as purely non-economic, in the sense that they are budget neutral. In other words, almost all policies must be financially funded to achieve their purpose. In this article, we simply follow Hellwig’s conceptualization ”that the public associates certain issues as more or less related to economic policy, broadly conceived. Others issues are more weakly associated with

economics frames” (Hellwig, 2013: 5). Accordingly, all questions that are in the categories ”macroeconomics”, ”Banking, Finance, Domestic Commerce” and ”Foreign Trade” are considered to be related to the economy. All other questions are considered as non-economic. We thus obtain a dummy coded ”1” for economy-related questions and ”0” for non-economy related question. The distribution of the dependent variable is displayed in table 1. Note that economic issues constitute less than 16% of the share of the parliamentary questioning during this period of time.

In order to test our hypotheses, we compute three different indicators of economic integration. First, we utilize the KOF index of globalization which measures the degree of integration within world markets of a country. The KOF Globalization Index measures the three main dimensions of globalization: economic, social and political. But, we decided to exclude measures of cultural globalization in our analysis since our theoretical argument focuses mainly on economic integration. Specifically, the KOF index on economic globalization is divided into two sub-indexes which measure both actual flows and restrictions. The flow sub-index is the sum of total trade, foreign direct investment, portfolio investment and income payments to foreign national as share of the gross domestic product, while the restriction sub-index gathers data on hidden import barriers, mean tariff rates, taxes on international trade and capital account restrictions. We retain the KOF score on actual flows of economic globalization corresponding to the respective year.

The second set of variables measuring economic integration are traditional indicators of economic globalization, notably used by Hellwig and Samuels (2007) and Steiner (2010). To measure international trade on goods and services, we use the most popular indicator: the sum of exports and imports as a share of GDP. To capture economic integration on factor markets and specifically capital markets, we employ the sum of all in- and outflows of gross private capital. More concretely, this measure corresponds to the sum of the absolute values of direct, portfolio, and other investment inflows and outflows in a given year as recorded in the official balance of payments statistic, where changes in the assets and liabilities of monetary authorities and general government are excluded. Following Marshall and Fisher (2015), we thus make the distinction between indicators of commercial flows and capital investments because we hypothesize that the globalization of ownership (direct and portfolio investment) more directly constrains domestic policy decisions. In contrast, the economic room-to-manoeuvre of national governments is assumed to be less affected by trade flows because they are less mobile and less sensitive to government policy. As a consequence, trade flows are arguably less consequential for the national economy. Overall, we thus expect trade flows to have a negative effect on MPs’ emphasis on economic issues, but the effects of trade flows should be lower than the effect

Table 1: Distribution of topics between non-economic and economic issues during sessions of parliamentary questioning from 1988 to 2007

	Frequency	%
Non-economic issues	282.026	84.2
Economic issues	53.054	15.8
Total	335.080	100

Source: Comparative Agenda Project (CAP)

of capital flows.

In addition, we assess the specific effect of European economic integration on MPs' issue attention using the recent *Index of Regional Institutional Economic Integration* (EURII) (Dorucci et al., 2015). So far, studies which have made the link between European economic integration and party behaviour or/and party issue emphases (Nanou and Dorussen, 2013; Ward et al., 2015) have relied on qualitative index of European authority derived from the work of Hooghe and Marks (2001) and Börzel (2005). For instance, Börzel's index measures the degree of European authority over 18 different policy areas, especially in economic affairs. Specifically, each of the policy domains receives two scores per treaty era: a score measuring the breadth of the European authority, and a scope score, which indicates how authority is divided between national and European authorities. In contrast, we use a specific index which maps the evolution of European economic integration from 1958 to 2014 on the basis of a monthly dataset. This is based on a 0-100 index: the index begins at 0 on 1958 (when the Treaty of Rome entered into force). Currently, its value cumulates at around 80 points, while the maximum total score of 100 would be assigned if all objectives of European economic integration were to be fully met. To illustrate how the index is crafted, take the entry in force of the Maastricht treaty in 1992: at this point in time, the index went from 32,95 points to 37,45 because of the Official launch of a common market for services; of a common market for capital; and the setting up of the convergence criteria on public deficit and debt. Figure 3 provides the variation of economic integration from 1987 to 2007. Note that the index decreases in 2005 because of the weakening of the Stability and Growth Pact, most probably because of the German and French behaviour. However, the increase is steady and linear.

In order to test the robustness of our empirical estimations and to see whether alternative variables are better predictors of MPs' issue attention than measures of economic integration, we compute additional political variables such as party group position (opposition-majority), left-right position-

European Economic Integration (EURII)

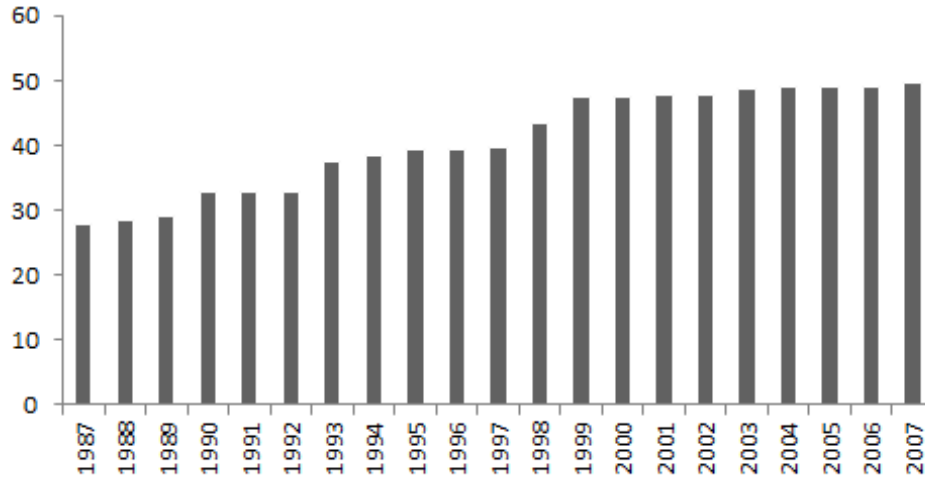


Figure 3: The evolution of the integration of France within the European economic and monetary Union from 1987 to 2007.

Source: Index of Regional Institutional Economic Integration (EURII)

ing, type of question, the date of the question (if in pre-electoral year or not) and indicators of the national economic performances. We include the institutional position in which MPs are embedded because Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2013) inform us that this is a crucial variable explaining parliamentary questioning, most notably its amount. Our theoretical argument has no clear expectations regarding the direction of the effect of opposition-majority on issue emphasis. Yet, one can assume that opposition MPs should be more willing to talk about economic issues if the executive is constrained in this matter, so to challenge them. Having said that, it is also plausible that majority MPs will emphasize economic issues to give the executive the opportunity to publicize his opinion on the economic dimension. This is thus more an empirical matter, than a theoretical one. Second, we also decided to include measures of party ideology in our empirical estimations. We do so because left parties are generally supposed to be more reluctant to publicize economic issues, especially in times of increasing economic constraints. Besides, right wing parties in France are largely considered as the owners of issues such as foreign trade, macroeconomics and finance. Moreover, we added an indicator of the year so to have a proxy of the contextual situation of the debates in France. Finally, we decided to take into account different indicators of the situation of the national economy, i.e. the growth of the gross domestic product (in constant Euro), the amount of foreign direct in-

Table 2: Determinants of MPs' attention toward economic issues during sessions of parliamentary questioning in France (logistic regressions)

Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Opposition-Majority	0.118***	0.107***	0.131***	0.111***	0.136***
Left-Right	0.084***	0.092***	0.092***	0.085***	0.094***
Year	0.006***	-0.013***	-0.041***	0.021***	-0.036***
Public Deficit %GDP		0.022***			-0.007***
Public Spending %GDP		0.075***			
GDP growth		0.026***			-0.020***
EURII			0.040***		0.042***
KOF flows				-0.016***	
Exports Goods/Services constant % GDP					0.034***
Imports Goods/Services constant % GDP					-0.012***
Foreign Direct Investments					0.040***
Nagelkerke R ²	0.003	0.007	0.004	0.003	0.005

Statistically significant at $p \leq 0.10$,*
Statistically significant at $p \leq 0.05$,**
Statistically significant at $p \leq 0.01$,***
Sources: CAP, OECD, KOF, EURII

vestments, the level of public expenditure and the level of public deficit, to see whether the state of the domestic economy affects the content of parliamentary questioning. The data come from the *OECD* and the *World Bank* datasets. We have no particular expectation regarding the direction of the variable on MPs' issue attention, since a bad situation can arguably trigger a harsh debate from the opposition, while a good economic situation can also provide majority MPs with incentives to please the executive. To assess the effect of economic integration on MPs' issue attention during sessions of parliamentary questioning, we perform multiple logistic regressions in different model specifications since the dependent variable is dichotomous.

4 Empirical results

In order to test our theoretical model, we run five principal binary logistic regression models. The results are displayed in table 2 Globally, the loss of competences in economic margins of manoeuvre resulting from further integration within world markets has a negative effect on the individual politicization of economic issues during sessions of parliamentary questioning.

Turning to the first model, results of the estimations demonstrate that ideology and institutional position in Parliament affect MPs' issue attention during sessions of parliamentary questioning. First, MPs who are located on the right side of the political spectrum ask more questions about the

economy than their colleague from the left. This in line with the literature on issue ownership: MPs are expected to devote more attention to the issues "belonging" to their party. More than anything, in France, macroeconomic, finance and foreign trade are issues that are strongly linked with right-wing platforms, especially those of the center right, i.e. *UMP* and its predecessors (*RPR*, *UDF*, etc.). In addition, model 1 also indicates that MPs within the majority devote more attention to economic issues. This result suggests two patterns. On the one hand, opposition MPs do not seem to be more likely to challenge the government on the economic dimension. On the other hand, this result also suggests that majority MPs seem to be providing ministers with the possibility to state an opinion on this dimension. This is as if the economy primarily serves as a way to draw attention on the governmental actions. Having said that, a closer look into the dataset shows that 70% of majority MPs are member of a right-wing party group. This overrepresentation of right wing MPs within the dataset might thus bias the estimations' results. In fact, we can not rule out the idea that the effect is driven by issue ownership of right wing parties. To see the proper effect of being in the majority on issue emphases, there is thus the need to gather more longitudinal or cross-sectional data. Note that the effects of these variables are stable across the different models specifications. Finally, the contextual effect of the year is taken into account and does not provide coherent results across model specifications.

Alongside those political control variables, model 2 adds four indicators measuring the economic situation of France. All the economic factors display positive and statistically significant coefficients. Hence, when the public debt, the public expenditures increase, MPs devote more attention to economic issues. The effect of the growth of the gross domestic product follows the same pattern: when the level of the gross domestic product increases, then MPs ask more question about macroeconomics, finance, and foreign trade. These results clearly indicate that there is a positive relationship between a positive economic situation and the likelihood to talk about the economy. Contrary to the media which are more prone to report negative information (see for example: [Soroka, 2014](#)), MPs seem to prefer to talk about the economy when the situation of the country is good rather than bad.

The third model specifically assesses the impact of European economic integration on MPs' issue attention using the *EURII* index. Again, empirical estimations show a statistically significant relationship between this variable and MPs issue attention. However, contrary to expectations, the empirical analyses show that MPs are more prone (conversely, less likely) to publicize economic issues (conversely, non-economic issues) as the European integration deepens. At this point, H1 and H2 must be rejected. Stated differently,

the loss of economic margins of manoeuvre of the French government resulting from further European integration does not affect the structure of MPs' issue attention during sessions of parliamentary questioning. This is contrary to findings regarding the issue salience in party manifestos (see for example: [Ward et al., 2015](#)). Note however that the coefficient associated with the evolution of the *EURII* index is very low, eventually suggesting that its effect on MPs' issue attention is limited.

The fourth model aims to assess the effect of economic globalization on MPs' issue attention. To do so, it includes the KOF index of globalization which measures the degree of integration of a national economy within the world markets. This time, the *constraint hypothesis* and the *balancing demands hypothesis* are clearly confirmed by the estimation. Indeed, results suggest that the number of parliamentary questioning regarding the economy is decreasing as the degree of integration within the world markets deepen. These results are in line with past studies on individual preferences toward government policy actions (see for example: [Hellwig, 2013](#)), voting behaviour ([Hellwig, 2008](#)) and works on party manifestos in times of increasing constraints (see for instance: [Ward et al., 2015](#)).

As explained in the last subsection, the KOF index is however a very broad indicator of economic globalization: it includes trade flows, foreign direct investments, portfolio investment and income payments to foreign nationals all together. However, these different indicators have varying effects on the economic margins of manoeuvre of national governments. We thus isolate the different indicators of economic integration and run a new regression in a final model. In this model, we also add the indicator of European integration with political variables predicting the content of parliamentary questioning. Besides, we add indicators of foreign direct investments and the share of exports of goods and services (as % of GDP) to differentiate the effect of commercial flows and capital investments on MPs' issue attention. In the regression, the coefficient associated with the *EURII* reaches the threshold of statistical significance at $p \leq 0.01$,***. Again, the relationship is positive, ultimately confirming that, contrary to expectations, MPs' attention toward economic issues does not decrease as European economic integration deepens. In addition, results indicate that MPs' issue attention toward economic issues increase with the level of foreign direct investments which goes contrary to Marshal and Fisher's argument (2015). Indeed, the authors make the claim that supranational constraints are more prominent because of the mobility of capital investment. That being said, when disentangling between exports and imports in constant Euro (as % of GDP), we find that exports have a positive impact on MPs' attention toward economic issues, while the reverse relationship is found for imports. This indicates a new pattern in studies regarding the impact of economic globalization on

mass politics. Indeed, legislators seem to change the structure of their issue attention when the national economy becomes more dependent on imports, but not when exports increase.

To sum up, the empirical analyses tend to confirm H1 and H2 regarding economic globalization, but not concerning European economic integration: MPs' issue attention toward non-economic issues seems to increase as the integration of the French economy within world markets deepens. On the contrary, MPs' issue attention toward economic issues is fiercer as European economic integration deepens. This relationship might suggest that the effects of European Union on parliamentary work is not translated similarly to parties, voters and MPs, probably because of the binding effects of European laws on parliamentary work.

5 Conclusive discussion

This article has aimed to supplement the literature on the on the determinants of MPs' issue attention during sessions of parliamentary questioning by highlighting the role of processes of economic integration. More precisely, we investigated the relationship between economic supranational constraints resulting from economic globalization and European integration and MPs' attention toward economic issues. According to the *constraint hypothesis* (conversely, *balancing demands hypothesis*, voters and political parties tend to take economic issues (conversely, non-economic issues) less into account (conversely, more into account) as processes of economic integration deepen (Hellwig, 2001, 2008, 2013; Nanou and Dorussen, 2013; Ward et al., 2015). Throughout this article, we build on the argument that MPs' behaviour is closely linked to those of voters and parties (see for example: [Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2013](#)) to make the case that MPs should also respond to the strengthening of economic integration by giving more attention to non-economic issues during sessions of parliamentary questioning.

In line with the literature on dynamics of parliamentary questioning (see for instance: [Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2013](#)), our results first show that the ideology and the institutional position of an individual MP are important predictors of the issue content of parliamentary questioning in the French context. That being said, we also highlight the necessity to consider exogenous factors such as processes of economic integration in the study of the dynamics of parliamentary questioning. Since processes of economic integration limit the room for manoeuvre of national Parliaments (and government), the work of MPs is thus transformed. In order to ensure the essential responsiveness towards citizens and parties, MPs should thus focus more on issues on which they have more leeway (i.e. non-economic issues)

to remain credible. Starting from the premise that MPs are representational agents of citizens and parties, our study tends to show that MPs follow the trends observed among voters and parties: as economic globalization deepens, MPs tend to emphasize more non-economic issues.

When looking in more details, empirical results give a more nuanced picture than expected. First, the idea the economic constraints resulting from the process of European economic integration provide MPs with incentives to downplay economic issues is clearly rejected. In contrast, MPs seem to emphasize more economic issues as European economic integration deepens. This result, although contradictory to our theoretical framework, can be explained by the fact that European integration has a direct effect on national legislation contrary to economic globalization. In turn, it seems normal that legislators give more attention toward economic issues as European Union demands the latter to do so. More surprisingly, our empirical results do not corroborate the argument that the globalization of ownership (direct foreign investments) more directly constrains domestic policy decisions (Marshall and Fisher, 2015). On the contrary, we show that MPs' issue attention towards economic issues only increase with the development of imports (as % of the GDP). This suggests an heterogeneous effect of economic globalization on political actors which might be of interest for further research.

Most importantly, this article calls for further confirmation. Especially, cross-sectional times-series studies are, to our view, necessary to understand how much issue attention is transformed by processes of economic integration. Comparative studies would be thus much than necessary. It would be interesting to compare the case of France (and other similar countries) with highly economically integrated countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium or Ireland. If our argument is valid, this would mean that Dutch, Belgian and Irish MPs would devote less attention to economic issue than French, Spanish and Polish MPs for instance.

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