



**Filling the Vacuum:
Mainstream Parties, Economic Crises, and
Party Support for European Integration**

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Since 2005, Significant EU Integration Has Largely Stalled

The EU has weathered two decades of major crises, but is treading water in terms of positive integration

- 2005: Rejection of EU constitutional treaty
- 2005-22: (At least) **five** major crises (Eurozone, refugee, Brexit, pandemic, authoritarianism) without new treaties or major institutional developments
- 2020: A “Hamiltonian Moment” that really wasn’t

What is the EU?

- *Monnet: “Forged in crisis”...“the sum of solutions adopted for those crises”*
 - So...the EU is now...a deeply technocratic, regulatory entity?
 - A project of “failing forward” (Jones, Kelemen, & Meunier 2016)?
- How should we interpret this trend?
 - Stagnation? Disintegration? Normalization? Plateau?

Why Has This Occurred?

The EU needs cheerleaders

- “Attainment” (Schuman 1950) is not self-reinforcing
- “Mainstream parties don’t talk about Europe anymore” (De Vries, 5/19/22)

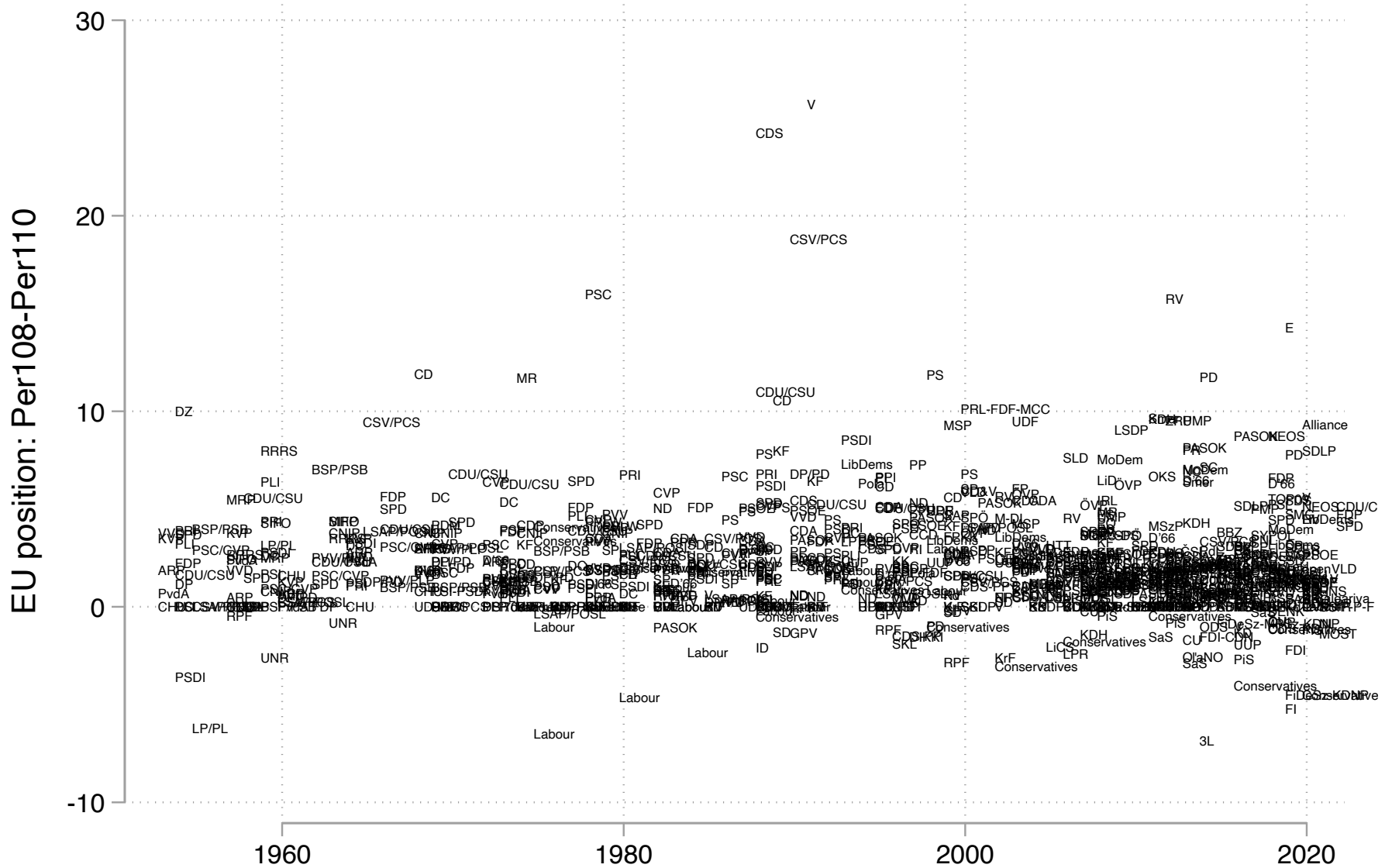
But mainstream governing parties (MGP) play this cheerleader role less often

- MGPs generally remain staunchly pro-European, but simply do not talk about the virtues of EU institutions, the effectiveness of European policies, or European ideals, as positively, or as often, as they did in decades past

Object impermanence

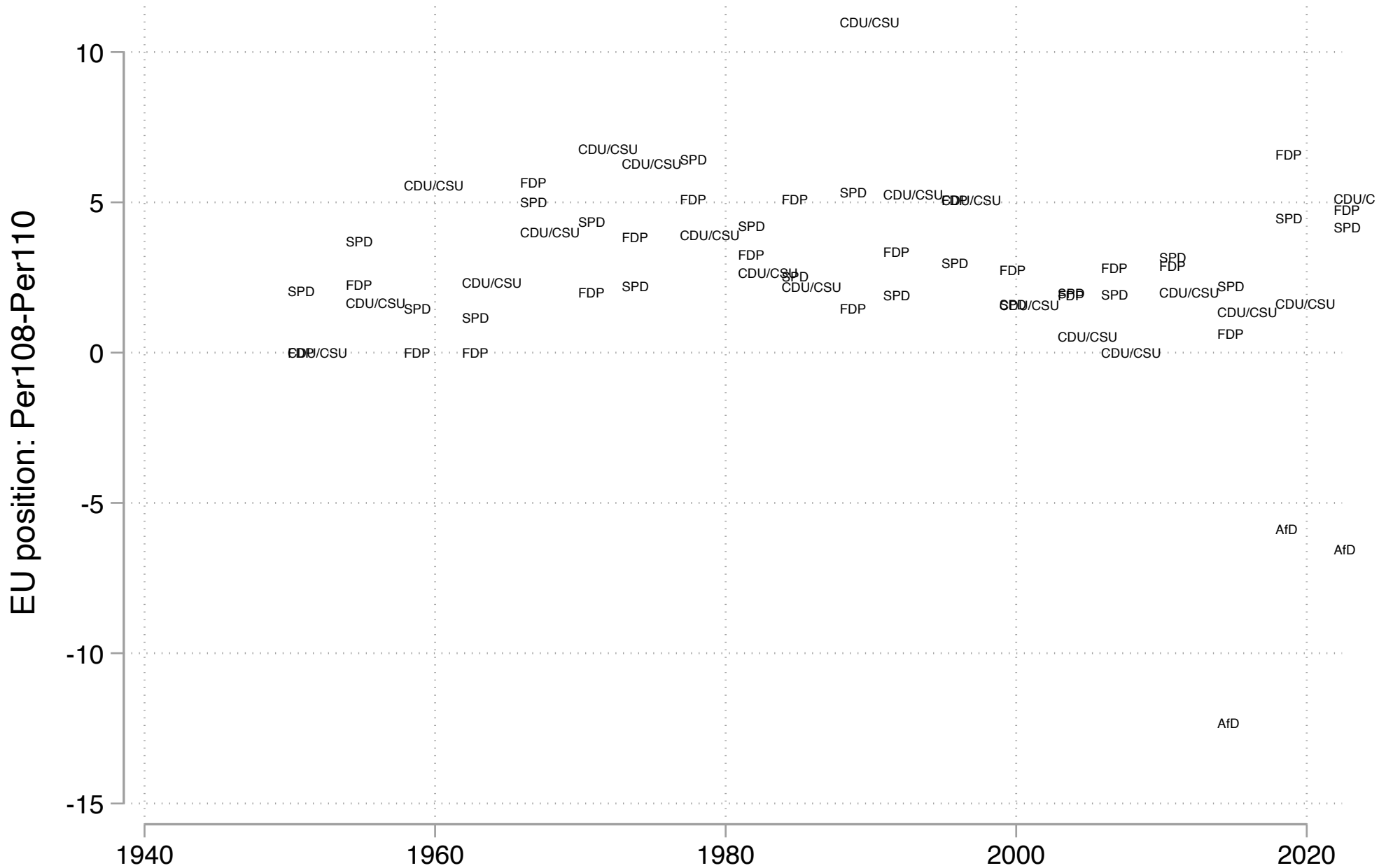
- Child psychology (Piaget 1976), vaccine hesitancy (Dubé et al. 2013)
- The MGP “vacuum” creates fertile ground for Euroskepticism

Party Manifesto EU Position, Per108 (+) – Per110 (-), Mainstream Governing Parties, 1949-2021



MGP: social democratic, liberal, Christian democratic, conservative parties

Party Manifesto EU Position, Per108 (+) – Per110 (-), Germany, 1949-2021



The Increasing “Vacuum” of Governing Parties’ Support for the EU

“Europhilia” only embraced at critical junctures

- Treaty signings, accession, acute crisis moments, etc.
- MGP’s support for EU institutions/“ever closer union” implied but inaudible
- MGPs intentionally shield integration steps from public dissensus (Hooghe & Marks 2009)

Domestic political incentives to limit openly positive EU support

- “Shadow of national elections” (Schneider 2018)
- EU pronouncements linked mostly to national issues (Adam et. al. 2017)
- Internal party/coalition dissension fuels “silencing strategies” (Adam et. al. 2017)

Agenda-setting ceded to Euroskeptic “challenger” parties

- Allows “losers” from European integration to dominate national political debates, despite diffuse “winners” (similar to trade politics in IPE)
- Public takes elite cues on how to think about EU, as with immigration & other issues (Schidt-Catran & Czymara 2022): negative rhetoric fuels negative attitudes

(A Bit) More Europe...After Years of Muddling Through

Merkel and Macron propose €500bn EU rescue fund

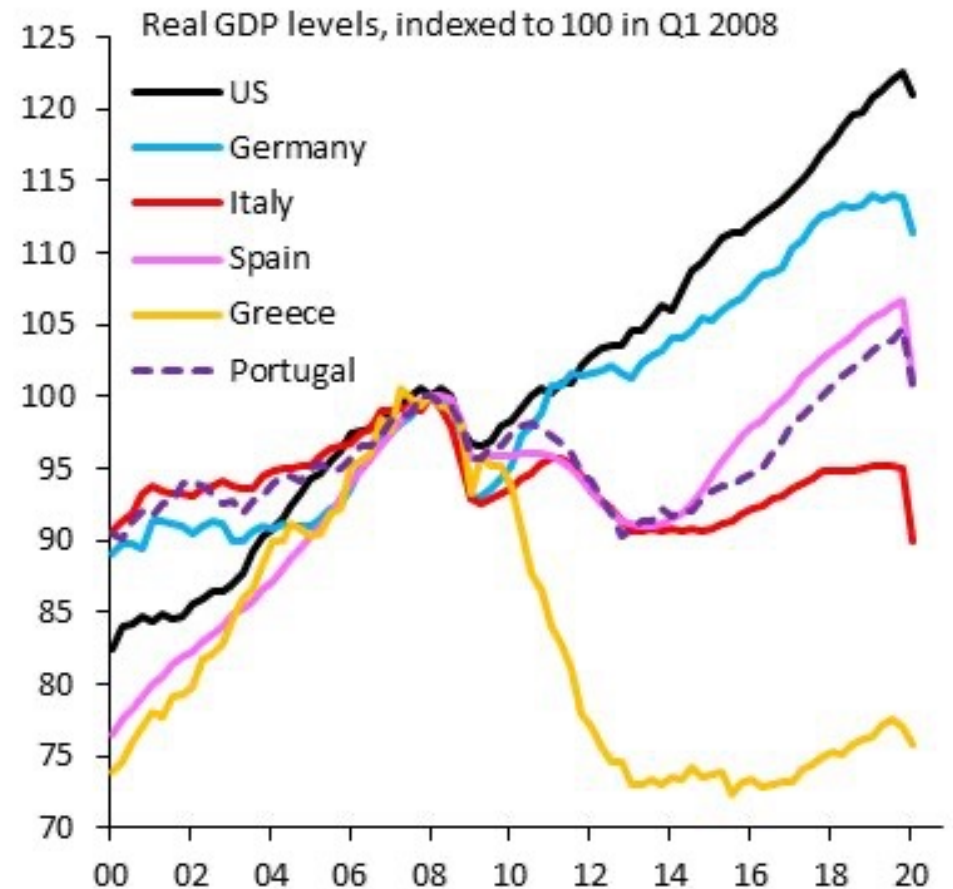
Member states hit hard by Covid-19 would not repay cash under Franco-German plan

- [Coronavirus - latest updates](#)
- [See all our coronavirus coverage](#)



Angela Merkel holds a joint video news conference with Emmanuel Macron in Berlin on Monday. Photograph: Reuters

Angela Merkel and [Emmanuel Macron](#) have proposed that the EU borrows on the financial markets in order to disperse some €500bn (£448bn) through grants to European economies hit hardest by the coronavirus pandemic.



Our Hypotheses

H1: Filling the vacuum

- As the governing party speaks less (less positively) about the EU, other parties speak more (more negatively)

H2: Virtuous (vicious) cycles

- If the governing party speaks more (more positively) about the EU, other parties respond by speaking more (more positively)

H3: Economic crises

- Parties speak more (more positively) about the EU during crises
- Vacuums and virtuous cycles are most evidence in crises

Empirical Analysis

Party mentions (positive, negative) of EU/European integration

- Manifesto Project Dataset 2021
- Party platform positions on the EU in national elections

Models/data

- N=939 country-party-election date manifesto observations
- All parties, excluding the incumbent chief executive's party
- All elections, 17 EU countries, 1952-2021
- OLS with country and election date fixed effects

Dependent variables

- **EU “salience”**: Positive mentions (Per108) + negative mentions (Per 110): *how much do parties talk about the EU?*
- **EU “position”**: Positive mentions (Per108) - negative EU mentions (Per110): *in what tone do parties talk about the EU?*

Manifesto Project Dataset (WZB Berlin)

The dataset contains three sets of content analytical variables (per101-per706; per1011-per7062; per103_1-per703_2). All of these variables indicate the share of quasi-sentences in the respective category calculated as a fraction of the overall number of allocated codes per document

per108

European Community/Union: Positive

Favourable mentions of European Community/Union in general. May include the:

- Desirability of the manifesto country joining (or remaining a member);
- Desirability of expanding the European Community/Union;
- Desirability of increasing the ECs/EUs competences;
- Desirability of expanding the competences of the European Parliament.

per110

European Community/Union: Negative

Negative references to the European Community/Union. May include:

- Opposition to specific European policies which are preferred by European authorities;
- Opposition to the net-contribution of the manifesto country to the EU budget.

Empirical Analysis

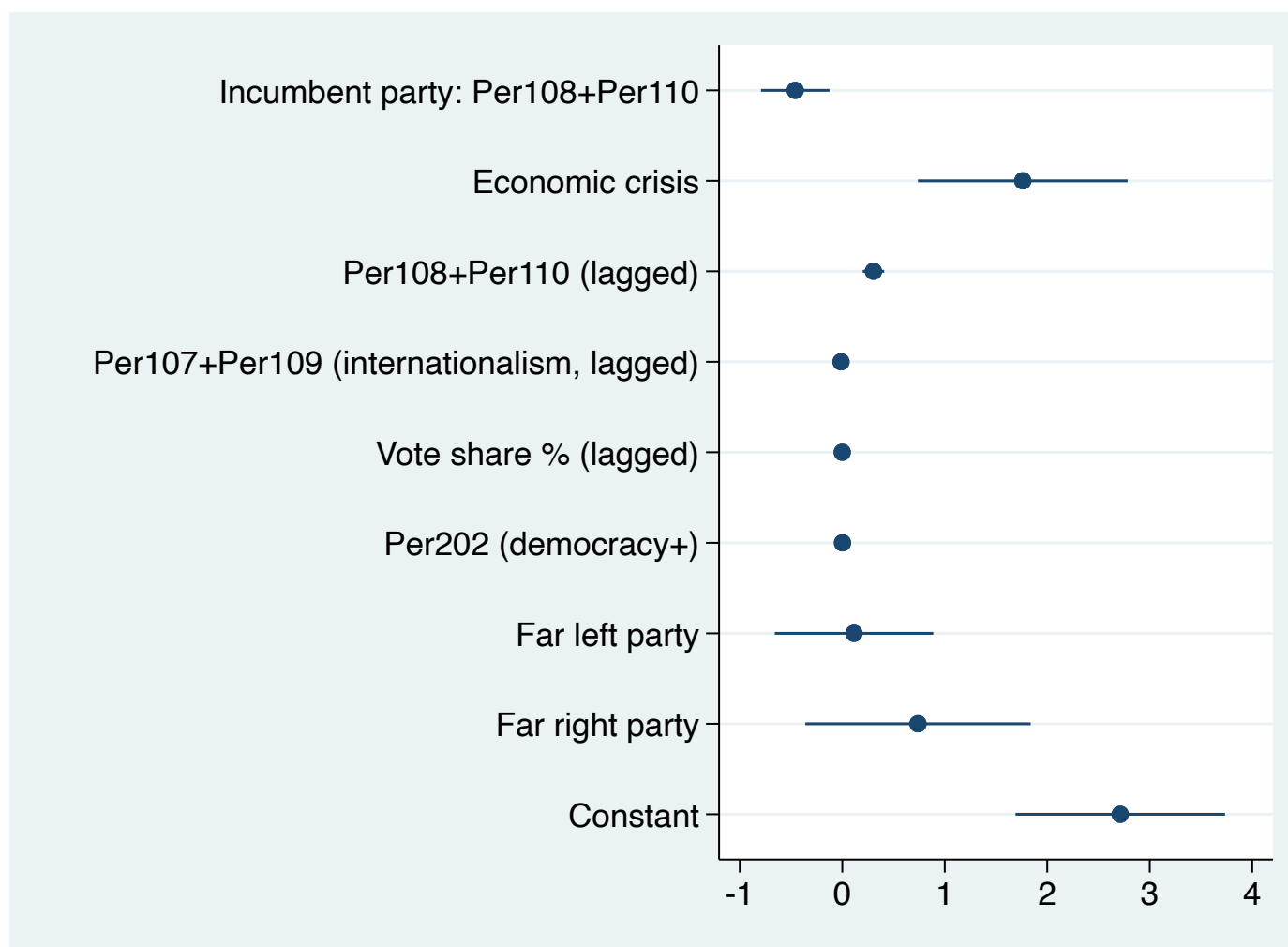
Independent variables

- Incumbent PM/chief executive's party EU "salience" and "position" variables (Per108, Per110)
- Economic crisis (=1 if currency crisis, banking crisis, domestic debt, sovereign default in year t) BFFS/HBS (Reinhart et. al.)

Controls

- Manifesto "salience" & "positions" on internationalism & international cooperation (Per107, Per109)
- Manifesto "salience" on democracy (+) (Per202)
- Lagged party vote share (previous national election)
- Far left and far right parties (party families "20" and "70")

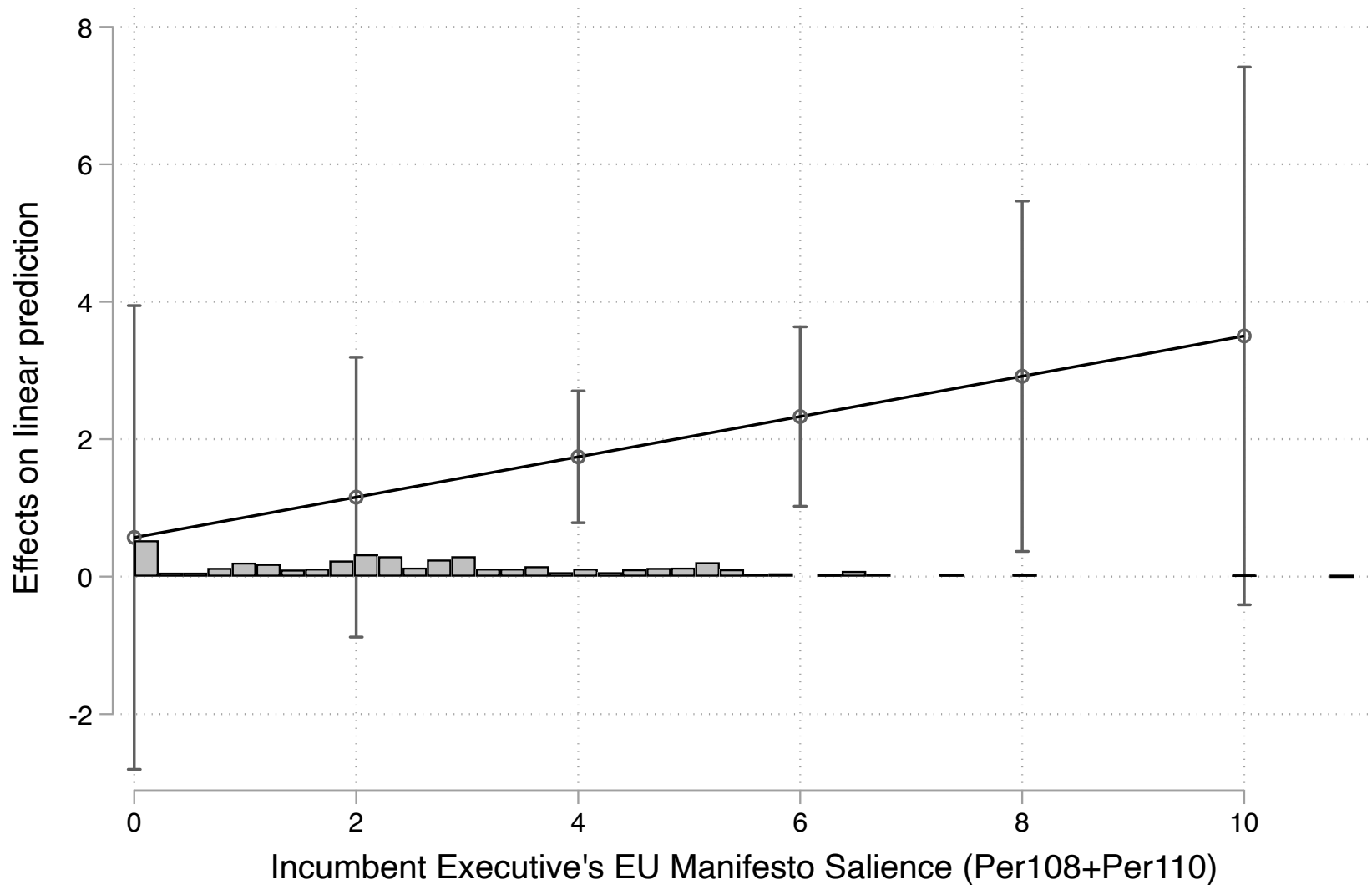
DV: EU Manifesto Salience: Per108 (+) + Per110 (-)



The more the incumbent executive's party talks about the EU, the less other parties talk about the EU: A one standard deviation *increase* in the incumbent chief executive's EU manifesto salience, from 2.77 to 3.73, is correlated with a *decrease* in other parties' EU manifesto salience from 2.68 (2.67, 2.68) to 2.23 (1.94, 2.53).

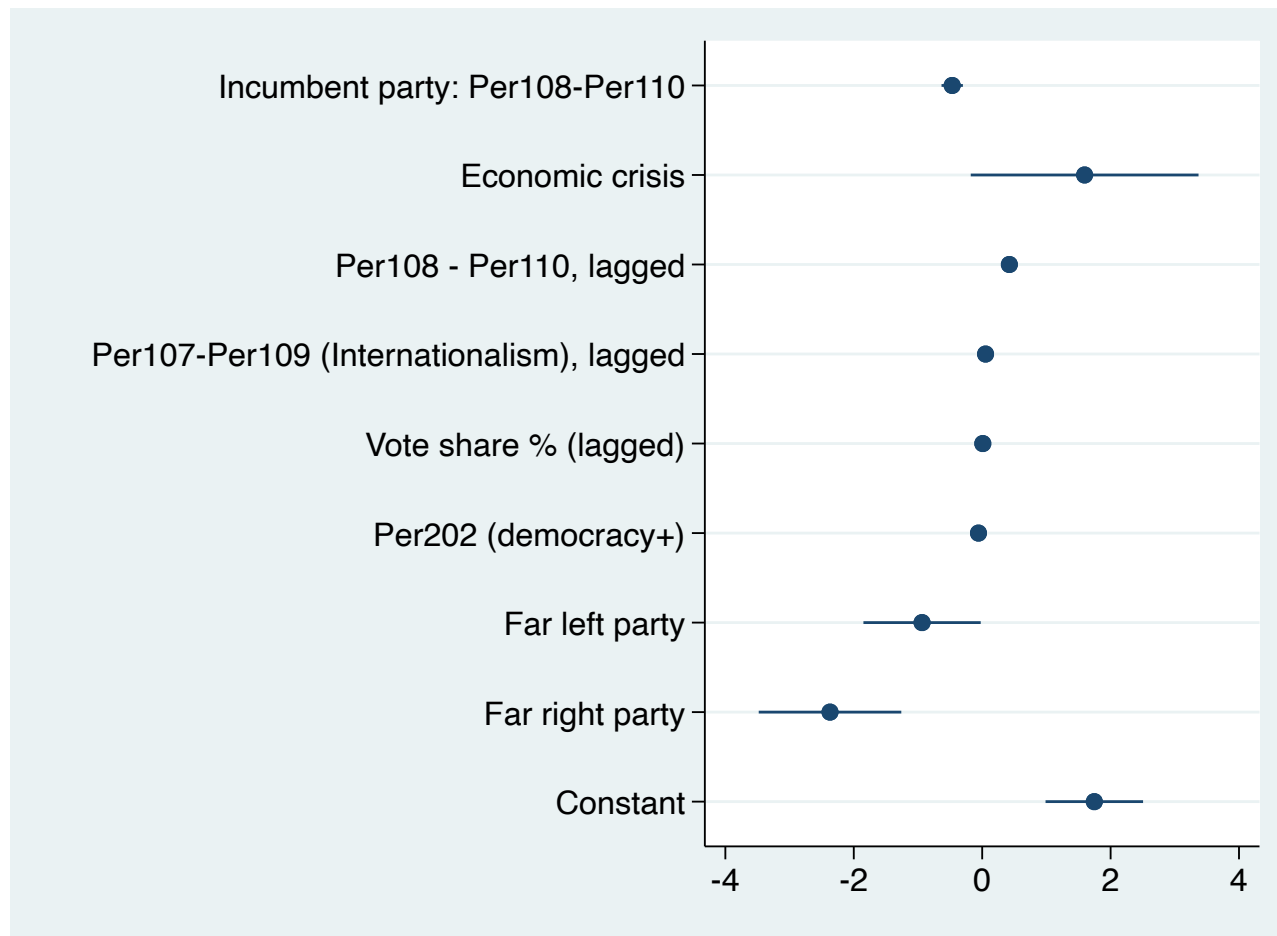
Parties talk more about the EU during economic crises: In an economic crisis, an *increase* in parties' EU manifesto salience from 2.33 (2.14, 2.52) to 4.10 (3.35, 4.85).

Interaction: Effect of an Economic Crisis on Party Platform EU Saliency (Per108 + Per110) by Incumbent Party Platform EU Saliency



Party platforms mention the EU more during economic crises, *but only when the governing party's platform already mentions the EU more*

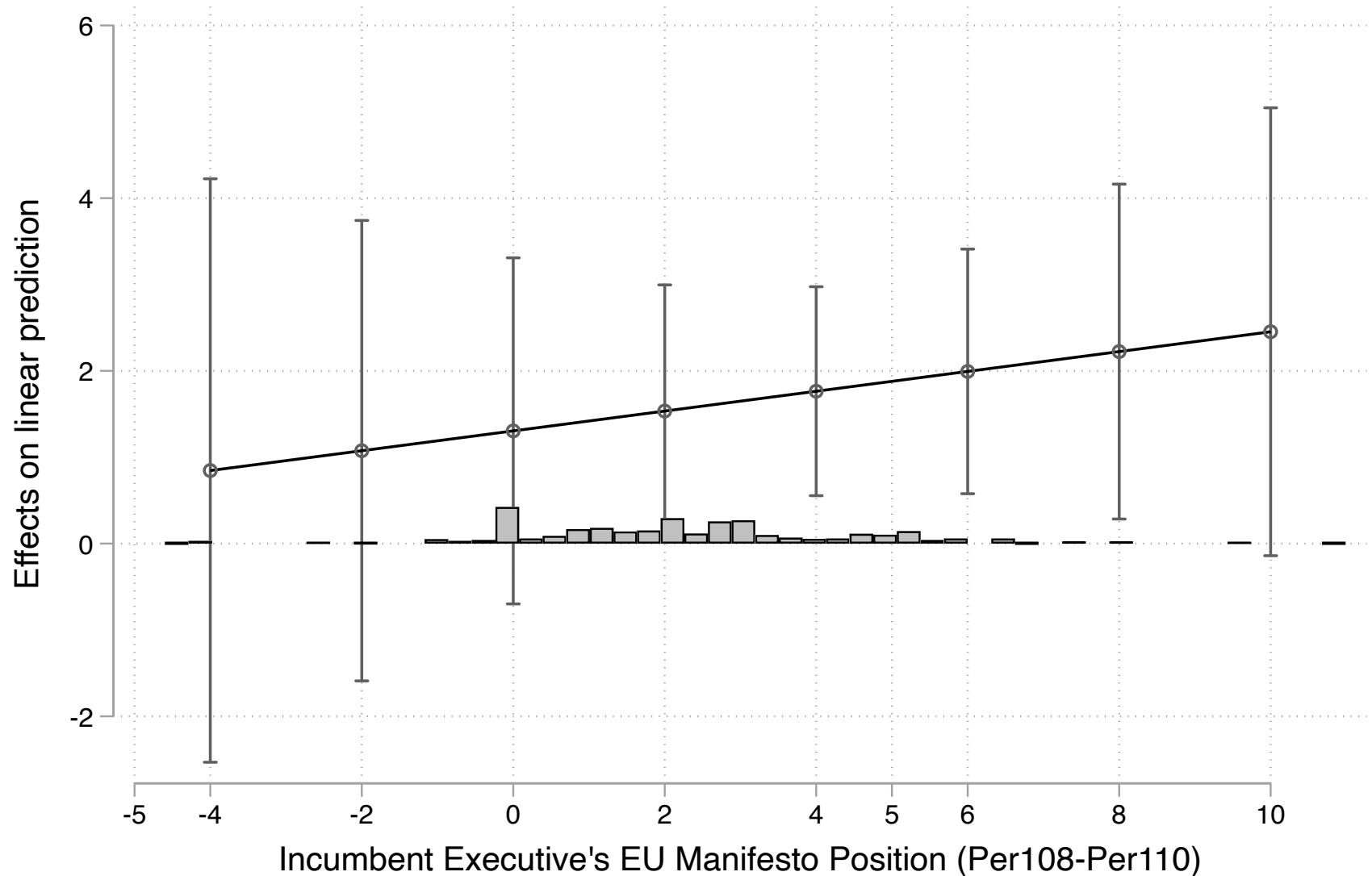
DV: EU Manifesto Position: Per108 (+) – Per110 (-)



The more the governing party’s platform talks positively about the EU, the less other parties’ platforms talk positively about the EU: A one standard deviation *increase* in the incumbent chief executive’s EU manifesto position, from 2.31 to 4.48, is correlated with a *decrease* in other parties’ EU manifesto positivity from 1.14 to 0.13.

Parties’ platforms talk more positively about the EU during economic crises: In an economic crisis, an *increase* in parties’ EU manifesto position from 0.83 to 2.42.

Interaction: Effect of an Economic Crisis on Party Platform EU Position (Per108 - Per110) by Incumbent Party Platform EU Position



Party platforms talk about the EU more positively during economic crises, *but only when the governing party's platform is already more positive about the EU*

Case: Germany & the Eurozone Crisis

Resolving international party conflicts first

- Internal party challenges on Germany's position
 - CDU internally conflicted: Schäuble ("the champion of austerity") vs. Merkel (austerity + aids and loans)
 - Supported Draghi to "do whatever it takes"
- "No alternative" to the Euro became Merkel's mantra

(Mildly) positive EU position brings along other parties

- SPD: gives up on Eurobonds, supports fiscal pact
- FDP: advocates for stability and reform

Vacuum filled by AfD

- Counter-positions with message of dissolving the Eurozone

Next Steps

Case analysis

- Germany in three crises: Eurozone, refugee, pandemic
- Greece in Eurozone
- France and the rise of Le Pen/RN

Better metrics of both mainstream and far left/right parties' EU stances

- Leader statements/speeches
- Coalitional dynamics/EU position heterogeneity
- ??

Role of media framing effects?

- Volume/tone of media coverage of EU policies/issues, relative to volume/tone of parties' manifesto positions