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Measuring salience in EU legislative politics

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Abstract
To describe and explain legislative politics in the European Union and to assess its democratic quality we need to measure the political importance (salience) of legislative proposals. The existing literature uses several indicators to measure salience. This article compares measures of salience based on three types of data source (expert interviews, text analysis and media coverage) using a large number of legislative proposals that cover a variety of policy fields and types of proposal. Different measures of salience often do not yield similar values.

Keywords
European Union, measurement, salience

Introduction

To describe and explain politics in the European Union (EU) and to assess its democratic quality we need to measure salience empirically. The existing literature uses several indicators to measure salience. Studies might categorize the same legislative act differently in terms of its importance for legislative actors simply because different measures were used.

This article compares measures of salience based on three types of data sources (expert interviews, text analysis and media coverage) using a large number of legislative proposals that cover a variety of policy fields and types of proposal. Expert interviews provide the most fine-grained and least ambiguous measure but are costly to conduct for a large number of proposals. Furthermore, long time-series data sets spanning several decades cannot be established using interviews. In contrast, text analysis or media coverage can provide salience values for all legislative proposals. Using computer-aided coding techniques, data sets can also be

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generated relatively quickly. However, these measures can be derived only for a proposal as a whole, without being able to distinguish between different actors and/or aspects (issues) of a proposal. Additionally, they might not result in valid measurements of salience. The empirical analysis presented in this article shows that different measures of salience do not always yield similar values.

Salience: Meaning and measurement

The concept of salience generally denotes the importance an actor attaches to an issue (Hinich and Munger, 1997: 52; Laver, 2001: 69; MacLean and MacMillan, 2009). This importance can be based inter alia on its (estimated) policy impact, the political sensitivity of an issue or the attention it receives from core constituencies. It is important to recognize that salience has an actor-specific and an issue-specific component. Some policies are more important than others, but different actors might disagree on the relative salience of policies. Furthermore, the assessment can be made at various levels. A whole policy field might be deemed particularly important or one could look at an individual legislative proposal or even issues within that proposal. Finally, an assessment can be made retrospectively or contemporaneously (Epstein and Segal, 2000: 67–8). For the study of legislative politics, it is primarily relevant how political actors perceived a proposal contemporaneously, that is, while adopting (or implementing) it.

In studies of EU politics, salience has featured in several contexts. For example, Moravcsik's intergovernmental theory of European integration includes the 'relative intensity' of national preferences (1993: 480). Salience is also a defining feature of a broad class of decision-making models. Models of log-rolling in legislatures assume that actors differ in their assessment of the importance of issues (Stratmann, 1997). Several scholars have argued that log-rolling characterizes decision-making in the Council of the European Union (for example, Mattila and Lane, 2001; König and Junge, 2009). A number of bargaining models that have been used to study EU decision-making include salience as an important factor (Bueno de Mesquita and Stokman, 1994; Thomson et al., 2006). For example, according to the compromise model, legislative outcomes will be at the weighted mean position of the actors involved (Achen, 2006a). The weights are salience and voting power. The more salient an issue to an actor, the more he or she will influence the decision outcome. This can be interpreted as a consequence of a higher mobilization of bargaining resources or as a consequence of the willingness of other actors to give the lead on a topic to the actors that are most concerned about it. Other bargaining models incorporate salience as a weighting factor on the utility loss an actor might experience owing to the difference between the outcome and the actor's ideal position (Thomson and Stokman, 2006: 40–1) or in the case of non-agreement. One can argue that higher salience leads to a higher willingness to make concessions to reach an agreement at all (Schneider et al., 2010: 92). In comparative empirical assessments, models that included salience tend to perform well (Achen, 2006b; Schneider et al., 2010).

There is evidence that legislative bodies in the EU use their procedural powers more forcefully when facing important issues (Selck, 2003). Empirically, salience is an important factor when it comes to the stage when a decision is reached and the level at which a decision is made. Politically salient proposals are more likely to be decided in the first reading stage (Rasmussen, 2007). Whether a decision is made at the administrative or the ministerial level in the Council also depends on the political salience of an issue (Häge, 2007). The political salience of an issue can furthermore affect the transposition of EU Directives into national law (Mastenbroek, 2005: 1110; Steunenberg and Kaeding, 2009: 448).

Salience can be measured in several ways. Indeed, the research discussed in the preceding paragraph has used different indicators to capture the importance of a proposal. We can distinguish between the following sources of information: expert interviews, secondary sources, text analysis, public opinion surveys, media coverage and procedural information.

Measures based on these sources differ with respect to the level at which salience is assessed (policy field, proposal or issues within a proposal), in terms of addressing actor-specific evaluations and with regard to (retrospective) data availability (see Table 1).

Expert interviews are the most flexible data-gathering technique because they can address the question of how salient an issue is at various levels. Furthermore, they can be used to create actor-specific data (Bueno de Mesquita and Stokman, 1994: 54–6). For example, the Decision-Making in the European Union (DEU) project has gathered data on the salience of policy issues within 70 legislative proposals pending in 1999/2000 separately for all (then 15) member states, the European Commission and the European Parliament (Thomson et al., 2006). A disadvantage of expert interviews is, however, that they are very costly. Thus, the DEU project relied on proxy respondents whereby (mostly) members of permanent representations would give values of salience for all actors involved, including the European Parliament and Commission (Thomson et al., 2006: 31–3). In addition, persons involved in the legislative proceedings in the past might not be available for

Table 1. Measures of salience

Level of measurement	Expert interviews	Secondary sources	Text analysis	Media coverage	Public opinion	Procedural information
Policy field	X	X	X	X	X	X
Proposal	X	X	X	X		X
Issue	X					
Actor-specific	X				X	X
Retrospective data availability		X	X	X	X	X

Note: X indicates that the data source listed in the column in principle has the attribute mentioned in the rows.

interviews any more. Thus, it is hard or even impossible to create time-series data for a large number of issues using expert interviews. Finally, experts (for example, civil servants or party leaders) might have different views on how important an issue is to their organization (for example, ministry or political party).

Expert judgements might also be available in the form of *secondary sources*, which alleviates some of the practical issues of interviews. For example, a data set on 'significant' legislation in the field of labour law created by the International Labour Organization has been used to study legislative productivity in a comparative manner (Tsebelis, 2002: 166). Similarly, inclusion in selective legislative records such as the Congressional Quarterly's list or law compendiums can be used as a measure of importance (Epstein and Segal, 2000). However, they offer only a crude (binary) measure of salience. Law compendiums and similar secondary sources might also reflect retrospective rather than contemporaneous salience. In addition, these selections could be based on criteria other than the political importance of a proposal (for example, its relevance for the development of legal doctrine).

Text analysis has been used to gauge the relative importance of different policy fields for actors. By comparing the space devoted to various issues in party manifestoes, one can derive a measure of salience for political parties (Budge et al., 2001), which can be aggregated to the level of governments using the number of cabinet posts that various parties hold (Kim and Fording, 2001). This provides a measure of the salience that individual member states (or party groups in the European Parliament) attach to a policy field. Similarly, one could use speeches such as the pronouncement of the working programme by the Council Presidency in the European Parliament (EP) (Warntjen, 2007). However, these measures are restricted to the level of policy fields and cannot discriminate between different legislative proposals. Another alternative would utilize statements of the member states in the minutes of the Council. However, this measure might be more closely related to positions rather than the salience of a proposal (Hagemann, 2008).

Legislative proposals themselves might also offer some clues to their salience. In many instances, including the EU, legislative proposals are introduced with a number of reasons for why legislation on this issue is needed (recitals). The number of these recitals is used to indicate the importance of an act. Legislative proposals in the EU are drafted by the European Commission, which might introduce some actor-specific bias. Nevertheless, the *number of recitals* 'should give a good approximation of the importance of a proposal in the overall European legal order' (Häge, 2007: 315). However, the number of recitals could also indicate the scope of a proposal, its complexity or whether or not it is part of a larger legislative agenda. The first two factors would be related to the number of issues of a proposal, not necessarily its importance. Furthermore, the number of recitals has also been interpreted as an indicator for political controversy (Steunenberg and Kaeding, 2009: 435).

Stimson (1991) measured political salience in terms of the scrutiny a topic receives in public opinion surveys. According to this measurement, an item is

important if pollsters frequently include it in their surveys. A similar measure would be based on the amount of *media coverage* a topic receives. However, Best's criticism (1999: 725) of Stimson's measure is also relevant for the use of media coverage as an indicator of salience. Both are determined by the demand for information on a given topic. This might reflect the complexity of a topic or the controversy it raised, rather than its salience. For example, the DEU project used media coverage as a selection criterion to identify controversial proposals (Thomson and Stokman, 2006: 28). Furthermore, these measures will be biased towards the views of a given target audience and thus are probably not representative of legislative actors or the population as a whole.

Public opinion surveys have been used to gauge the relative salience of different policy fields. For example, national elections studies have featured questions concerning the 'most important problem' (Wlezien, 2005). This yields salience values for the electorate. Distinguishing between the views of the supporters of different parties or within different countries, we could construct actor-specific indicators for political parties or member states. Whether or not this measures the salience that legislators attach to a given policy field depends on the responsiveness of the political system.

Procedural aspects could also be used to measure the importance of a policy field or legislative proposals. For example, Rasmussen (2007: 8) uses the number of EP committees that were involved in a legislative dossier as a measure of political salience. The time spent debating a proposal, the number of hearings or legislative sessions devoted to a topic or the amount and type of legislative activity (for example, questions or amendments) a proposal generates can be used to estimate the salience of a topic. These measures might differ according to the legislative setting (Best, 1999: 722). Thus, they can be used to capture actor-specific aspects. However, these indicators also tap aspects other than the salience of a proposal. For example, controversial topics would generate more attention. In addition, the frequency of legislative activities is also determined by institutional features or the preceding process.

In the EU context, it is often assumed that the various legal types of proposal (decision, directive or regulation) differ with regard to their importance. We can also distinguish between proposals according to their legal basis (primary or secondary law), their coverage (for example, framework directives) or whether they concern new or amending legislation. However, procedural facts such as the level at which a decision is being taken or the amount of activity generated with regard to a given proposal are what we often want to explain as a consequence of salience. Thus, we cannot use it as a measure of salience and as an independent variable. In sum, to derive measures of salience for EU legislative bodies we can use interview-based data, the number of recitals, media coverage, public opinion polls, secondary sources or procedural information. Public opinion polls provide information only at the level of policy fields. Secondary sources usually provide only a crude binary measure and will often reflect factors other than salience. A general problem with using procedural aspects to measure salience is that we often think of them as a

consequence of the importance of a topic. Thus, the focus in the following comparison is on interview-based data and the number of recitals as well as media coverage. Expert interviews are the least ambiguous measure of salience because questions can be included that are designed specifically for that purpose. In contrast, both the number of recitals and media coverage are only indirect measures and can be interpreted differently.

Comparing measures of salience

To compare the different measures of salience I use data from the DEU data set (Thomson et al., 2006) and additional information. The DEU data set is an exhaustive sample of legislative proposals that were discussed in the Council in the period January 1999 to December 2000. Those proposals were subject to the consultation or codecision procedure and did not change their legal basis as a result of the coming into effect of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999. Furthermore, only proposals that were covered in five or more lines in the Brussels-based daily information service *Agence Europe* were selected. This criterion was meant to ensure that all proposals aroused some level of controversy and had some political importance (Thomson and Stokman, 2006: 26–9). For the following analysis it is important to keep in mind that all of the proposals thus might feature a minimum level of salience. The data were collected at the issue level. A proposal usually addresses a number of policy concerns (issues). Expert interviews were used to identify 'the main elements of the discussions on this dossier' (Thomson and Stokman, 2006: 33). To be included as an issue in the data set there had to be disagreement between at least some of the actors on the particular policy question (Thomson and Stokman, 2006: 35). The number of issues per proposal ranges from one to six, with a mean value of 3.05. There are 174 issues across 70 proposals. The values are based on proxy interviews; for the most part the data reflect not the views of the actors concerned but rather the observations of another actor (Thomson et al., 2006: 31–3). Relying on proxy respondents rather than using self-reporting is a potential source of measurement error (Fowler, 2009: 106). The issues cover a wide range of policy fields, although most of them are in the area of Agriculture or the Internal Market.

Experts were asked to provide a measure of the salience of each issue. The measure ranges from 0 to 100. The experts received the following description:

> A score of 100 indicates that an issue is of the highest importance to a stakeholder, while a score of zero indicates that that issue is of no importance whatsoever to a stakeholder. A score of 50 indicates that the issue has an average level of priority to the stakeholder involved, and that it is willing to use arguments but not power politics to convince opponents. Note that it is possible for a stakeholder to attach a high level of salience to an issue on which it takes a moderate position, and a low level of salience to an issue on which it takes an extreme position. (Thomson and Stokman, 2006: 42)

Experts provided their salience values on each issue for all 15 member states, the European Parliament and the European Commission.[1] In the following, three aggregated values for the Council will be used that reflect different conceptualizations of the relevant political processes (see Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace, 2006: 298–320): the mean value, a weighted mean and the maximum. The mean salience value assumes that the behaviour of the Council as a legislative body is determined equally by all member states. However, one could argue that some member states have more influence than others. A weighted average based on the Shapley–Shubik power index captures this notion. Finally, the behaviour of the Council as a whole might be driven by the concerns of a single member state. For example, a proposal might be discussed at the ministerial level because a single country considers it to be important. Thus, the maximum value is used in the analysis as well. Which of these values is most appropriate in an empirical analysis will depend on the specific research question and the theoretical background.

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics of the salience values for all legislative bodies. According to the interview data, the Commission tends to consider issues to be more important than the average member state. However, typically the member states most interested in a particular issue consider it to be even more important than the Commission. Indeed, this is the case in 65 percent of the issues. Interestingly, the values for the European Parliament are lower than the mean values for the Council.

There is a substantial variation in the salience values for a given issue across the (then 15) Council members. Figure 1 shows the frequency of the maximum range of salience values across Council members. A value of 0 indicates that all Council members agreed on the salience of this issue. This is the case in 6.9 percent of the issues. If at least one member state considers an issue to be of utmost importance while another thinks of it as being of no importance whatsoever, the value of the maximum range variable would be 100. This holds true for 10.3 percent of the cases. The range has an average value of 50.7. The average standard deviation lies at 17. Thus, member states have quite divergent views on the importance of issues according to the expert interviews. The different aggregate values for the Council

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the interview-based salience measure (issue level)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Commission	0	100	65	24
European Parliament	0	100	49	35
Council				
Mean	4	90	55	18
Weighted mean	5	90	57	17
Maximum	20	100	82	17

Notes: $N = 174$, rounded values, weighted arithmetic mean using the Shapley–Shubik power index.

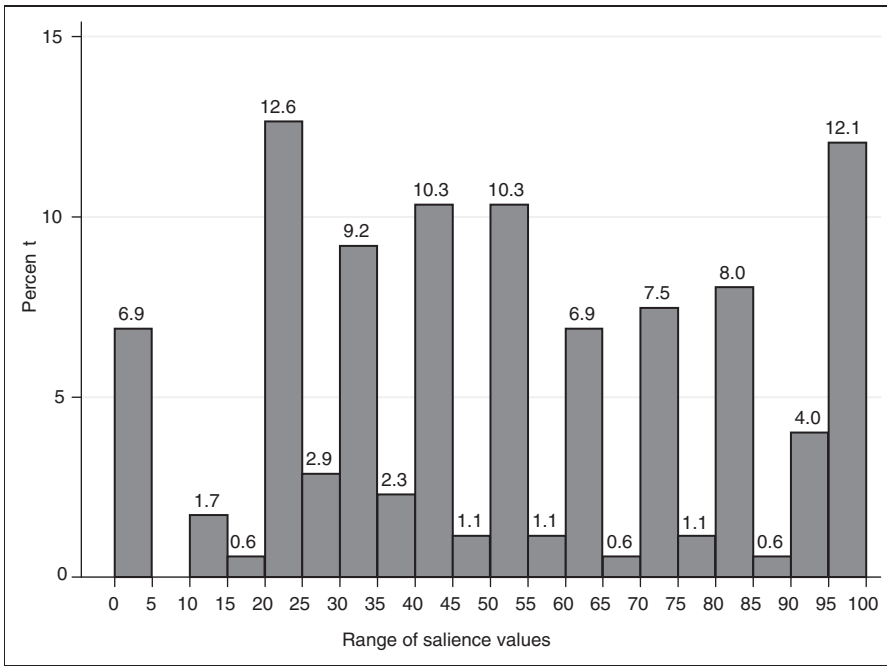

Figure 1. Histogram of the range of salience values for member states.

are clearly correlated (see Table 3). There is also a moderate relationship between the values for the Commission and for the member states. The association between the salience values for the supranational bodies is weaker and the relationship between the average maximum value for the Council and the value for the EP is very weak.

So far, the analysis has revealed that there is considerable variation in the degree to which member states value different issues. Nevertheless, there is also a moderate relationship between these evaluations of the Council and the supranational bodies. Thus, there is some common ground with regard to which legislative issues are deemed to be particularly important by all legislative bodies. The next section compares interview-based values with other potential measures of salience.

Comparing different measures of salience

Besides using interviews, salience can also be approximated by the number of recitals and the amount of media coverage a proposal receives.

Recitals provide the reasons for a legislative proposal. Recitals in EU legislative proposals are organized in paragraphs and/or introduced by the word 'whereas' at the beginning of a legislative proposal. Some recitals are devoted to previous legislative activity rather than giving genuine reasons for adopting an EU proposal. Two measures of recitals were used. One is the overall number of recitals; the other

Table 3. Relationship between interview-based values of salience (issue level)

	Council			
	Mean	Weighted mean	Maximum	Commission
Council				
Weighted mean	0.98***			
	0.99***			
Maximum	0.40***	0.47***		
	0.49***	0.55***		
Commission	0.33***	0.34***	0.40***	
	0.36***	0.37***	0.41***	
Parliament	0.37***	0.37***	0.14*	0.27***
	0.37***	0.36***	0.16**	0.27***

Notes: The first value in a cell is Spearman's rho, the second is Pearson's *r*; rounded values; $N = 174$; weighted arithmetic mean using the Shapley–Shubik power index.
***significant at the .01 level, **statistically significant at the .05 level, *statistically significant at the .1 level.

one is the number of recitals excluding those that are referring to existing EU law (pure recitals).[2] The numbers of overall and pure recitals are strongly associated.[3]

Agence Europe was used to code the media coverage of the proposals. *Agence Europe* is a Brussels-based newsletter that extensively covers legislative activity in the EU. Given that it is a very specialized information service, one could also interpret this measure as a secondary analysis of expert judgements. The extent of its coverage of a topic would reflect the relevance the editorial staff think Brussels insiders would give to a topic, not how important it is for the general public. Using a key word search, we identified all articles that covered one of the legislative proposals in the DEU data set.[4] Only articles that substantially cover the proposal or discussions and viewpoints about it were selected. This excluded articles that are solely on procedural issues (for example, lists of agendas of meetings). If more than four proposals are discussed in an article and there is no clear (disproportionate) focus on the relevant proposal, then the article was excluded as well. The sum of the word count of all relevant articles constitutes another potential measure of salience. The more extensive the coverage of a proposal, the more important it might be.

Table 4 shows the association (Spearman's rho) and the correlation (Pearson's *r*) between the different values of salience. Pearson's *r* assumes a linear relationship between two variables (measured at the interval or ratio level). In contrast, Spearman's rho shows the degree of a monotonic relationship between two variables at the ordinal level and is robust with regard to outliers. Both range from -1 (perfect negative relationship) to $+1$ (perfect positive relationship), with a value of 0 indicating no relationship at all (Agresti and Finlay, 1997). Because both recitals and media coverage are available only at the level of proposals, the comparison of

Table 4. Relationship between different measures of salience

Interview-based values (mean values across issues)	Recitals			Interview-based values (maximum values across issues)	Recitals		
	Overall	Pure	Media coverage		Overall	Pure	Media coverage
Commission	0.27**	0.26**	−0.07	Commission	0.24*	0.22*	0.03
	0.24*	0.23*	−0.01		0.18	0.19	0.05
European Parliament	0.09	0.15	−0.04	European Parliament	0.22*	0.24**	0.06
	0.05	0.09	−0.05		0.10	0.12	0.03
Council (mean)	0.11	0.17	0.21*	Council (mean)	0.11	0.17	0.18
	0.11	0.17	0.17		0.10	0.18	0.19
Council (weighted mean)	0.13	0.20	0.21*	Council (weighted mean)	0.13	0.20	0.18
	0.13	0.19	0.16		0.11	0.19	0.18
Council (maximum)	0.29**	0.31***	0.11	Council (maximum)	0.25**	0.28**	0.16
	0.23*	0.29**	0.08		0.22*	0.28**	0.10
All bodies (mean)				*All bodies (mean)*			
Council (mean)	0.20	0.25**	0.03	Council (mean)	0.23*	0.27**	0.11
	0.16	0.20	0.03		0.18	0.22*	0.12
Council (weighted mean)	0.19	0.24**	0.01	Council (weighted mean)	0.24*	0.27**	0.10
	0.16	0.20*	0.02		0.18	0.22*	0.11
Council (maximum)	0.22*	0.27**	−0.03	Council (maximum)	0.28**	0.30**	0.07
	0.20*	0.24**	0		0.23*	0.25**	0.06
All bodies (maximum)				*All bodies (maximum)*			
Council (mean)	0.22*	0.23*	−0.05	Council (mean)	0.25**	0.24**	0.05
	0.16	0.17	−0.02		0.14	0.17	0.04
Council (weighted mean)	0.23*	0.24*	−0.04	Council (weighted mean)	0.25**	0.25**	0.05
	0.16	0.18	−0.02		0.15	0.18	0.04
Council (maximum)	0.28**	0.31**	0.01	Council (maximum)	0.28**	0.32***	0.06
	0.20*	0.26**	0.01		0.21*	0.28**	0.03

Notes: The first value in a cell is Spearman's rho, the second is Pearson's *r*; $N = 68$; rounded values; weighted arithmetic mean using the Shapley–Shubik power index.
***statistically significant at the .01 level,
**statistically significant at the .05 level,
*statistically significant at the .1 level.

the different measures of salience proceeds on the proposal level ($N = 68$).[5] The interview-based salience values for the Council are aggregated to the proposal level using both the mean and the maximum of the values at the issue level. Which of those forms of aggregation is appropriate for a given question depends on the theoretical conceptualization of the underlying political process. On the one hand, a single important issue might lead to a discussion of a proposal at the ministerial level. On the other hand, for the overall style of negotiations in the Council the average importance of the issues at hand might be more relevant. The rows in the top panel of the table show the relationship between the interview data for the individual legislative bodies and recitals as well as media coverage. For the Council, the mean, the weighted mean and the maximum value for the 15 member states have been used. The rows in the middle panel use aggregated (mean) values across legislative bodies for the interview data, again using the mean, weighted mean and maximum for the Council members. Finally, the interview data were aggregated across legislative bodies using the maximum value.

Aggregating the interview-based values across issues yields similar results using mean or maximum values. There is a weak association between the interview-based values and the number of recitals for the Commission and the maximum value in the Council. There is no association between the number of recitals and the mean or weighted mean of the interview-based salience values for the member states (see Figure 2). For the European Parliament, there is only an association (but no correlation) between interview-based values and the number of recitals when looking at the maximum values across issues. Aggregating the interview-based values across legislative bodies tends to yield a weak association (but not always a significant correlation) with the number of recitals, particularly when maximum values are used across issues. Throughout, the associations are slightly stronger for the pure number of recitals than for the overall number.

In general, there is no statistically significant relationship between media coverage and interview-based values. The only exceptions are weak associations between media coverage and both the mean and the weighted mean of the member states' values.[6]

Rather than reflecting the salience of an issue, the number of recitals and the amount of media coverage a proposal receives might be due to its scope. The more issues a proposal covers, the more reasons can be provided for it in recitals. Similarly, the more issues there are, the more likely it is that one of them is receiving media coverage.[7] There is indeed a weak but statistically significant relationship between the number of issues and the number of recitals as well as the amount of media coverage a proposal gets (see Table 5).

In sum, there is a weak association between the number of recitals and the interview-based salience values for all legislative bodies (using maximum values for the Council), the Commission and the maximum value in the Council. In contrast, the salience values based on expert interviews are generally not related to the media coverage. Furthermore, the number of issues – which can be interpreted as a

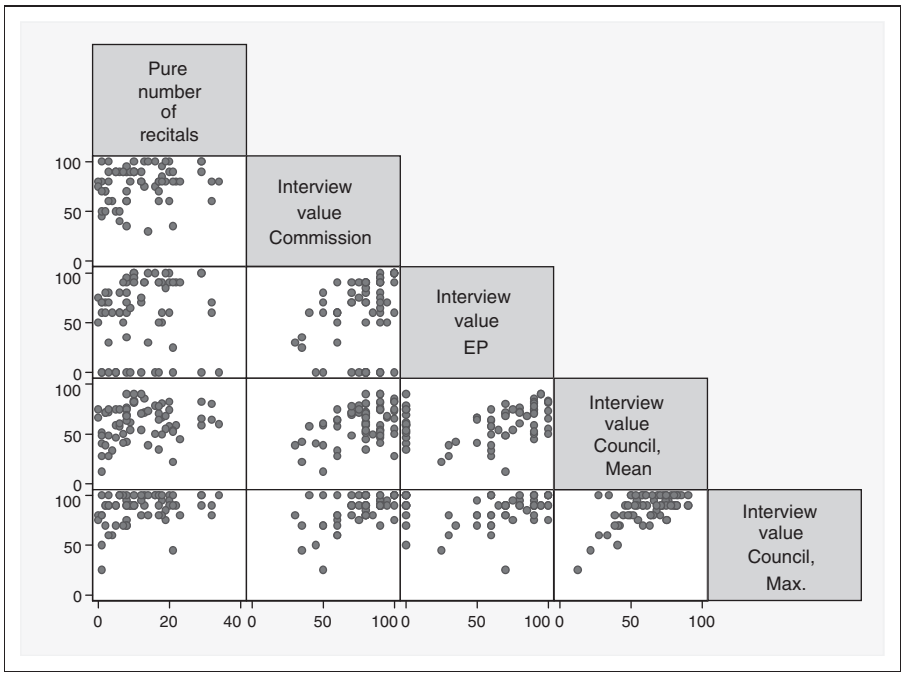

Figure 2. Recitals and interview-based salience values. *Notes:* All interview values are at the proposal level. They are aggregated across issues using the maximum value.

Table 5. The relationship between the number of issues and measures of salience

	Recitals		
Issues	Overall	Pure	Media coverage
Number of issues	0.29**	0.27**	0.34***
	0.24**	0.23*	0.23*

Notes: The first value in a cell is Spearman's rho, the second is Pearson's *r*; rounded values; $N = 68$.
***statistically significant at the .01 level,
**statistically significant at the .05 level,
*statistically significant at the .1 level.

measure of the scope or complexity of a proposal – also has a statistically significant relationship with both the number of recitals and media coverage.

Conclusion

Salience needs to be taken into account when explaining legislative behaviour. We would expect actors to behave differently according to the importance of the issue

at hand. Accordingly, salience is a defining feature of a broad class of bargaining models. Furthermore, salience is an important variable when studying the stage and the level at which legislative decisions are taken and should influence the transposition of EU law into national legislation.

Different measures have been used in the past to estimate the level of salience. Values based on expert interviews are the most fine-grained and least ambiguous measure. It can capture both actor-specific and issue-specific aspects of the salience of a legislative proposal whereas other measures provide information only on the importance of a legislative proposal as a whole. However, generating this kind of data for a large number of (past) legislative acts is prohibitively expensive if not impossible. In contrast, measures based on the text of legislative proposals itself (for example, the number of recitals) or media coverage (for example, the word count of relevant articles) can be used for all legislative proposals ever put forward. By using computer-aided coding methods, this is a relatively inexpensive measure as well.

A comparison of these different measures of salience, however, shows that they do not always yield similar values. The salience values based on expert interviews and on recitals are often associated in a statistically significant way. However, there are three important caveats. First, there is no association between the number of recitals and the mean and weighted mean of interview-based values for the Council. Thus, whether one could substitute interviews with the number of recitals when studying the Council depends on the theoretical conception one uses to explain its decision-making. Second, even when there is an association it is only a weak one. Thus, in most cases the number of recitals is probably not a reasonable substitute for interview-based values. Third, there is also an association between the number of issues of a proposal and the number of recitals. Thus, the number of recitals might reflect not (just) the salience of an issue but also its scope or complexity. There is generally no relationship between interview-based salience values and media coverage.

In sum, neither the number of recitals nor media coverage provides an unambiguous substitute for interview-based measures of salience. Hence, studies might categorize the same legislative act differently in terms of its importance for legislative actors because different measures were used. Thus, these indicators should be interpreted in a very careful manner. The same indicators have been and can be interpreted in various ways. For example, the number of recitals has been used as a measure of political conflict and as a measure of the importance of an issue.

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Notes

1. Unfortunately, the coding scheme of the DEU project also assigned a value of 0 to missing values (Thomson and Stokman, 2003: 34). Thus, a value of 0 indicates either that the expert did not provide an estimate or that the estimate was that the actor did not have any interest in this issue. Arguably, the chances are higher that an expert does not provide an estimate of the salience for an actor who has a low salience and did not participate in discussions, etc. Thus, rather than treating all entries of 0 as missing values, I use the DEU coding.
2. The data were coded by two coders independently, with a third person double-checking cases where there were discrepancies.
3. Spearman's rho = 0.96, statistically significant at the.01-level.
4. To minimize the number of articles that were overlooked, the key word search was carried out twice by two different people.
5. Two proposals were the result of a split of one proposal; these are excluded from the analysis.
6. For six proposals the word count is 0. Using the logarithm of the word count ($N = 62$) for the (weighted) mean values for the Council does not yield a statistically significant relationship either.
7. The number of issues ranges from one to six. However, only five proposals have five or six issues. Thus, I created one category for all proposals that have four or more issues. Using six categories yields similar results.

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