

# Sources of Government Accountability in the European Union. Evidence from Germany

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**Abstract** How do specific and diffuse attitudes affect voters' support for government policies in the European Union? This paper analyzes two important sources of government accountability in the EU, and how they interact to affect voter support for national politicians: diffuse support for the EU as a regime and specific support for particular policies. I argue that both sources of electoral accountability matter, but in different ways. Whereas the effect of diffuse attitudes toward the EU are predominantly driven by Eurosceptics' protest to European integration, Europhile voters are more likely to rely on their specific attitudes toward specific policies to assess the responsiveness of their politicians. To analyze comparatively how German respondents' diffuse and specific attitudes influence their assessment of typical signals of government responsiveness, I present the results of a conjoint experiment that I conducted in a survey of over 2,500 Germans. The results support the theoretical claims.

*Keywords:* European Union, electoral accountability, Germany, conjoint experiment, diffuse attitudes, specific attitudes

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Government responsiveness, accountability and the sanction of elections are essential elements of a democratic political system (Dahl, 1973). In systems, where citizens hold their governments accountable via elections, politicians are induced to choose policies that in their judgement will be positively valued by citizens at the time of the next election (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes, 1999).<sup>1</sup> For a long time, politicians in West European countries only had to worry about pursuing responsive policies at the national level. Their conduct in the European Union (EU) remained largely outside of domestic politics; a pattern that Schmidt (2006) fittingly described as “policies without politics.” These days are gone. The increasing politicization of European affairs in the national political arena (Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012; Kriesi and Grande, 2016; de Vries, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Hutter and Grande, 2014) has increased the pressure and opportunities for governments to politicize European cooperation. Actors in the European Commission Rauh (2016), the European Parliament (Thomassen and Schmitt, 1997; Van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh, 1996), and the Council of the European Union (Schneider and Tobin, 2017; Schneider and Slantchev, 2017; Schneider, 2018; Hagemann, Hobolt and Wratil, 2016; Wratil, 2017) try to signal to European citizens that they are responsive to their interests when they cooperate in the EU.

The situation is particularly tenuous for opportunistic governments. Voters are now likely to hold them accountable for responsive conduct both at the national and European level. Although mounting research establishes that governments increasingly “Europeanize” politics by signaling responsiveness in the Council, we know precious little about how voters form their attitudes about government conduct in the EU. It is commonly known that voters choose which political party to support during elections based on their assessment about the responsiveness of their government both with respect to positions on the European Union as a polity (i.e. their diffuse support for European integration) as well as to (partisan) positions about specific policies.<sup>2</sup> But how do voters use the two dimensions to choose whom to support at the ballot box, and perhaps more importantly, how do the two dimensions of voter attitudes interact with each other to explain electoral accountability of governments in the European Union?

In this paper, I compare the two sources of government accountability in the EU with a focus on how specific and diffuse attitudes affect voters’ decision to reward or punish their governments’ conduct in the Council of

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<sup>1</sup>Accountability implies that voters vote to retain the incumbent only when the incumbent acts in their best interest, and that the incumbent chooses policies necessary to get reelected Manin, Przeworski and Stokes (1999, 40).

<sup>2</sup>The concepts of diffuse and specific attitudes are derived from Easton (1965). I offer a more detailed discussion of the concepts below.

the European Union.<sup>3</sup> I argue that government support is driven by politicians' responsiveness to both diffuse and specific attitudes of voters, at least when issues are politicized, but that they matter in different ways. Voters hold their government accountable for pursuing policies that represent their own support for the EU. Since diffuse support for the EU as a polity has developed directly, and in most parts, as a protest movement to European integration, Eurosceptic voters should hold more consistent attitudes on relevant policies than Europhile voters, and electoral accountability should mainly be driven by Eurosceptic attitudes. Europhile voters, on the other hand, are much more likely to punish or reward governments with policy positions that are responsive to their specific attitudes toward policies.

Analyzing the sources of electoral accountability with observational data is an important first step, but it limits the ability to study the phenomenon in question. Vote choice in national elections is restricted to available party options. Mainstream parties tend to be Europhile while Eurosceptic parties can typically be found at the two extremes of the ideological continuum. These patterns restrict the available options that voters have with respect to the party vote, which in turn limits our ability to study how voter attitudes interact in forming attitudes toward politicians. This paper uses an experimental design to address some of these challenges and to complement existing observational research on electoral accountability in the EU.

To compare the different sources of electoral accountability, I conducted a conjoint survey experiment with 2,500 German adult citizens. I asked respondents to indicate the extent of their (a) diffuse support for the EU and (b) specific support for two European policies that are highly politicized in national politics (and therefore likely to matter for national vote choice): immigration of refugees in Europe and a financial rescue loan for Greece. Respondents then evaluated various politicians who differ on a set of policy choices that correspond to the dimensions of theoretical interest as well as other characteristics of the politicians that may have an impact on their government approval (i.e. experience, party affiliation, gender). By randomly assigning both the values that each feature takes and their order of presentation, the conjoint experiment allows me to compare the different types of electoral accountability analytically. I find that voters' specific and diffuse

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<sup>3</sup>In principle, voters can hold politicians accountable through a supranational and an intergovernmental channel (de Vries, 2015, 219-20). They can participate in elections to the European Parliament (EP), and vote for European parties that resemble their own attitudes. They can also reward or punish their own governments for their policy choices and actions in the intergovernmental negotiations in the Council of the European Union. While both are without doubt important channels of electoral accountability, here, I focus on electoral accountability in the intergovernmental mode of European cooperation; that is, how voters hold their own governments accountable for their actions in the EU.

attitudes matter, in different ways. Voters do hold politicians accountable for their responsiveness to their own diffuse attitudes, but the effect is almost entirely driven by Eurosceptic voters. Europhile respondents, on the other hand, do not reward politicians when they are responsive to their diffuse attitudes, but reward (or punish) politicians' whose conduct in the Council is responsive to their preferences over specific policies.

The findings indicate that diffuse attitudes toward the EU are more likely to affect government support when voters hold Eurosceptic views. The results indicate that this may be due to the salience that voters attach to these issues. Eurosceptic voters tend to exhibit much stronger and more consistent attitudes toward policies relevant to that dimension than Europhiles who exhibit much greater variations on these policy issues. With these findings, the paper sheds more light on the sources of government accountability in the European Union. The paper builds on previous work that demonstrates how voters use their support for or opposition to the European project to hold their governments accountable for their actions at the EU-level (de Vries, 2007, 2010, 2017; de Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Evans, 1998; Tillman, 2004, 2012; Schneider, 2018). My analysis corroborates these findings, but it also (a) analyzes how electoral accountability works to restrain governments, and (b) demonstrates that the effects are mainly driven by Eurosceptic voters. In addition, I show that specific policy support is another important dimension of government accountability in the EU, at least for policy issues that are politicized. Although the results cannot speak to *whether* government conduct in the Council matters for national elections (indeed, this relationship has been demonstrated elsewhere), the findings provide first insights into how diffuse and specific attitudes can affect how voters hold their governments accountable for politicized issues. To my knowledge, this paper presents the first comparative analysis of both dimensions, at least when policy issues are politicized domestically.

## **Of Waking Giants and Electoral Accountability in Europe**

For a long time, cooperation at the European level was not politicized in national political arenas. It was not the performance of the politicians at the EU-level, but national politics that explained voting outcomes in elections to the European Parliament (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996; Van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh, 1996; Van der Brug and Van der Eijk, 2007). Voters' preferences over European integration also did not influence their vote choice in national elections. Voters were uninterested and uninformed, and European integration seemed to proceed in the shadow of a "diffuse feeling of approval," or a "permissive consensus"

(Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970).

Public opinion toward the EU is still characterized by a high degree of uncertainty, many issues are still not politicized in the national political arena, and EP elections are still oftentimes second-order elections (de Vries and Steenbergen, 2013). Yet, it is undeniable that the ‘sleeping giant’ is waking up (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004; Van der Brug, Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2007; Kriesi, 2007; Kriesi, Tresch and Jochum, 2007; Kriesi et al., 2008, 2012; Hutter and Grande, 2014; Risse, 2015; Rauh, 2016). European countries have experienced an “increase in polarization of opinions, interests, or values and the extent to which they are publicly advanced towards the process of policy formulation within the EU.” (de Wilde, 2011, 566f.). Politicization of the EU began in earnest with the signing of the Single European Act in 1986. It created the Common Market, and extended the range of European competences to include policy areas like environmental protection, safety at work, and consumer protection (Scharpf, 2003, 6). The next spike was occasioned by the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, which broadened and deepened integration (Scharpf, 2003; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). The effects of the European debt crisis are discernible as well (Cramme and Hobolt, 2015; Kriesi and Grande, 2016). And even though EU politicization varies in intensity that depends on particular events, it has generally increased over time (Rauh, 2016; Hutter, Grande and Kriesi, 2016).

The consequences for domestic politics have been predictable. Voter attitudes toward European integration affect their choices, especially when political entrepreneurs succeed in making the EU electorally salient, and when the government confronts various dissenting groups in the media. The position parties take on European integration now influence their share of the vote in national elections (Evans, 1998; Tillman, 2004, 2012; de Vries, 2007, 2010). Parties that advance Eurosceptic positions have managed to attract significant voter support (de Vries and Hobolt, 2012). They have challenged the prevailing pro-European consensus of the mainstream parties and have contributed to the growth of internal divisions in centrist parties as well (Kriesi et al., 2012; Hutter, Grande and Kriesi, 2016). This has forced the ruling parties on the defensive, and today it is the parties in the governing coalitions that tend to be most active in debates on European integration during election campaigns (Dolezal and Hellström, 2016). Similarly, voters’ choice on who to support depends on politicians’ responsiveness on specific policies (Schoen, 2008; Schneider, 2018). These electoral effects are not limited to domestic politics. In elections for the European Parliament, voters tend to favor parties that represent their own attitudes toward European integration (de Vries et al., 2011; Hobolt and Spoon, 2012; Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). The effect is particularly strong for Eurosceptic voters, for whom anti-immigration attitudes contribute to a negative disposition

toward the EU (Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley, 2008; Treib, 2014; Hobolt, 2015).

Voters increasingly hold their governments accountable for their attitudes toward European integration as well as their attitudes toward specific policies, and in turn, governments have started to signal that their conduct in the Council is responsive to these attitudes (Schneider and Tobin, 2017; Schneider and Slantchev, 2017; Schneider, 2018; Hagemann, Hobolt and Wratil, 2016; Wratil, 2017). Whereas there is much evidence *that* diffuse attitudes toward the EU and specific attitudes toward particular policies matter for vote choice in national elections, we know very little about *how* diffuse attitudes toward the EU and specific attitudes toward European policies matter for voters when they assess the responsiveness of their politicians. The “how” is particularly important given the two-dimensional nature of national contestation in the European Union (Hix and Lord, 1997; Hooghe and Marks, 1999; Bakker, Jolly and Polk, 2012).

To theoretically develop these notions of electoral accountability, it is helpful to apply Easton (1965)’s distinction between specific and diffuse attitudes to the European setting. *Diffuse attitudes* are directed toward or against the polity itself (i.e., European integration or the European Union). Voters hold preferences over whether they support any policies that lead to further European integration, or even about whether they believe that the EU itself is a desirable political system or should cease to exist. We can label voters as either Eurosceptic or Europhile based on their diffuse attitudes. *Specific attitudes* are directed toward or against specific policies of the EU. Voters have preferences over which policies they want implemented at the EU-level, similar to their preferences over the policies implemented at the national level. Oftentimes, but not always, these specific attitudes can be placed along a left-right dimension.

European voters should take both of these dimensions into account when they decide whom to vote for in a national election, at least when European issues are politicized in the national political arena. Similar to national politics, EU governments can signal responsiveness to voter demands in a number of different ways. Since the Council is one of the two central legislative decision-making bodies in the European Union, it lends itself to signals of government responsiveness, because it is here where governments indicate their positions, negotiate, and decide upon European policies. And whereas the decision-making process in the Council is characterized by a larger degree of cooperation (i.e. governments are very likely to compromise on their own policy positions to achieve policy solutions), voters could take into account their governments’ willingness to take on their preferred positions as their own. In addition, they should care about the government’s ability to defend their positions throughout the legislative negotiations and to assert these positions in the final policy outcome.

We could conceive of these signals as a result of governments trying to be responsive to both the diffuse and specific attitudes of their voters. The extent of diffuse support for the EU polity should lead voters to judge politicians upon whether their own policy positions are congruent on that dimension. With the increasing tendency of national parties to incorporate their stances on European integration into their party manifestos, and to campaign explicitly on the European dimension, it has become easier for voters to judge national parties along the European integration dimension (that is, activating their diffuse attitudes). Eurosceptic voters should be more likely to reward parties that have negative attitudes towards European integration, while Europhile voters should be more likely to sanction these parties and instead vote for governments that have positive attitudes towards European integration. Aside from favoring parties that share their principle attitudes toward European integration, voters can hold the incumbent government accountable for pursuing particular policies in the Council. For example, Eurosceptic voters should be more likely to punish a government party for pursuing pro-integration policies at the European level; and reward governments for representing more Eurosceptic policy positions.

The effect of diffuse attitudes should matter most for Eurosceptic voters. In particular, the increasing salience of diffuse attitudes toward the EU mainly owes to the historical development of a protest movement that is directed against globalization in general, and the European Union in particular. It is the economically disadvantaged – the losers of European integration and globalization – that started to doubt the European project and sparked the rise of diffuse attitudes as a new important dimension of the national political space (Copsey, 2015). These individuals did not benefit from the uneven distribution of the Single Market's benefits, they suffered particularly during the financial crisis, and they were most worried about the immigration of refugees and its implications for their own economic welfare. For this reason, supporters of eurosceptic parties tend to be opposed to redistribution and immigration (de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005; Toshkov and Kortenska, 2015). The dissatisfaction with the performance of the European Union led to an increasing salience of diffuse attitude in vote choice by this group; a salience that is expectedly unmatched by voters who did not experience the same losses. To make matters worse, voters oftentimes do not have many “real” choices when they want to vote for a party with a Eurosceptic agenda, especially if they do not have extreme positions on the left-right dimension. It is well known that voters in European countries tend to be more Eurosceptic than the political elites in government (Mattila and Raunio, 2006).<sup>4</sup> Eurosceptic votes therefore are

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<sup>4</sup>Parties that participate in national coalition governments are usually much less Eu-

much more likely to manifest themselves as protest votes. The blaming and rewarding effect should therefore be stronger for Eurosceptic voters than for Europhile voters.

Since diffuse attitudes became a dimension of national contestation as a result of a protest movement that targeted globalization, economic redistribution, and immigration, it should not be as salient to voters who do not hold strong eurosceptic views. Voters who self-identify as pro-European may in fact simply not conceive themselves as Eurosceptic without identifying this necessarily with particular policies toward immigration or redistribution. That is, while Euroscepticism is driven by protest to particular policies, and Eurosceptics are likely to hold very consistent preferences on that dimension across relevant policies, pro-European sentiments toward these policies may be more variant. As a consequence, Europhile voters may not only *not* use their diffuse attitudes to hold politicians accountable for their policies in the Council, but they may be more likely to make their vote choices based on politicians' responsiveness toward their specific policy interests on particular policies. The extent of specific support for or opposition to specific European policies should lead voters to judge politicians upon whether their specific policy positions are in line with the voters' own positions on these policies.

## Research Design: A Conjoint Experiment in Germany

I designed a fully randomized conjoint experiment to examine *how* voters assess different politicians based on typical signals of government responsiveness in national and European politics.<sup>5</sup> All respondents were instructed about the conjoint exercise and then exposed to comparisons between two politicians, each of whom varied along six different dimensions. The survey was fielded in the fall of 2016; the sample includes 2450 German adults who are eligible to vote in federal elections. Although *Respondi* uses various techniques to generate a sample that resembles the underlying population, online samples are never true probability samples.<sup>6</sup> This particular sample skews toward younger and more educated male voters

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rosceptic than the parties in the opposition (Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley, 2008, 98). In addition, these parties all tend to adopt very similar positions on European integration (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson, 2002).

<sup>5</sup>For a discussion of signals of responsiveness in national political arenas, see for example, Mayhew (1974). For an application to the Council see Schneider and Tobin (2017); Schneider (2018); Wratil (2017). Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014) provide a formal exposition and a discussion of the conjoint method.

<sup>6</sup>True probability samples are extremely difficult (if not impossible) to generate even with offline sampling methods, they come at considerable cost, and their benefits diminish with historically declining response rates.



compared to the general voter population. To address this, I use entropy balancing to re-weight the data from the survey so that it matches the demographic margins from the voter population (I weigh on age groups, gender, and level of education). The sample is well balanced geographically.<sup>7</sup>

Before I delve deeper into the experimental design, I would like to discuss some of advantages and disadvantages of the experimental strategy chosen here. The nature of the experiment puts limitations on its external validity beyond the context of (a) Germany and (b) the policies that are discussed. To the extent that the process that generates German voters' attitudes toward the policies differ from the process that generates individuals' attitudes toward these policies in other EU member states, it will not be possible to derive more general implications from the results. Whereas existing research on electoral accountability finds evidence for the two-dimensional space in all European countries, Otjes and Katsandidou (2016) find significant differences across the two dimensions for the poorer member states in Southern Europe. At the very least, one would therefore have to be careful in making any inferences to those countries based on the results presented here. Even if the geographical scope is limited, a focus on Germany is still warranted because the policies discussed in this paper – immigration and financial bailouts – are mainly driven by intergovernmental negotiations with a strong leverage of those states that carry the largest burden. Germany therefore has had important influence on policy formulation in these areas, and this influence merits a better understanding of potential domestic electoral causes for the policies that the government pursues.

In addition to the geographical focus, the experiment focuses on two policies that are highly politicized at the national level. It is to be expected that voter reactions would be different when policies are not politicized. That is, the experimental results will tell us neither whether voters hold their governments accountable for responsive conduct in the EU nor the conditions under which they are likely to do so. As discussed above, this is not the focus of this study. In fact, there is mounting evidence that voters hold governments accountable for responsive conduct, at least when policies are politicized in the national political arenas. My focus is on achieving a better understanding of how diffuse and specific attitudes matter; that is, I am interested in the internal validity for which the experimental design is appropriate.

In addition, the survey experiment offers important complementary advantages to existing studies of government accountability. First, most scholars who analyze issue voting use quantitative analysis to test whether more

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<sup>7</sup>Appendix A shows the demographic margins of the voter population, the raw online sample, and the weighted online sample. The imbalances are relatively minor, and the results are robust when unweighted data are used (see Appendix D).

Eurosceptic voters are more likely to punish Europhile governments. The data on the parties' attitudes toward European integration are typically collected from party manifestos, and vary across national contexts. The survey experiment allows me to exogenously set the attitudes of the politicians, and present them to the respondents. This is particularly useful because previous work oftentimes had to assume (given the data limitations) that politicians tend to take less Eurosceptic positions than their electorates. The experiment provides an important complement to these studies. Second, it is difficult, to say the least, to disentangle the national and European sources of electoral accountability. In the conjoint experiment, I can control for other important aspects, such as partisanship. This allows me to analyze the sources of electoral accountability holding other potential factors exogenously constant. Finally, whereas aggregated data makes it very difficult to compare the two different sources of accountability, the setup of the conjoint experiment allows me to distinguish more explicitly between diffuse and specific attitudes as sources of government accountability.

The first step in the experiment was to elicit each respondent's ideal positions on the two policies (i.e., their specific attitudes).

*Financial Bailout for Greece.* The survey coincided with public discussions of another bailout for Greece. The debt crisis had started in 2009, and the Greek government had received several financial aid packages from the EU and the IMF. These seemed to have resolved the crisis but in the summer of 2016 the Greek economy plunged again and incited renewed talk about more financial aid.<sup>8</sup> Since contributions to these rescue packages were pegged to the size of the economy, Germany always ended up with the lion's share of payments. In consequence, the discussions rapidly politicized the issue among German taxpayers.

To elicit voter preferences regarding another Greek bailout, the question was phrased as follows:

We are now interested in your opinion about the debt crisis in Greece. Some believe that Greece should receive more financial aid from the European Union. Others believe that Greece should not receive more financial aid from the European Union. In general, how much do you support or oppose more financial aid for Greece?

*European Migrant Crisis.* Starting in 2015, increasing numbers of people from Southwest Asia and Africa arrived in the European Union. Some were asylum seekers fleeing wars or persecution in their home countries, others

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<sup>8</sup>*The Guardian*. August 13, 2016. "A year after the crisis was declared over, Greece is still spiralling down."

were migrants seeking better economic prospects, and the majority were Muslim. More than three quarters were from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq. By the end of 2016, there were 2,582,780 first time asylum applications in the EU, which exceeded the total for the previous seven years combined. Of these, Germany had received nearly half (1,221,665, or 47%). This was double its average share of the seven preceding years. The German open door policy was made famous by Chancellor Angela Merkel who declared “Wir schaffen das” (We can do this), with the predictable effect of gravely intensifying the politicization of the issue. Even setting aside the vocal xenophobic minority, critics asserted that the unprecedented influx of migrants would overburden the system, and that the costs of absorbing the immigrants were exorbitant. Indeed, by the end of 2016, the German government had already spent €20 billion on the refugees.<sup>9</sup>

To elicit voter preferences regarding the migrant crisis, the question was phrased as follows:

We are now interested in your opinion about the European refugee policies. Last year, more than one million people tried to enter the EU. Some believe that more immigrants should be accepted. Others believe that no more immigrants should be accepted. Are you for or against accepting more refugees in the European Union?

For both questions, respondents could pick from the ordinal ranking “strongly in favor”, “somewhat in favor”, “neither in favor nor opposed”, “somewhat opposed”, and “strongly opposed”.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 1 summarizes the respondents’ attitudes toward (a) providing another financial aid package to Greece, and (b) accepting more refugees in the European Union. The majority of surveyed Germans somewhat or strongly opposed both another bailout (54%) and more immigration (55%). The numbers of voters who have not formed an opinion on these issues were also similar across the policy areas: 24% (bailout) and 21% (immigration). The only difference was that Germans appear to remain resolved to accept more refugees than to help the Greeks (6% strongly in favor of more immigration versus 3% strongly in favor of more aid for Greece). Overall, there is significant variation in citizen preferences on both issues, and neither seems to offer anything close to a national consensus.

Both policy areas were highly politicized in Germany. Even though it might be interesting to see whether voters respond differently to policy issues that are not politicized, I chose not to do so, for three reasons. First,

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<sup>9</sup>While Germany took the largest total number of refugees, Sweden and Hungary had more refugees relative to their populations.

<sup>10</sup>The ranking was randomly reversed.

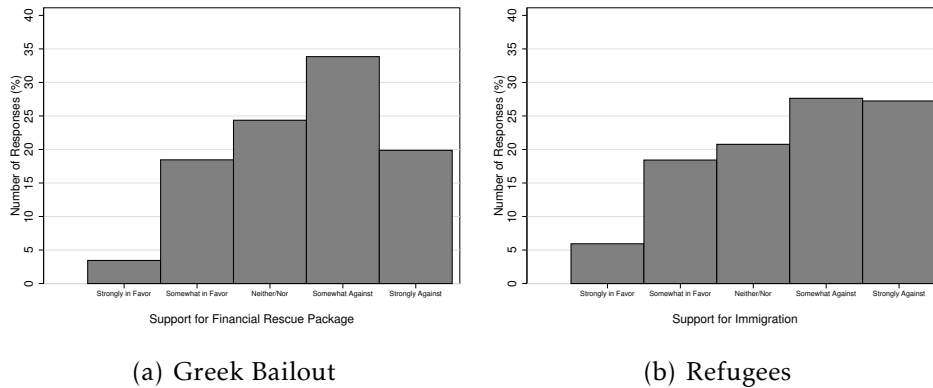


Figure 1: Attitudes Toward a Greek Bailout and More Immigration in Germany, 2016. Histograms of responses in the online survey about respondents’ attitudes toward (a) providing more financial aid to Greece, and (b) accepting more immigrants in the EU.

it would be very difficult to model a non-politicized issue experimentally because by merely including such a policy area the experimenter would draw the respondent’s attention to the issue in a way that would not happen in reality for non-politicized issues. This could elicit a response in the experiment even though there would have been no effect outside it. Second, the theoretical mechanism requires voter awareness of the issue, and the point of the experiment is to demonstrate that in this case voters make the hypothesized inferences and choices. For this, highly politicized issues are appropriate because they guarantee such awareness. If we were to discover no connection between signals of responsiveness and voter choices here, then we would have fairly strong evidence that the mechanism has made implausible assumptions. Third, many still believe that voters do not care about signals of responsiveness at the EU level even when the issues are politicized. Instead, voters are supposed to rely largely on the government’s ideological stances to inform their electoral choices. The relevant setup here is to include ideological affinity as a control and see whether signals of responsiveness have a discernible effect anyway. As we shall see, this is exactly what the experiment does.

The second step in the experiment was to assess the respondents’ attitudes toward the EU itself (i.e., their diffuse attitudes). The survey asked respondents whether they believe that Germany’s membership in the EU is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither a good nor a bad thing.<sup>11</sup> Table 1 provides a summary of the responses. In Germany, 54.4% of respondents

<sup>11</sup>There are various questions to assess attitudes toward European integration; most of them produce highly correlated responses.

indicated that membership is a good thing, while only 16.2% believed that it is a bad thing. Almost 26% of respondents did not have a strong opinion on EU membership either way.

Since the Eurobarometer asked a similar question until 2011, I can compare the responses in my survey to the results of the Eurobarometer results. The respondents in my survey tend to have a stronger opinion either way than respondents in the Eurobarometer survey. The reason for this could be that the EU has significantly politicized since 2011 (the last data available for the Eurobarometer on this question). The distribution of responses is remarkable close to the European average in the Eurobarometer survey. In fact, with the exception of a few outliers, respondents in most European countries have very similar attitudes towards the EU. For example, even though the share of Eurobarometer respondents who believe that EU membership is a good thing varies from 25% (Latvia) to 72% (Luxembourg), most countries depict support levels between 40-55%. Similarly, the share of Eurobarometer respondents who believe that EU membership is a bad thing ranges from 9% (Estonia) to 33% (Greece), but most countries fall somewhere between 10% and 20%.

	<b>Good Thing</b>	<b>Bad Thing</b>	<b>Neither/Nor</b>
Germany	54.3%	16.2%	25.7%
EU (Survey)	46.6%	18.5%	31.1%
Germany (Survey)	47.1%	15.9%	32.2%

Table 1: Public Support for EU Membership

The third step in the experiment was to present respondents with the scenario for one of the policy areas. When participants were done answering questions for the first area, the survey returned to this step for the other area. The order of the policy areas was random. The scenario informed respondents that further positive action on the relevant policy would require more negotiations among EU members, and that German politicians would be involved.

The bailout scenario was framed as follows (the refugee one was analogous):

Further financial aid for Greece would require negotiations between EU members. These negotiations also involve German politicians. These politicians can represent different opinions and have more or less influence on the outcomes of the negotia-

tions. We will now show you some examples of such a negotiation behavior. We will show you among other things:

- the position which the politician represented at the start of negotiations,
- the position for which the politician voted at the end of the negotiations, and
- the final policy outcome

We will always show you two possible scenarios to compare. For each comparison, we would like to know which of the two politicians you would prefer if there was an election next Sunday. Even if you like or dislike both politicians, please let us know which one you would prefer to the other. In addition, we will ask you how likely you would vote for each politician if there was an election next Sunday. There are neither correct nor incorrect responses for this question. *Please read the scenarios carefully before you make a decision.*

Respondents could not proceed to the next page without spending at least ten seconds on these instructions.

The fourth step in the experiment was to ask respondents to evaluate two sets of two hypothetical politicians who used different strategies to signal responsiveness in a policy area, choose which one they supported, and indicate how likely they would be to vote for each if elections were held next Sunday. Politicians were defined by three personal attributes (party affiliation, gender, and political experience), the initial position they took on the issue, their final vote, and the negotiation outcome. Table 2 lists all possible values of the variables for each of the policy areas.

Each respondent was presented with a pair of hypothetical politicians (Politician A and Politician B) within a fully randomized choice-based conjoint framework, wherein each politician varied along the six dimensions of each variant.<sup>12</sup> This design permits the identification of causal effects non-parametrically and so does not require one to make assumptions about the function that maps signals of responsiveness to levels of support.

Respondents were then asked to choose between the two politicians. They had to select one, and only one, of the two. The forced-choice design allows me to analyze the correspondence between the signals of responsiveness

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<sup>12</sup>See Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014) for this method. This design builds on previous experiments about political repositioning and voter behavior in American politics (Butler and Powell, 2014; Houweling and Tomz, 2016a,b). I adapted it for the European context, and added the responsiveness dimensions.

	<b>Bailout</b>	<b>Refugees</b>
<i>Personal Attributes</i>		
Party Affiliation	CDU/CSU	CDU/CSU
	SPD	SPD
	FDP	FDP
	The Greens	The Greens
Gender	male	male
	female	female
Political Experience (years)	0	0
	2	2
	4	4
	6	6
	8	8
	10	10
<i>Signals of Responsiveness</i>		
Position Taken	favors more aid	favors more refugees
	opposes more aid	opposes more refugees
Final Vote	favors more aid	favors more refugees
	opposes more aid	opposes more refugees
Negotiation Outcome	more aid	more refugees
	no more aid	no more refugees

Table 2: Politician Attributes and Signals of Responsiveness.

and what a voter might actually do at the ballot box. For a somewhat more fine-grained analysis, I also included a continuous measure of the intensity of voter preferences for both politicians. The respondents were asked,

If there was an election next Sunday how likely is it that you would vote for each of the politicians? Please give your answer on the following scale from highly unlikely (1) to highly likely (10).

Half of the respondents were randomly chosen to receive the scale in this order, and the other half received it in reverse order, from highly likely (1) to highly unlikely (10).

When respondents were finished with their selections, they were presented with a second set of a different hypothetical pair, and asked to choose between them and to indicate the probability of voting for each (i.e., the step was repeated with two other randomly-assigned politicians).

	<b>Politician A</b>	<b>Politician B</b>
Negotiation Position in the EU	opposes more aid	supports more aid
Voting Behavior in the EU	opposes more aid	opposes more aid
Negotiation Outcome in the EU	more aid	no more aid
Party Affiliation	FDP	CDU/CSU
Gender	male	female
Political Experience (in years)	6	4
<b>Your Choice</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Table 3: Choice-Based Conjoint (English). The row ordering of the variables and their values (in light-grey) are merely examples. In the experiment both the order of the variables and their values were randomized.

Table 3 shows the basic layout of the forced choice-based conjoint in English.<sup>13</sup> Values for each dimension in each politician’s profile were randomly assigned, and the ordering of the dimensions was also randomized. Each respondent was given two sets of these hypothetical politician pairs for each policy area, so they had to make a total of four forced choices. The analysis is based on the forced choices because these are what matters during elections. Estimations using the continuous measure of support intensity can be found in Appendix E.<sup>14</sup>

Following the literature on responsiveness in the Council, governments can signal that their are responsive to their citizens’ interests by taking positions that are responsive to the citizens’ positions at the initial stages of the negotiations and by casting a final vote that is responsive to the citizens’ positions (Wratil, 2017; Schneider, 2018).<sup>15</sup> The explanatory variables measures the politician’s initial position and their final vote without reference to the voter:

*Position:* An indicator variable that takes the value of 1 if the politician’s initial policy position is in favor of the policy, and 0 otherwise.

*Vote:* An indicator variable that takes the value of 1 if the politician’s final vote is in favor of the policy, and 0 otherwise.

All estimations share four controls:

<sup>13</sup>Appendix B shows a screenshot of the instructions that individuals received during the survey.

<sup>14</sup>Although the uncertainty around the estimates varies somewhat (in both directions), the results are remarkably robust to the results using the forced-choice question.

<sup>15</sup>In addition, governments can signal responsiveness by defending responsive positions, and by achieving more responsive policy outcomes. Appendices H and I present results analyzing how these signals matters; they are consistent with the results about position-taking strategies.



*Outcome*: An indicator variable that takes the value of 1 if the outcome is in favor of the policy, and 0 otherwise.

*Partisanship*: An indicator variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent and the politician affiliate with the same party, and 0 otherwise.

*Gender*: An indicator variable that takes the value of 1 if the respondent and the politician have the same gender, and 0 otherwise.

*Experience*: A variable that measures the years of experience the politician has. It takes values from the set specified in Table 2.

## **Empirical Results**

For the analysis, I estimate average marginal component-specific effects (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014). I regress the dependent variable, a binary measure of whether the respondent voted for a particular politician or not, on a set of indicator variables that capture the specific values that the given scenario takes for each of the attributes. For each dimension, I omit one of the attribute values and use it as the baseline category. The regression coefficient for each dummy variable indicates the average marginal component-specific effect of that value of the dimension relative to the omitted value of that dimension. I report standard errors for these estimates clustered by respondent to account for within-respondent correlations in responses. I also estimated regressions that took into account the respondents' political knowledge and the respondents' attention during the survey without changing the main results (see Appendices F and G).

All results are presented graphically, the tabulations can be found in Appendix C. The figures consist of two panels, one for each policy. The panel on the left displays the results for the Greek bailout, and the panel on the right displays the results for the refugees. The independent variables are arrayed along the vertical axis, with the reference value omitted. The marginal effects are plotted on the horizontal axis. The estimated coefficients are denoted by either a dark grey circle or a light grey diamond (see the corresponding legend for their meanings), and their 90% confidence intervals are marked by bars of the same color.

I start out by analyzing the effects of diffuse attitudes toward the EU on politicians support during Council negotiations. I split the sample by Eurosceptic (coefficient estimates marked with dark-grey circles) and Europhile respondents (coefficient estimates marked with light-grey diamonds).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>I exclude respondents who chose the "neither/nor" category; an analysis of those respondents is presented in the appendix. Interestingly, the respondents' behavior is quite

Following the theoretical argument, I expect that Eurosceptic respondents punish politicians for taking positions and casting votes in favor of the pro-EU policy (providing a bailout; allowing for the immigration of more refugees). Europhile respondents should reward politicians for this behavior, but the effect should be weaker. Figure 2 represents the results.

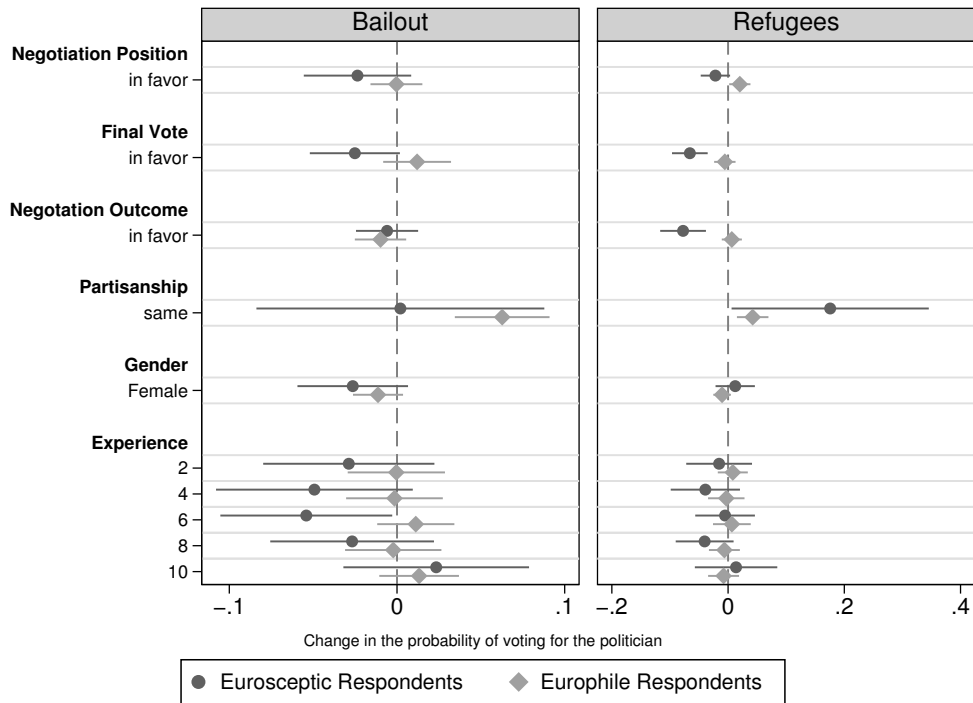


Figure 2: Position-Taking and Voter Support. Marginal component-specific effects from a linear probability model. Bars denote 90% confidence intervals. Reference values for each variable omitted.

The findings are largely consistent with the theoretical expectations. A few results are particularly noteworthy. First, Eurosceptic respondents are more likely to punish politicians who take pro-EU positions or cast votes that are considered pro-European. Second, the effect for Eurosceptic respondents is consistently negative across the two policies, but only marginally significant for the bailout policy. This result is not surprising; even though the debates over a Greek bailout have driven much of the Eurosceptic sentiment, it is immigration that has been the main topic for Eurosceptic parties at the domestic level. Furthermore, the recent refugee crisis has made immigration policies highly politicized; much more so than the Greek finan-

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consistent with the behavior of the Eurosceptic respondents.

cial crisis. Third, the effects for Europhile voters are largely positive, but insignificant with the exception of the politician's negotiation position on refugee policies. The findings therefore indicate that the effects of diffuse attitudes on government support are predominantly driven by Eurosceptic voters.

Why do Europhiles fail to reward politicians for pro-European policies more consistently? Above, I argued that Eurosceptic voters are likely to have more consistent (and consistently salient) preferences on policies that are connected to European integration, whereas Europhile voters may interpret support for the EU in much less salient and more general terms. It is possible to use the data to analyze this in greater detail. Table 4 presents information on the overlap between diffuse and specific attitudes (column percentages). Eurosceptic respondents tend to oppose both a Greek bailout (80.6%) and further immigration into the EU (85.1%). Europhile respondents, on the other hand, do not depict very consistent attitudes: 35.1% of Europhile respondents support a Greek bailout, but 43% oppose it. Similarly, 40.5% of Europhile respondents support further immigration, but 39.7% oppose it. These descriptive findings support the view that the European integration dimension seems to be more prevalent among the Eurosceptic voters who protest existing policies in the European Union. Europhile voters, on the other hand, vary much more strongly in their disposition toward European policies; they do not indiscriminately support pro-EU policies.

To analyze whether Europhile voters base their vote choice more on specific attitudes than on diffuse attitudes, I created variables that measure how similar the politician's initial position and final vote are to the voter's preference on the issue, and how closely the outcome corresponds to the voter's ideal point, without reference to the respondent's diffuse attitudes – a measure that reflects general notions of responsiveness in the comparative politics literature. The voter's preference is measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly in favor) to 5 (strongly opposed), so I coded voters with values 1 through 3 as being in favor of the policy (more aid to Greece and more refugees to EU, respectively), and those with values from 4 through 5 as being opposed to it. The three measures of affinity are as follows:

*Position Affinity:* An indicator variable that takes the value of 1 if the politician's initial policy position (in favor or against) the policy is the same as the voter's preferred position, and 0 otherwise.

*Vote Affinity:* An indicator variable that takes the value of 1 if the politician's final vote (in favor or against) the policy is the same as the voter's preferred position, and 0 otherwise.

	<b>Bad Thing</b>	<b>Good Thing</b>	<b>Neither/Nor</b>
<b>Immigration</b>			
Strongly in Favor	0.3%	10.6%	2.5%
Somewhat in Favor	5.1%	29.8%	10.4%
Neither/Nor	9.6%	19.9%	25.9%
Somewhat Against	28.2%	26.2%	28.9%
Strongly Against	56.9%	13.5%	32.5%
<b>Financial Rescue Package</b>			
Strongly in Favor	0.6%	5.8%	1.8%
Somewhat in Favor	6.8%	29.3%	10.0%
Neither/Nor	12.1%	21.9%	30.8%
Somewhat Against	36.1%	33.1%	35.3%
Strongly Against	44.5%	9.9%	22.1%

Table 4: Public Support for EU Membership and Attitudes Towards EU Policies

*Outcome Affinity*: An indicator variable that takes the value of 1 if the policy is set to the position preferred by the voter, and 0 otherwise.

Figure 3 presents the results. I again split the sample by Eurosceptic (coefficient estimates marked with dark-grey circles) and Europhile respondents (coefficient estimates marked with light-grey diamonds). Eurosceptics are more likely to reward politicians whose position or vote is close to their own ideal positions. The results are not surprising given the high consistency of preferences toward Eurosceptic preferences. The difference to previous findings comes from the behavior of Europhile respondents. Europhile respondents are significantly likely to reward politicians who take positions or vote in a way that is responsive to the respondents' ideal positions. The effect is stronger for refugee policies, but also significant for responsive behavior toward bailout policies. That is, Europhile respondents are more likely to assess responsiveness based on their specific attitudes toward individual policies.

Having the same party affiliation as the politician remains the strongest predictor of voting choice, just like the many studies of voting patterns in Europe would lead one to expect. However, it is worth emphasizing that position-taking has a statistically discernible effect even when partisanship is taken into account.

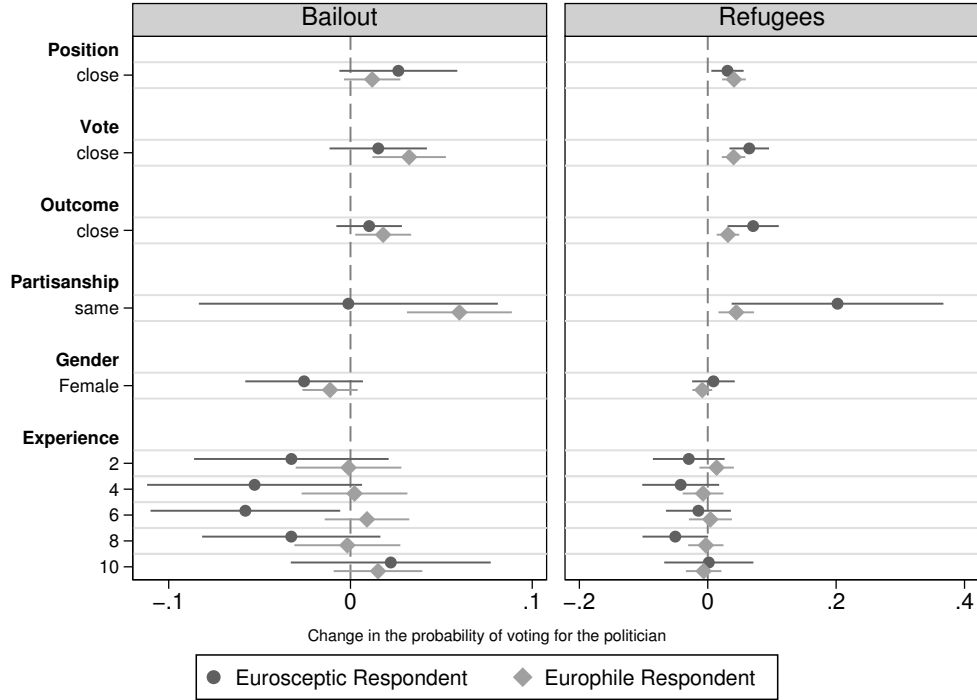


Figure 3: Position-Taking and Politician Support by Europhile Respondents. Marginal component-specific effects from a linear probability model. Bars denote 90% confidence intervals. Reference values for each variable omitted.

## Discussion

This paper provided a comparative analysis of the sources of government accountability in the EU. I argued that at least for policy issues that are politicized at the domestic level, both diffuse and specific attitudes support should drive government support, albeit in somewhat different ways. Given the absence of Eurosceptic parties in most European governments, variations in diffuse attitudes should become particularly important for Eurosceptic voters as a way to sanction governments for Europhile policies (or to reward them for Eurosceptic policies). Europhile voters, on the other hand, are more likely to take specific policy positions of politicians into account when deciding whom to vote for.

I presented the results of an experiment to assess comparatively how German respondents' diffuse and specific attitudes influence their assessment of typical signals of government responsiveness. I find that both sources of electoral accountability – diffuse and specific attitudes – matter for government support. But they matter in different ways. The effects of diffuse atti-

tudes on electoral accountability are predominantly driven by Eurosceptic respondents who both blame and reward politicians for their actions at the EU-level depending on whether those actions are in line with a Eurosceptic or a Europhile view. The effects are particularly strong for policies on refugees, which are traditionally highly salient to Eurosceptic voters. Europhile respondents, on the other hand, do not seem to hold their governments accountable on the basis of their diffuse attitudes, but rather on their specific attitudes toward individual policies. These findings provide first support not only that specific attitudes – the source of electoral accountability that is usually applied as a benchmark in democratic countries – matters for voters when they hold their governments accountable for their actions at the EU-level. They also show how voters can refer to different attitudes under different circumstances.

The paper complements existing observational research and sheds more light on electoral accountability in the EU. The nature of the experiment offered crucial advantages for the purpose of analysis, but it also has shortcomings with respect to the external validity of the results. The survey was conducted in Germany, and future research needs to ascertain that the findings hold for other EU member states as well. The relatively homogenous distribution of preferences on these issues across Europe that I documented above are somewhat reassuring in this respect, but the existing differences could point to interesting variations of electoral accountability across countries, especially in the European South. In addition, my analysis focused on two highly politicized issues. This choice was made intentionally to analyze how different sources of electoral accountability matter (rather than whether they matter to begin with). As I discussed previously, I do not expect that voters always hold their governments accountable for their actions at the EU level. I would expect that electoral accountability mechanisms are much more likely to hold for policies that are politicized. Finally, my paper has focused on electoral accountability through the intergovernmental channel, but it would be important to analyze whether the patterns are similar for the European Parliament as well, especially since the attribution of responsibility is much more difficult in the European Parliament.

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