

# The Sources of Government Accountability in the European Union. Evidence from a Conjoint Experiment in Germany

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**Abstract** How do voters hold their governments accountable for their policy choices in the European Union? This paper analyzes two sources of government accountability in the EU: regime support and policy support. I argue that specific preferences over particular policies induces voters to reward and punish governments for their policy actions at the EU level. Their support for European integration should be particularly important for opponents of the EU who have incentives to punish their governments for pursuing policies that are in the European interest. To analyze my theoretical argument, I present the results of a conjoint experiment that I conducted in a survey of about 2,500 Germans. The results reveal that both policy and regime evaluations matter. Voters are more likely to vote for politicians who represent their favored policy position, defend this position throughout the negotiations, and those who are successful in achieving their preferred outcome. At the same time, the level of regime support matters mainly for Eurosceptic voters who blame governments for taking and defending pro-EU positions.

*Keywords:* European Union, electoral accountability, Germany, conjoint experiment

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Government representation, 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). While much of the scholarly literature on electoral accountability in established democratic systems focuses on specific support for governmental policies as a benchmark for government accountability,<sup>1</sup> studies of political systems that are not established yet tend to focus on the electoral consequences of variations in regime support instead, whereby individuals' support for the government depend on the governments' and the individuals' attitudes toward the regime itself. In the European Union (EU), a political system that is still developing and in constant flux, diffuse regime support or opposition has been a dominant feature of the public debate. But even though we have gained many insights into government accountability that is based on voters' support for European integration, it is less clear to what extent government accountability in the EU also depends on specific policy support – the benchmark of accountability in established democratic systems.

Both sources of electoral accountability are important in regimes that are not yet firmly established. A political system is not viable without firm support for the existing political regime. But even if citizens support the regime itself, governments would have no incentives to govern responsively without electoral accountability that is based on citizens support for specific governmental policies. In this paper, I analyze and compare these two sources of government accountability in the EU with a focus on the accountability of governments in the Council of the European Union. In principle, voters can hold politicians accountable through a supranational and an intergovernmental channel.<sup>2</sup> They can participate in elections to the European Parliament (EP), and vote for European parties that resemble their own interests in specific policies and in their support for European integration. 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; how voters hold their own governments accountable for their actions in the EU in national elections. I argue that both specific policy and general regime support are drivers of government accountability in the European Union. While specific policy

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<sup>1</sup>See Ashworth (2012) for a recent review of existing studies on electoral accountability.

<sup>2</sup>de Vries (2015, 219-20).

support induces voters to reward and punish governments for their policy actions at the EU level, their support for the regime becomes particularly important for opponents of the EU (Eurosceptics) who have incentives to punish their governments for pursuing policies that are in the European (as opposed to in the national) interest.

To analyze how voters take their governments' actions at the EU level into account, I present the results of a conjoint experiment that I conducted in a survey of over 2,500 Germans in the fall of 2016. I asked respondents to evaluate 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 both matter. Voters are more likely to vote for politicians who represent their favored policy position, defend this position throughout the negotiations, and those who are successful in achieving their preferred outcome. Similarly, voters blame governments for representing unfavored positions, and for their inability to achieve favored negotiation outcomes. At the same time, the level of regime support tends to matter mainly for Eurosceptic voters who blame governments for taking and defending pro-EU positions and rewarding them for taking and defending anti-EU positions.

With these findings, the paper sheds more light on the sources of electoral 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.<sup>3</sup> My analysis corroborates these findings, but it also demonstrates that specific policy support is another important dimension of government accountability in the EU. To my knowledge, this paper presents the first comparative analysis of both dimensions, at least when policy issues are politicized domestically. These findings are relevant for the debates about the "democratic deficit" in the EU, which tend to center around the lack of electoral accountability in the EU.<sup>4</sup> Whereas the EU lacks in electoral accountability on many dimensions, my work demonstrates that under certain conditions (i.e. when issues are salient) Europeans are likely to hold their governments accountable for policy decisions at the European level. The results are relevant for other political systems that are in flux and that

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<sup>3</sup>de Vries (2007, 2010, 2017); de Vries and Hobolt (2012); Evans (1998); Tillman (2004, 2012).

<sup>4</sup>Scharpf (1999); Dahl (1999); Crombez (2003); Hix and Follesdal (2006); Hix (2008); Rohrschneider (2002).

have so far been mainly studied with respect to citizens' regime support.

On a more general level, the findings are interesting in respect to the waning regime support that established democracies have experienced over the last years. Despite the dominance of specific support for particular government policies as a source of electoral accountability, the recent developments in many democracies demonstrate that citizens' support for the political regime itself may be an important source of electoral accountability of governments as well. The rise of populist movements in countries around the world showcases that voters have increasing doubts about the legitimacy of established political elites. Many believe that elites are distant and unaccountable to the demands of their citizens. For example, whereas a majority of the public in most of the EU member states tended to trust their own governments in 2001, only a mere 27% of Europeans still tended to trust their government in 2016 (68% distrusted their national government on average).<sup>5</sup> Political entrepreneurs across Europe have already capitalized on this mood, and new or revived populist movements are on the rise, thereby indicating the importance to study regime support as another source of electoral accountability in established democracies as well.

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

From its very inception, the European Union was an elitist, strategically depoliticized, operation. As envisioned by one of its principal architects, Jean Monnet, none of the major institutions of the European Coal and Steel Community – the European Commission, the Council, and the European Court of Justice – were created with direct democratic mandates. The idea was to speed up the European integration process by minimizing the politicization of negotiations at the European level. Jean Monnet even used an “information obstruction policy,” and asked news agencies to *not* cover the European Coal and Steel Community because he was worried that increasing public salience would derail further integration.

It therefore should not come as a surprise that for a long time cooperation at the European level was not politicized in national political arenas. At least until the 1990s, it was not the performance of the politicians at the EU-level, but national politics that explained voting outcomes in elections

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<sup>5</sup>Ironically, more Europeans distrusted their own governments more than the EU (55% of respondents distrusted the EU, and 33% trusted the EU in 2016). Data are from the Interactive Eurobarometer at <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMfrontOffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/index>. The reported numbers are averages across respondents in EU member countries. They vary somewhat for individual countries, but the general tendency is the same across countries. In 2016, Luxembourg, Malta and the Netherlands were the only countries where a (tight) majority of respondents still trusted their government.

to the European Parliament.<sup>6</sup> Voters' preferences over European integration also did not influence their vote choice in national elections.<sup>7</sup> Voters were uninterested and uninformed, and European integration seemed to proceed in the shadow of a "diffuse feeling of approval," or a "permissive consensus."<sup>8</sup> The European Union was a "sleeping giant."<sup>9</sup>

Public opinion toward the EU is still characterized by a high degree of uncertainty,<sup>10</sup> but many observers also note that the 'sleeping giant' has woken up.<sup>11</sup> 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."<sup>12</sup> Issues of European integration gained in political salience with the Single European Act, which was signed in 1986 and created the Common Market, because it expanded the range of European competencies to include policy areas like environmental protection, safety at work, and consumer protection.<sup>13</sup> The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 further accelerated the politicization of European integration,<sup>14</sup> as did the European Debt Crisis.<sup>15</sup> There is mounting evidence that attitudes toward European integration *do* affect national vote choice, particularly when the issue (i) is mobilized by Euroskeptic issue entrepreneurs,<sup>16</sup> or (ii) becomes politicized at the national level through public debates between the government, opposition, the media, and other relevant groups.<sup>17</sup> The proliferation of referenda on EU matters, the rise of Euroskeptic parties, and the politicization of EU issues in national and European elections, has moved public opinion from the permissive consensus of the early period of European integration toward a "constraining dissensus" today.<sup>18</sup>

That European affairs have politicized is well accepted by now, but it is less clear *how* European affairs affect citizens' vote choice at the national

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<sup>6</sup>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).

<sup>7</sup>Hobolt and de Vries (2016).

<sup>8</sup>Lindberg and Scheingold (1970).

<sup>9</sup>Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004).

<sup>10</sup>de Vries and Steenbergen (2013).

<sup>11</sup>Mair (2000); 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).

<sup>12</sup>De Wilde (2011, 566f.).

<sup>13</sup>Scharpf (2003).

<sup>14</sup>Scharpf (2003); Hooghe and Marks (2009).

<sup>15</sup>Cramme and Hobolt (2015); Kriesi and Grande (2016).

<sup>16</sup>de Vries (2007, 2010); Evans (1998); Tillman (2004, 2012).

<sup>17</sup>Franklin and Wlezién (1997); Gable (2000); Schoen (2008); de Vries (2010); de Vries et al. (2011); Hooghe and Marks (2009).

<sup>18</sup>Hooghe and Marks (2009).

level. Much of the existing literature has focused on the effects of citizens' regime support on vote choice in both European and national elections.<sup>19</sup> For example, voters are more likely to vote for parties in EP elections that represent their own attitudes toward European integration,<sup>20</sup> and the effect is particularly pronounced for Eurosceptic voters.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, scholars have not found much evidence of electoral accountability that is based on specific policy support, mainly because it appears much more difficult for voters to assign responsibility for EU affairs to individual parties in the European Parliament than to individual parties in national governments.<sup>22</sup> Emerging evidence also points to an electoral connection between national parties' positions toward European integration and vote choice in national elections.<sup>23</sup> Whereas the dimension of European integration used to be unimportant in national elections, mainly because it was orthogonal to the more important left-right dimension, it has by now become a contested dimension in national politics. Furthermore, parties who put especially Eurosceptic positions on the electoral agenda have been quite successful in attracting voter support at the national level.<sup>24</sup>

The existing research demonstrates that voters hold their governments accountable for their attitudes toward European integration. But while we know much about the importance of regime support as a source of government accountability in the European Union, we know very little about the relative importance of specific policy support as a source of government accountability in the EU.<sup>25</sup> The increasing delegation of important policies to the European level should have led voters to hold their governments accountable for their policy choices at the EU level as well. In the next section, I compare these two sources of electoral accountability, and discuss how voters can hold governments accountable using both their underlying evaluations of the regime and specific European policies.

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<sup>19</sup>de Vries (2007).

<sup>20</sup>Clark and Rohrschneider (2009); de Vries et al. (2011); Hobolt and Spoon (2012); Hobolt and Tilley (2014)

<sup>21</sup>Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley (2008); Treib (2014); Hobolt (2015).

<sup>22</sup>Clark and Rohrschneider (2009); Hobolt and Tilley (2014). Clark and Rohrschneider (2009) find some evidence that policy-specific support matters for vote choice in the European Parliament. In addition, Hobolt (2015) and Treib (2014) show that anti-immigration attitudes can also play a role in vote choice.

<sup>23</sup>Evans (1998, 2002); Tillman (2004, 2012); de Vries (2007, 2009, 2010).

<sup>24</sup>de Vries and Hobolt (2012).

<sup>25</sup>Schoen (2008) is a notable exception.

## The Two Sources of Accountability in the EU

National elections help people to hold their governments responsible for their conduct during political office.<sup>26</sup> Governments are “accountable” if citizens can discern representative from unrepresentative governments and can sanction them appropriately.<sup>27</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.<sup>28</sup> In established democratic regimes, where basic political support for the regime is assumed, electoral accountability is usually all about the policy choices of elected incumbent governments (or government coalitions).

The sources of government accountability in the EU are more ambivalent. First, the attribution of responsibility for policy actions is much less straightforward in the multi-level and multi-layered system of the EU (similar to some federal systems such as the United States). In principle, voters can use elections to sanction both European parties that participate in the European Parliament and national parties that participate in the intergovernmental Council negotiations. Both institutions are central to legislative decisions in the EU. European citizens’ electoral control over the European Parliament is direct, but the attribution of responsibility is much more difficult.<sup>29</sup> European citizens’ electoral control over the Council is more indirect (i.e. they use national elections to sanction only their own government parties) but the attribution of responsibility is relatively straightforward. Whereas the electoral accountability of the European Parliament is without doubt important (and has been studied extensively elsewhere), my focus is on how voters hold their own governments accountable for their actions in the European Union. Although oftentimes neglected in the study of democratic governance in the EU, government accountability in the Council of the European Union is one important dimension in the study of democratic governance because the Council is still the most important legislative decision-making body in the EU, and has gained in influence since the European debt crisis.

Second, the political system of the EU is still developing and very much in flux, and recent events have dramatically demonstrated the inherent fragility of public support for the EU. The recent European crises – including the European Debt Crisis, the Ukraine crisis, the refugee crisis, and the Brexit crisis – have not only contributed to a rise of populism across Europe, but also to a sharpening of the EU’s existing legitimacy problem. For

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<sup>26</sup>Powell2000

<sup>27</sup>Przeworski, Stokes and Manin (1999, 10).

<sup>28</sup>Manin, Przeworski and Stokes (1999, 40).

<sup>29</sup>Hobolt and Tilley (2014).

many Europeans, the EU is run by distant and unaccountable political elites who reach decisions behind closed doors. As Figure 1(a) illustrates, trust in the EU has hit rock bottom in the 2010s, and for the first time since the early days of European integration more Europeans distrust the EU rather than trusting it. Figure 1(b) further shows that support for EU membership has declined dramatically in the 1990s. The upside is that support levels have remained between 50-60% since then, which compares to the levels in the 1970s; those who believe that EU membership is a bad thing remain well below 20% up to today.

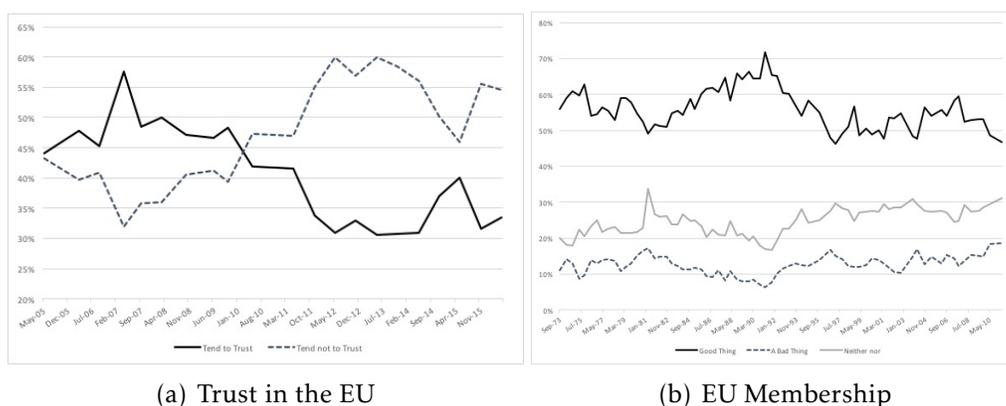


Figure 1: The EU’s Legitimacy Crisis. The left-hand side graph displays the results of Eurobarometer surveys from 2005–2015 on the question “I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it? – European Union.” The respondents’ answers (“tend to trust,” “tend to distrust”) are displayed in percentages. The right-hand side graph displays the results of Eurobarometer surveys from 1973–2011 on the question “Generally speaking, do you think that (your country’s) membership of the European Union is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?” The respondents’ answers are displayed in percentages. Data are from the interactive Eurobarometer <http://ec.europa.eu/COMMFrontOffice/PublicOpinion/index.cfm/Chart/index>, last accessed: September 2016)

The EU as a political system is highly contested amongst both political elites and European citizens.<sup>30</sup> National contestation about European affairs has therefore been described as two-dimensional. In addition to the well-known conflict over particular policies (oftentimes depicted on a left-right dimension), political conflict over more or less European integration has become central in the national political arena.<sup>31</sup> A theory of government accountability in the EU has to take both sources of accountability into account.

<sup>30</sup>Mair (2007); Wilde and Trenz (2012).

<sup>31</sup>Hix (1999); Marks and Steenbergen (2004); Kriesi and Grande (2015).

To theoretically develop these notions of electoral accountability, it is helpful to make use of Easton (1965)'s distinction between specific and diffuse support for politics or polities. *Diffuse regime support* or opposition is directed toward or against the polity itself (here, the idea of European integration or the European Union). Voters have 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. *Specific policy support* or opposition is directed toward or against particular 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.

Following the politicization of European integration in national political arenas, European voters should take both of these dimensions into account when they decide whom to vote for in a national election, at least when issues are salient enough. 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.<sup>32</sup> 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 both diffuse polity support and specific policy support. 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. 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

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<sup>32</sup>In fact, scholars have demonstrated that governments are responsive to both diffuse regime support and specific policy support when they cooperate in the EU (Schneider, 2013; Hagemann, Hobolt and Wratwil, 2016).

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.

Importantly, it is not just the absolute opposition or support for the system that matters in national politics where governments are typically composed of pro-EU parties. Indeed, 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. But voters can blame or reward governments for pursuing or failing to pursue policies that further advance European integration. This leads to a first testable implication about diffuse regime support as a source of government accountability in the EU:

**Hypothesis 1** *Eurosceptic (Europhile) voters should be more (less) likely to reward their national politicians for representing policy positions that are in opposition of European integration, while sanctioning (rewarding) those that represent policy positions in favor of European integration.*

It is well known that voters in European countries tend to be more Eurosceptic than the political elites who tend to be represented in government.<sup>33</sup> Parties that participate in national coalition governments are usually much less Eurosceptic than the parties in the opposition.<sup>34</sup> In addition, these parties all tend to adopt very similar positions on European integration.<sup>35</sup> Whereas Eurosceptic voters are more likely to find alternative parties to vote for either on the extreme left or the extreme right if their initially preferred party does not pursue their preferred policies at the EU level, Europhile voters are much less likely to find alternative parties that would adopt significantly different positions on these issues. Consequently, vote choice based on diffuse regime support should be less prevalent amongst Europhile voters. Eurosceptic voters, however, will reward governments who pursue policies in opposition to further European integration and sanction them for policies that lead to further European integration. The blaming and rewarding effect should therefore be stronger for Eurosceptic voters than for Europhile voters. In other words, diffuse support for or opposition to European integration should transpire more as a protest vote as long as government coalitions are composed of Europhile

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<sup>33</sup>Mattila and Raunio (2006).

<sup>34</sup>Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley (2008, 98).

<sup>35</sup>Hooghe, Marks and Wilson (2002).

parties.<sup>36</sup>

Diffuse support for the EU regime should not be the only driving factor of government accountability in the EU. As a consequence of European integration, EU decision-making has increasingly invaded national decision-making in almost all aspects of domestic life. Whereas the EU decides on very few truly redistributive issues (i.e. there is no European social security system) that could be particularly salient for domestic voters, many of the policies where the EU has shared competence are areas that tend to influence voters' welfare. For example, both EU economic policies as well as EU foreign policies are highly relevant for European voters. At least since the 1990s, voters should therefore be more concerned about specific policy outcomes at the EU-level. 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. Indeed, many European policies are by now saliently discussed at the national level, and as long as voters know about these policies and also know that they are decided at the European level, they should be more likely to vote for politicians who represent their favored policy positions throughout the Council negotiations and sanction those politicians who do not.

In addition to positions that may be aligned along the European integration dimension, voters should assign responsibility to governments for pursuing particular policies independent of their level of diffuse support for the political regime in the EU. They can blame or reward governments for pursuing or failing to pursue policies that they prefer. This leads to a second testable implication about specific policy support as a source of government accountability in the EU.

**Hypothesis 2** *Voters should be more likely to reward their national politicians for representing policy positions that are in line with their own positions, while sanctioning those that do not represent their own positions on the issue.*

Given that the EU polity is contested at the national level, both sources of contestation should factor in to the vote choice of the national electorate, and they may have different effects on government accountability dependent on whether the policy issue underlies a conflict along the left-right dimension, the European integration dimension, or both. Whereas the dimensions used to be largely orthogonal, many issues that are salient today are contested on both dimensions. In the following section, I will use a

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<sup>36</sup>More recently, we experience an increasing possibility of Eurosceptic parties becoming part of governmental coalitions. This would imply that diffuse regime support to become more prevalent for Europhile voters as well.

conjoint experiment in Germany to analyze how citizens hold their governments accountable for issues that are salient and contested along both dimensions.

## Research Design: A Conjoint Experiment in Germany

I now analyze how voters hold governments accountable for their policies in the EU.<sup>37</sup> To examine how voters hold governments accountable, and to assess the internal validity of the government accountability argument, I conducted a large-scale survey about voter responses to different signals of political responsiveness in two salient policy areas – whether the EU should agree to another financial rescue package for Greece and whether the EU should allow for more immigration of refugees and asylum seekers into the EU – in Germany. Both issues are currently discussed in the EU, and are not only highly politicized in Europe, but particularly in Germany, which shoulders the largest share of the burden on both financial rescues and immigration. In addition, both policies have been contested at the left-right and the European integration dimension, such that we should observe both types of electoral accountability.

Embedded in the larger survey, 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. In particular, I focus on the possible multidimensionality of governments' position-taking and position-defending strategies, and their bargaining success.<sup>38</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. My experimental design is modeled on previous experiments on political positioning and voter behavior in American politics.<sup>39</sup> The survey was fielded in the fall of 2016; the sample includes 2450 German adults who are eligible to vote in federal elections. The online sample was somewhat skewed towards younger, more educated, and male voters compared to the total voter population. To address this issue, I use entropy balancing to re-weight the data from

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<sup>37</sup>Given the data limitations, it is not possible to provide a test of *whether* voters reward their governments for different types of accountability. In fact, I do not expect that voters always hold their governments accountable (i.e. depending on the salience of the issue), but when they respond I expect them to reward (punish) governments' for being responsive (non-responsive).

<sup>38</sup>For a discussion of signals of responsiveness in national political arenas, see for example, Mayhew (1974). Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014) provide a formal exposition and a discussion of the conjoint method.

<sup>39</sup>Butler and Powell (2014); Houweling and Tomz (2016a,b).

the survey such that it matches the demographic margins from the voter population.<sup>40</sup>

Whereas the nature of the experiment puts limitations on its external validity beyond the context of the policies that are discussed (i.e. voter reactions should be different when (a) policies are not politicized and (b) when they are contested on only one of the two dimensions), the survey experiment provides important complementary advantages to existing studies of government accountability. First, most scholars who analyze issue voting use quantitative analysis to test whether more 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 therefore provides an important complement to these studies, and in this respect it is reassuring that I find similar results about the importance of Eurosceptic voters for the diffuse sources of electoral accountability. Second, it proves difficult 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 clearly between diffuse regime support and specific policy support as sources of government accountability. The conjoint experiment therefore provides a useful setting to compare the two sources of government accountability.

To design the conjoint experiment I proceeded in four steps (see the appendix for a more detailed description). First, I asked respondents to indicate their opinions about the two issues under observation to establish a baseline on which they would judge politician's behavior.<sup>41</sup> To assess re-

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<sup>40</sup>The survey was implemented by *Respondi* on samples of the adult vote-eligible Germans. Although *Respondi* uses various techniques to generate a sample that resembles the underlying population, online samples are never true probability samples. True probability samples are extremely difficult (if not impossible) to generate even with offline sampling methods, they come at considerable costs, and their benefits diminish with historically declining response rates. Since my focus is on internal validity, I opted for an online survey, and weighted the data by important demographic characteristics. Overall, the imbalances are relatively minor and the results are robust when I use the unweighted data. Results for unweighted data are presented in the appendix.

<sup>41</sup>The full text of the questions are presented in the appendix.

spondents specific policy preferences on the two issues, respondents were presented with information on financial rescue packages to Greece, and then asked whether they are for or against further financial aid to Greece.<sup>42</sup> Respondents were also presented with information about the current situation on the immigration of refugees and asylum seekers, and then asked whether they are in favor of accepting more or fewer refugees in the EU.<sup>43</sup> Responses varied from strongly in favor, somewhat in favor, neither in favor nor against, somewhat against, to strongly against.

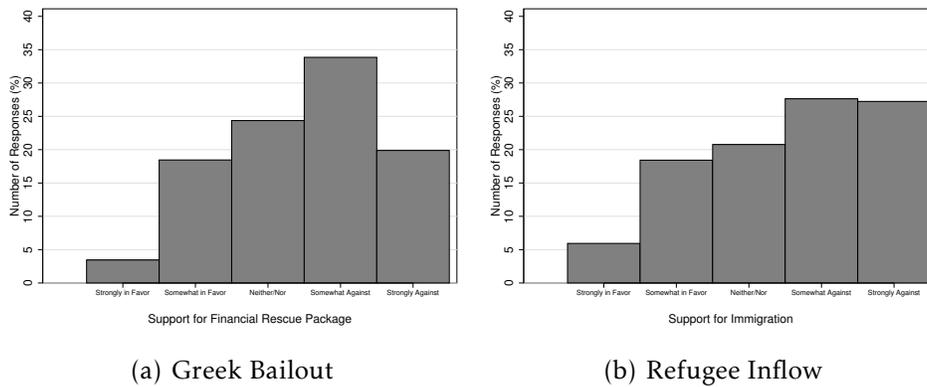


Figure 2: Support for a Greek Bailout and the Inflow of Refugees in Germany, 2016.

Figure 2 provides information on the respondents’ attitudes toward providing another financial aid package to Greece (Figure 2(a)) and toward accepting more refugees in the European Union (Figure 2(b)). Overall, Germans in the survey are slightly more opposed to both, providing another financial bailout and accepting more refugees, but the extent of support and opposition varies across policy fields. Only 3% of Germans are strongly in favor of another financial package for Greece (6% are in favor of accepting more refugees). 18.5% of Germans are somewhat in favor of both policy initiatives. 24% are neither in favor nor against another financial package for Greece (the percentage is 21% for accepting more refugees). About 34%

<sup>42</sup>I use the terms “bailout” and “financial package” simultaneously. In the survey, I exclusively used the term “financial rescue package” (*Finanzhilfe*) because the term “bailout” tends to carry negative connotations.

<sup>43</sup>Strictly speaking, the terms “refugee,” “immigrant,” and “asylum seeker” refer to different groups. In the survey, I decided to use the German word for refugee (*Flüchtling*) even though the current crisis centers around asylum seekers who illegally enter the borders of the EU. However, the media tends to refer to them as refugees, and much of the public debate uses the term in this matter. My discussion will therefore use the words “immigrants” and “refugees” interchangeably to refer to both refugees and asylum seekers.

are somewhat against another financial bailout of Greece (28% are somewhat against accepting more refugees), and 20% are strongly against another Greek bailout (27% are strongly against accepting further refugees). The respondents' policy preferences were then used in the analysis as a baseline for comparison with the politicians' positions.

In a second step, I assessed the respondents' attitudes toward the EU polity. The survey asked them 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. Table 1 provides a summary of the responses. In Germany, 54.4% of respondents indicate that membership is a good thing, while only 16.2% believe that it is a bad thing. Almost 26% of respondents do 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

Since both policy issues have been contested both along the left-right and along the European integration dimension, it might be difficult to disentangle them. Table 2 provides information on the extent to which attitudes toward both policies overlap by presenting information on the share of respondents that fall within each mutual category (column percentages). The findings indicate that there is indeed a great overlap, but also that important variation exists particularly for Europhile respondents. For both, European immigration policies and a Greek bailout, respondents who believe

that EU membership is a bad thing are highly likely to oppose both a Greek bailout (80.6%) and further immigration into the EU (85.1%). Europhiles, on the other hand, do not depict a similar behavior: 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 earlier results 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 towards European policies; they do not indiscriminately support pro-EU policies.

	<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 2: Public Support for EU Membership and Attitudes Towards EU Policies

The questions provide us with information on the specific policy and diffuse regime attitudes of the respondents in the survey. In a third step, I presented the respondents with two politicians (A, B) who varied randomly on their demographic attributes as well as their negotiation behavior and bargaining success during the negotiations on each issue. Survey participants were informed that any action on the policy (i.e. more financial aid for Greece, or welcoming more refugees into the European Union) would require negotiations between EU members, and that German politicians would partake in such negotiations.<sup>44</sup> Respondents were also prepared that they would see examples of different negotiation behaviors by German politicians, including (i) the position that the politician represented at the start of negotiations, (ii) the position for which the politician voted at the

<sup>44</sup>The full text of these instructions is presented in the appendix.

end of the negotiations, and (iii) the final result. I instructed all respondents that they would have to compare two politicians who vary on these dimensions, and to pick the politician who they would prefer if there was an election the following Sunday.

	<b>Politician A</b>	<b>Politician B</b>
Negotiation Position in the EU		
Voting Behavior in the EU		
Negotiation Outcome in the EU		
Partisan Affiliation		
Gender		
Political Experience (in years)		
<b>Your Choice</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Table 3: Design of the Conjoint Experiment

Table 3 presents the basic layout of this comparison (a screenshot is available in the Appendix). All values were randomly assigned to each dimension based on the list of values in Table 4 (the order of categories was also randomized). In addition to the dimensions of interest, I added a number of politician characteristics that have been shown to affect voter choice.<sup>45</sup> Aside from the politician’s gender and her or his political experience, whether the politician’s partisanship is similar to the respondent’s partisanship should play a crucial role in respondents’ vote choice. I therefore included information on the affiliation of the politician with parties that have been elected to the German *Bundestag*. The conjoint design therefore allows me to provide a tougher test for the conditions under which government accountability matters; and especially, how it matters.

Based on this information, I generate variables that account for the similarity and difference of respondents and politicians in respect to their partisan affiliation and gender.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the data allow me to generate variables that take into account the different responsiveness signals that governments can send in Council negotiations. First, I analyze whether the positions that politicians took on each of the two policies resembled the position of the respondent as well as his/her attitude toward the EU regime (*Position Taking*). Second, I generate a variable that takes into account whether the politician defended her/his policy position throughout

<sup>45</sup>Houweling and Tomz (2016a,b).

<sup>46</sup>The main results do not change if I control for absolute gender of the politician.

the negotiations until the final vote (*Position Defense*). And finally, I analyze whether the politician received the outcome that s/he voted for in the Council (*Bargaining Success*). Position-taking, position-defending, and credit-claiming strategies are integral features of national politics,<sup>47</sup> For all three indicators, I observe how respondents use their evaluations of the regime and the specific policy to hold governments accountable.

Dimension	Possible Values	
	Financial Package	Refugees
<i>Negotiation Position in the EU</i>	In favor of financial aid Against financial aid	In favor of more refugees Against more refugees
<i>Voting Behavior in the EU</i>	In favor of financial aid Against financial aid	In favor of more refugees Against more refugees
<i>Negotiation Outcome in the EU</i>	More financial aid No more financial aid	More refugees No more Refugees
<i>Partisan Affiliation</i>	CDU/CSU SPD FDP The Greens	CDU/CSU SPD FDP The Greens
<i>Gender</i>	Male Female	Male Female
<i>Political Experience (in years)</i>	0 2 4 6 8 10	0 2 4 6 8 10

Table 4: Dimensions and Values for the Conjoint Experiment

Each respondent had to make two evaluations for each of the two policy issues, totaling four evaluations for each respondent. In addition to the forced choice between politicians that each respondent was given, I gave them the opportunity to rate each politician independently in respect to how likely they would vote for them in an upcoming election (the scale ranged from 1 [highly unlikely] to 10 [highly likely]). In the main regressions, I use the relative vote choice because it more closely corresponds to the actual decisions voters have to make at the ballot box. It also provides a

<sup>47</sup>See, for example, Mayhew (1974); Tomz and Houweling (2008); Houweling and Tomz (2016a,b); Grimmer, Messing and Westwood (2012); Grimmer, Westwood and Messing (2014); Cruz and Schneider (2017).

tougher test of the theory because respondents could more easily fall back on ideology, gender, or the political experience of the politician. The results for the estimations using absolute (continuous) vote choice as a dependent variable are presented in the appendix.

## Empirical Results

Since I fully randomized the attributes of the politicians under consideration, I can nonparametrically compare levels of support across attribute levels for any given dimension of a politician to determine the average causal effect of a given attribute on the support for the politician. I estimate the average marginal component specific effect, that is, I regress the variable *Politician Support* on a set of dummy variables for each value of each dimension, excluding one value in each dimension as the baseline.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup>

### Position Taking

In a first set of regressions, I analyze how much a politician's initial position on the issue, and her or his voting behavior affect public support for that politician, controlling for all the other dimensions in the conjoint. Figures 3 and 4 present the results graphically for electoral accountability from a specific policy perspective and a diffuse regime perspective, respectively.<sup>50</sup> For each policy, I analyze how the politician's position and his or her voting behavior affected the respondent's vote choice. The results indicate that for both policy areas, vote choice is based on both citizens' diffuse regime and specific policy evaluations.

Figure 3 first analyzes whether specific policy positions matter for vote choice. I split the sample by respondents who generally oppose the policy (dark-gray circles) and those who generally support the policy (light-gray

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<sup>48</sup>Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto (2014).

<sup>49</sup>I use weighted data for the main results, but in the appendix I present results of estimations that use data which was not weighted. The results are substantively similar. The results are also robust (and even stronger) if I estimate the effects using a logit model instead of OLS. Finally, the results hold if I take into account (a) the respondents' political knowledge, (b) the respondents' attention during the survey, and (c) if I use the continuous vote choice measure instead. The results, together with a discussion, are presented in the appendix.

<sup>50</sup>Full estimation results in tabular form are in the appendix.

diamonds), based on their initial positions on each policy.<sup>51</sup> For both immigration policies (left-hand side graph) and policies toward a financial rescue package for Greece, I find evidence that specific policy support as a source of government accountability exists and it is two-directional. Opponents of the policy tend to blame governments for taking positions or for voting in support of the policy (i.e. they punish politicians for their non-responsiveness on specific policies) while supporters reward politicians for their responsiveness.

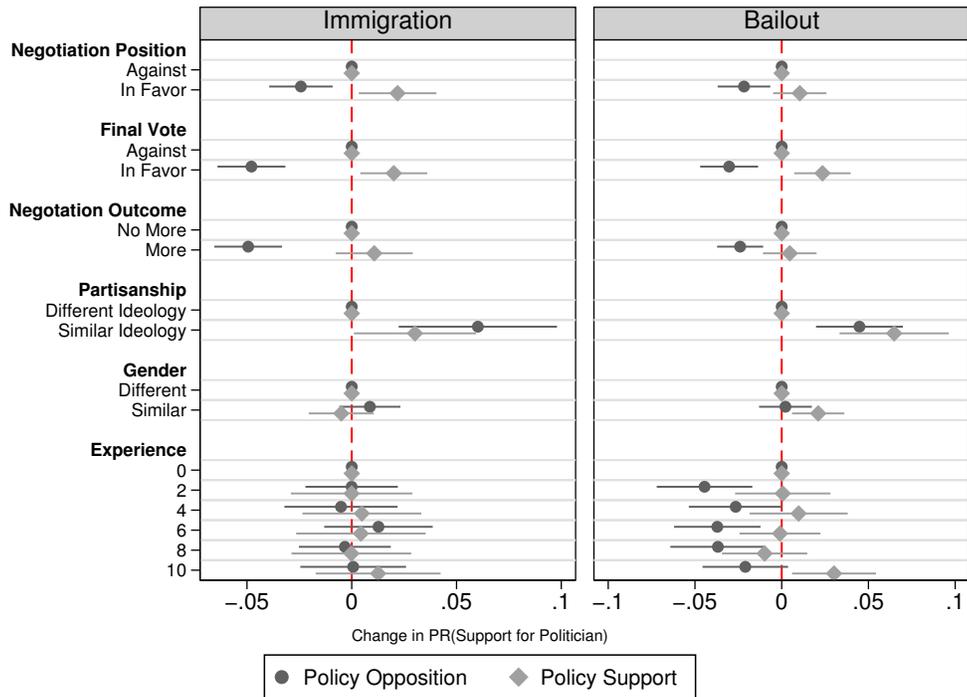


Figure 3: Negotiation Position and Voter Support based on Specific Policy Support. The graph displays the results of a linear probability model where I regress the support for a politician on a number of index variables. The left hand side graph represents the results for the EU policy on refugees; the right-hand side graph presents the results for the EU policy on financial aid for Greece. The y-axis presents all included variables. The x-axis displays the marginal effect sizes for the probability that respondents would vote for the politician. The coefficients are displayed with dark-gray circles (for respondents who support the policy) and light-gray diamonds (for respondents who oppose the policy). The bars mark 90% confidence intervals. The circles/diamonds without bars indicate the reference category for a given dimension. The red vertical line represents the value 0.

<sup>51</sup>Those who indicated “somewhat opposed” or “strongly opposed” are measured as opponents; those who indicated “strongly in favor,” “somewhat in favor,” or “neither/nor” are measured as supporters.

Figure 4 focuses on diffuse regime support as a source of government accountability. I split the sample by respondents who generally oppose EU membership (dark-gray circles) and those who generally support it (light-gray diamonds). I find that Eurosceptic voters indeed punish politicians who pursue Europhile policies. The effect is stronger for immigration policies (left-hand side graph), but still significant for a politicians' final vote choice in negotiations about a financial rescue package for Greece (right-hand side graph). While Eurosceptic voters tend to blame Europhile politicians, Europhile voters do not tend to reward Europhile governments. The effects are insignificant with the exception of the negotiation position on immigration policies. The results corroborate earlier findings that government accountability that is based on regime support seems to be derive mainly from Eurosceptic voters who blame politicians for pursuing pro-integrative policies.

The politicians' positions matter even if I control for whether the outcome was in the respondent's interest, whether or not the respondent shares the politician's partisanship, whether the politician and the respondent share the same gender, or the politician's experience. As expected, respondents significantly increase their support for politicians who have the preferred partisanship. But even though the effects are strong, they do not diminish the effects of the politician's negotiation position and final vote choice.

### **Position Defending**

I now turn to the question of whether respondents favor politicians who defend their initial positions throughout EU negotiations. Figure 5 first analyzes whether position-defending strategies for politicians if we assume that respondents take the specific policy preferences into account. I split the sample between respondents who share the policy preferences of the politician (dark-gray circles) and respondents who do not share the policy preferences of the politician (light-gray diamonds). For both immigration policies (left-hand side figure) and bailout policies (right-hand side figure) I find that respondents respond to the ability of politicians to defend their initial positions. In particular, respondents who have similar positions to the politician initially reward them with greater electoral support if they successfully defend the responsive position throughout the negotiations; respondents who do not share the politician's initial position punish politicians who defend the non-responsive position throughout the negotiations. The political consequences of position-defending strategies in both cases therefore depend on whether the politician has a responsive position to begin with.

Figure 6 indicates that the results for position-defending strategies are

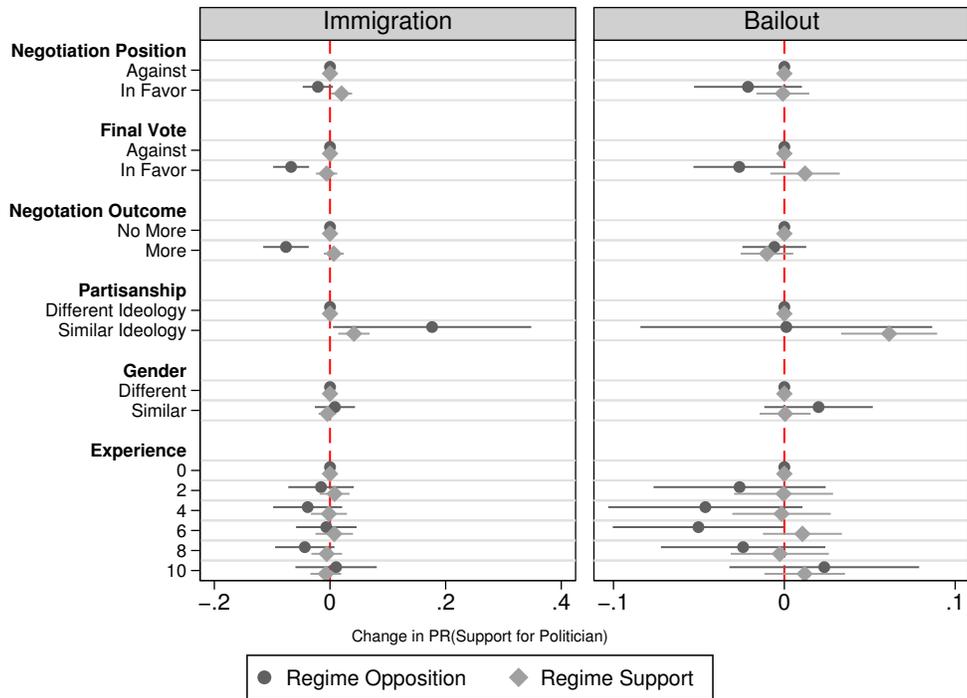


Figure 4: Negotiation Position and Voter Support based on Diffuse Regime Support. The graph displays the results of a linear probability model where I regress the support for a politician on a number of index variables. The left hand side graph represents the results for the EU policy on refugees; the right-hand side graph presents the results for the EU policy on financial aid for Greece. The y-axis presents all included variables. The x-axis displays the marginal effect sizes for the probability that respondents would vote for the politician. The coefficients are displayed with dark-gray circles (for Eurosceptic respondents) and light-gray diamonds (for Europhile respondents). The bars mark 90% confidence intervals. The circles/diamonds without bars indicate the reference category for a given dimension. The red vertical line represents the value 0.

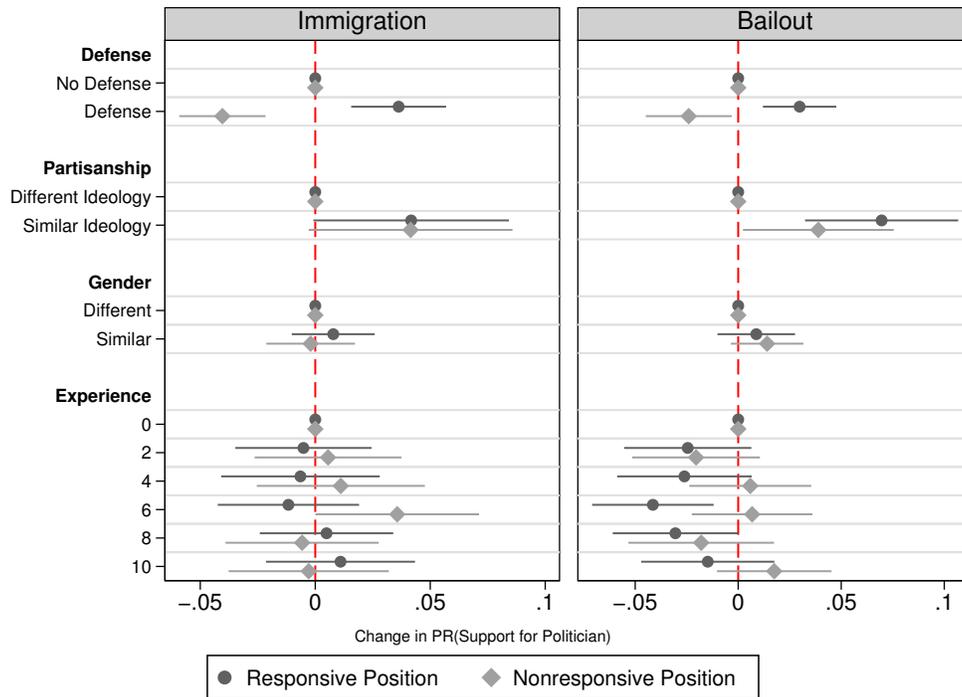
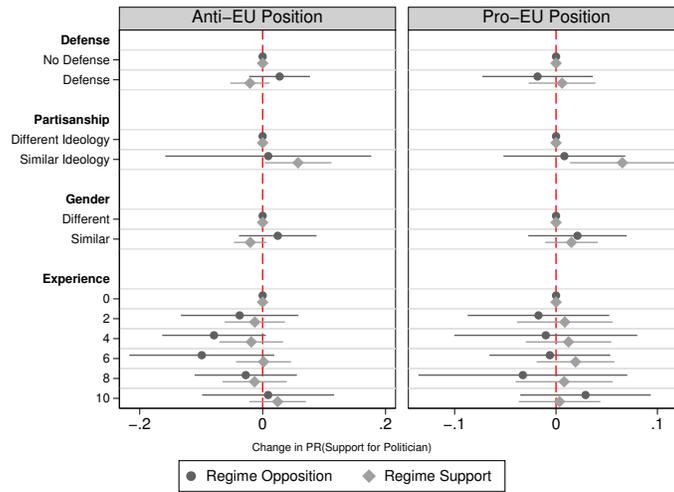
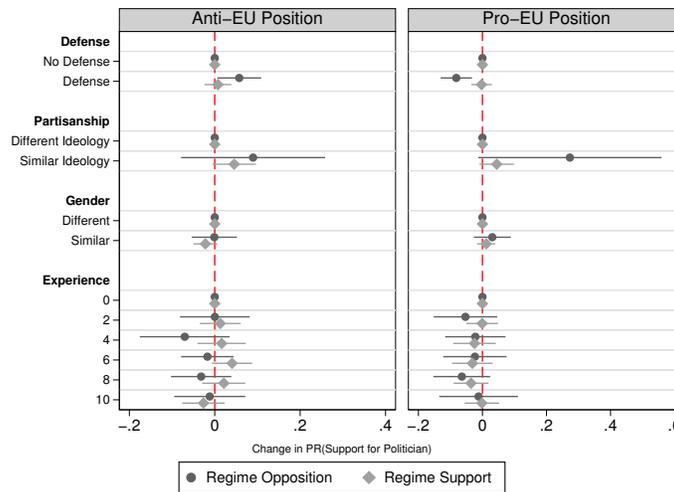


Figure 5: Position-Defending Strategies and Voter Support based on Specific Policy Support. The graph displays the results of a linear probability model where I regress the support for a politician on a number of index variables. The left hand side graph represents the results for the EU policy on refugees; the right-hand side graph presents the results for the EU policy on financial aid for Greece. The y-axis presents all included variables. The x-axis displays the marginal effect sizes for the probability that respondents would vote for the politician. The coefficients are displayed with dark-gray circles (for respondents who share the policy preferences of the politician) and light-gray diamonds (for respondents who do not share the policy preferences of the politician). The bars mark 90% confidence intervals. The circles/diamonds without bars indicate the reference category for a given dimension. The red vertical line represents the value 0.



(a) Bailout



(b) Immigration

Figure 6: Position-Defending Strategies and Voter Support based on Diffuse Regime Support. The graph displays the results of a linear probability model where I regress the support for a politician on a number of index variables. The upper sub-graphs focus on the EU's bailout policies toward Greece; the lower sub-graphs focus on the EU's refugee policies. The left-hand side graph represents the results for politicians who initially represent the eurosceptic position; the right-hand side graph presents the results for politicians who initially represent the europhile position. The y-axis presents all included variables. The x-axis displays the marginal effect sizes for the probability that respondents would vote for the politician. The coefficients are displayed with dark-gray circles (for respondents who are generally opposed to the EU) and light-gray diamonds (for respondents who generally are supportive of the EU). The bars mark 90% confidence intervals. The circles/diamonds without bars indicate the reference category for a given dimension. The red vertical line represents the value 0.

less strong when we analyze electoral accountability from a diffuse regime support perspective. Taking into account previous findings in the literature, I do not lump together Eurosceptic and Europhile voters. Rather, I focus on potentially heterogeneous effects across these two groups. Consequently the upper graph focuses on the bailout policy, and distinguishes between politicians who took a Eurosceptic anti-bailout position (left-hand side graph) versus a Europhile pro-bailout position (right-hand side graph). The upper graph focuses on the refugee policy, and distinguishes between politicians who took a Eurosceptic anti-immigration position (left-hand side graph) versus a Europhile pro-immigration position (right-hand side graph). Whereas Figure 6(a) indicates that the effects for EU policies on a Greek bailout are largely insignificant, Figure 6(b) shows that diffuse regime support can also matter for voters. In line with my results on position-taking strategies, I find that it is largely Eurosceptics who punish politicians for defending europhile positions and reward politicians for defending eurosceptic positions throughout the negotiations. In particular, Eurosceptic respondents increase their support for governments who defend an anti-immigration policy (left-hand side figure), while punishing those who defend a pro-immigration policy (right-hand side figure).

### **Bargaining Success**

Finally, the bargaining success of politicians (they received the outcome they supported at the end of negotiations) also matters for their public support. Figure 7 analyzes the consequences of bargaining success from a specific policy support perspective. The left-hand side figure focuses on the immigration policy, while the right-hand side figure focuses on the bailout policy. Similar to the position-defense figures, I distinguish between politicians who voted in line with the respondent's position (dark-gray circle) and politicians who did not vote in line with the respondent's position (light-gray circle). The results indicate that in both policies (although the results are weaker in the bailout case), politicians get rewarded for bargaining success if they represented the responsive position. Failing to represent the position of the respondent, they get blamed even if they can claim a bargaining success (the blaming effect is insignificant for the bailout policy).

The patterns of electoral accountability for bargaining success from a diffuse regime support perspective in Figure 8 are consistent with the findings of other signals of political responsiveness. Similar to before, I distinguish not only between policies (upper and lower subgraphs) but also between whether politicians' voted in line with Eurosceptic or Europhile positions (left and right hand side subgraphs). Again, the findings are somewhat weaker for a policy on a financial rescue package for Greece (Figure 8(a)),

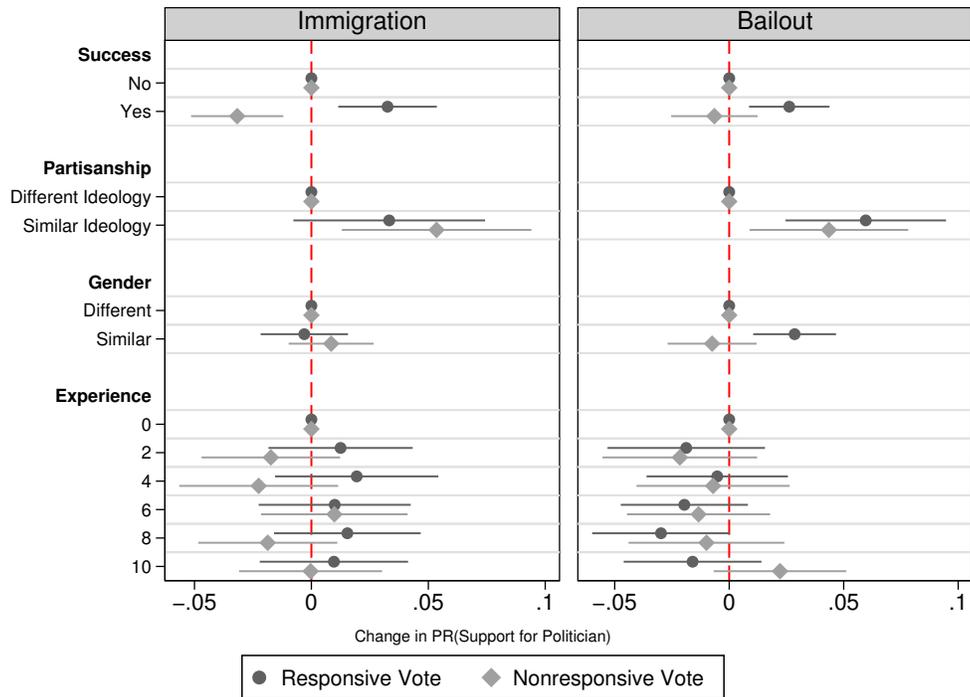


Figure 7: Negotiation Success and Voter Support based on Specific Policy Support. The graph displays the results of a linear probability model where I regress the support for a politician on a number of index variables. The left hand side graph represents the results for the EU policy on refugees; the right-hand side graph presents the results for the EU policy on financial aid for Greece. The y-axis presents all included variables. The x-axis displays the marginal effect sizes for the probability that respondents would vote for the politician. The coefficients are displayed with dark-gray circles (for politicians who voted in line with the respondent's position) and light-gray diamonds (for politicians who did not vote in line with the respondent's position). The bars mark 90% confidence intervals. The circles/diamonds without bars indicate the reference category for a given dimension. The red vertical line represents the value 0.

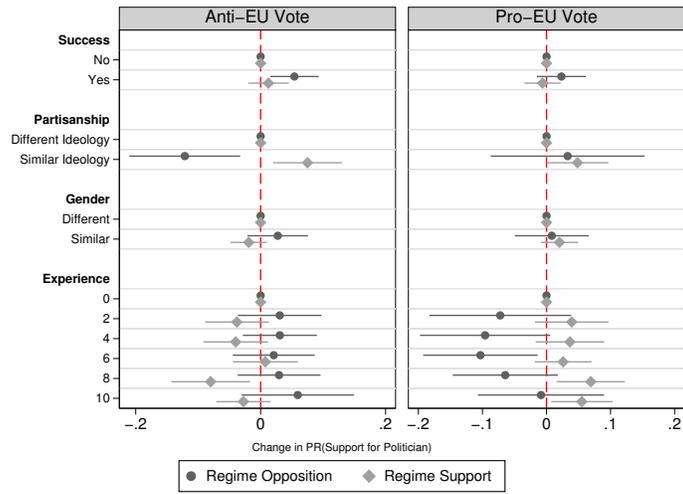
and stronger for a policy on the immigration of more refugees (Figure 8(b)). And again, the effects mainly owe to Eurosceptics. For the question on a Greek bailout, Eurosceptics tend to reward politicians who were successful in achieving an outcome that resembles a Eurosceptic policy. For the question on immigration, Eurosceptics both reward politicians for achieving Eurosceptic outcomes, and they blame those who are successful in achieving Europhile outcomes. For both policies, and in line with my previous findings, I do not find much evidence that Europhile voters base their vote choice on diffuse regime support.

To summarize, I presented the results of an experiment that allowed me to assess how German respondents decide on who to vote for in an election depending on different typical signals of government responsiveness (i.e. position-taking, position-defending, bargaining success). I find that both sources of electoral accountability – diffuse regime support and specific policy support – matter for vote choice in the EU. But they matter in different ways. Analyzing electoral accountability from a diffuse regime support perspective, I found that the results are mainly 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 immigration, which are traditionally highly salient for Eurosceptic voters.<sup>52</sup> Europhile respondents, on the other hand, do not seem to hold their governments accountable on the basis of diffuse regime support. There is only a positive and significant coefficient for the politician's negotiation position on immigration, indicating that immigration policies are highly salient amongst Europhile voters as well.

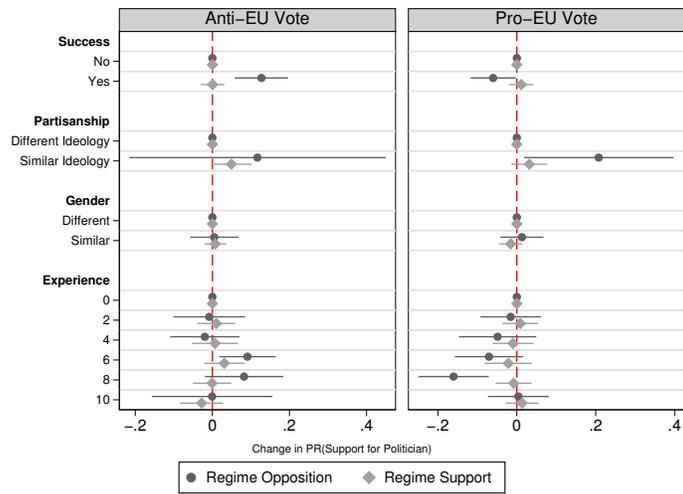
Analyzing electoral accountability from a specific policy support perspective, I find that respondents hold their governments accountable for their actions in the EU. Both opponents and supporters of particular policies base their vote choice on the different signals of responsiveness. The findings thereby indicate that policy preferences of Europhile voters may be much more diverse (see also Table 2 above), and they may be more inclined to use specific policy support as a basis of their vote choice. One could argue that the blaming effect is mainly attributable to an underlying notion of regime opposition. In the appendix, I show that the results hold if one excludes Eurosceptics. Europhiles who oppose more immigration or a financial aid package for Greece are likely to sanction politicians who negotiate and vote in favor of these policies. With this, the results are also in line with the idea that voters in established regimes hold their governments accountable for specific policy choices (when issues are politicized), while in

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<sup>52</sup>de Vries (2017).



(a) Bailout



(b) Immigration

Figure 8: Bargaining Success and Voter Support based on Diffuse Regime Support. The graph displays the results of a linear probability model where I regress the support for a politician on a number of index variables. The upper sub-graphs focus on the EU’s bailout policies toward Greece; the lower sub-graphs focus on the EU’s refugee policies. The left-hand side graph represents the results for politicians who initially represent the eurosceptic position; the right-hand side graph presents the results for politicians who initially represent the europhile position. The y-axis presents all included variables. The x-axis displays the marginal effect sizes for the probability that respondents would vote for the politician. The coefficients are displayed with dark-gray circles (for respondents who are generally opposed to the EU) and light-gray diamonds (for respondents who generally are supportive of the EU). The bars mark 90% confidence intervals. The circles/diamonds without bars indicate the reference category for a given dimension. The red vertical line represents the value 0.

not established regimes diffuse regime support or opposition plays a much greater role. Since Europhile voters accept the EU as a polity, they are more likely to use specific policies as a benchmark for accountability.

## **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 sources of electoral accountability – diffuse regime support and specific policy support – should drive vote choice, albeit in somewhat different ways. Given the absence of Eurosceptic parties in most European governments, variations in regime support 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.

To analyze how these two sources of electoral accountability matter for vote choice, I conducted a conjoint experiment that was embedded in a large-scale survey in Germany. The idea was to compare voter responses to two highly politicized policies as a way to compare the different sources of electoral accountability. The findings supported my argument. I find that both sources of electoral accountability matter. Eurosceptic voters base their vote choice on signals of responsiveness in respect to the European integration dimensions. Europhile voters, on the other hand, are much more likely to use specific policy support as a basis for their vote choice. Whereas they reward politicians for responsive behavior, they punish them for non-responsive behavior. These findings provide first support not only that specific policy support – the source of electoral accountability that is usually applied as a benchmark in established democratic regimes – matters for voters when they hold their governments accountable for their actions at the EU-level. But they also show how voters can apply different sources of electoral accountability in various circumstances.

The paper sheds some light on electoral accountability in the EU, but the analysis is just a first step toward a comprehensive theory of electoral accountability in the EU. In particular, the nature of the experiment provided 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. One interesting avenue would be to focus on countries that have a greater participation of Eurosceptic parties in government. In addition, my analysis focused on two relatively salient policy areas. This choice was made because I wanted 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, and the present analysis clearly does not claim this. I would expect that electoral accountability mechanisms are much more likely to hold for policies that are salient. Finally, my paper has focused on electoral accountability through the inter-governmental channel, but it would be important to analyze whether the patterns are similar for the European Parliament as well. Since the attribution of responsibility is much more difficult in the European Parliament, I expect that voters' choices are much more driven by regime support.

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