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The Responsive Union: National Elections and European Governance

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Nearly all commentators, even staunch federalists, echo the Euroskeptical charge that the European Union is a distant institution populated by unaccountable technocrats and double-dealing politicians. Most social scientists go along with this story as well, arguing that almost all European issues are too obscure and complex to generate sustained and meaningful popular attention and engagement. This important book turns the conventional wisdom on its head with a simple yet profound observation: in reality, the EU responds to the democratic demands of its citizens. The governments of member states, constantly worried that the public could suddenly notice and mobilize around an EU issue, habitually stake out strong negotiating positions that appear to defend clear social interests. Schneider also reveals a narrower phenomenon: governments delay EU decisions that might trigger unfavorable outcomes until after national elections—and their counterparts in other capitals generally play along. One might conclude that European governments collude to fool all the people all the time by pushing unpopular policies only when their citizens aren't looking. In the end, Schneider remains ambivalent about how much the public controls EU policy and about the prospects for meaningful democratic reform in Europe.

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