

# The responsive public: How EU decisions shape public opinion on salient policies\*

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## Abstract

Do the European Union's (EU) decisions affect public opinion about electorally salient policies? Recent studies show that the EU's policy choices have become politicized in member states (Hagemann et al., 2017). Eager to avoid voters' punishment for unpopular decisions, European governments signal responsiveness to domestic electorates during negotiations in Brussels (Schneider, 2018). In contrast to the existing literature, this paper argues that EU decisions do not merely respond to public opinion. Instead, they also shape how European publics think about electorally salient policies. Specifically, the EU's adoption of a policy increases popular support for that policy. Elite cue theory leads me to expect that this effect only materializes among members of the public who trust the EU. Moreover, the adoption of a policy by a unanimous Council of the EU conveys a qualitatively different cue to the public than the Council's endorsement of the same policy despite vocal dissent, and the latter should lead to a smaller rally in support of the policy than the former. Survey experiments administered to large national samples in Germany and Austria find support for the argument that publics respond to signals conveyed from Brussels. Cues about Covid-19 economic recovery aid and refugee redistribution increase German and Austrian respondents' support of these policies by 3-7 percentage points. As expected, this average effect is driven by the much larger effect on the subset of respondents who trust the EU. Unanimous decisions trigger a bigger rally in public support than policy choices over which Council members are divided.

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Do the European Union’s decisions affect public opinion about electorally salient policies? Recent studies show that the Union’s policy choices have become politicized in member states (Hagemann, Hobolt and Wratil, 2017). Eager to avoid being punished by voters for taking unpopular decisions, European governments aim to signal responsiveness to domestic electorates during negotiations in Brussels (Schneider, 2019). In contrast to the existing literature, this paper argues that decisions in the European Union do not merely respond to public opinion in member states. Instead, they also shape how European publics think about electorally salient policies. Specifically, the European Union’s adoption of a policy increases popular support for that policy, but only among those Europeans who trust the Union. Policy decisions by a united Union have a bigger impact on public opinion than those taken by a divided one.

Public opinion scholarship indicates that most Europeans tend to be rationally ignorant about European integration and form their political attitudes based on cues from trusted elites (De Vries and Edwards, 2009; Gabel and Scheve, 2007*b*). Empirical tests of elite cue theory focus on the cues Europeans citizens receive from political parties, and they conclude that party elites have a bigger impact on partisans’ attitudes when they are united rather than divided, because divided elites muddle the group’s message (Ray, 2003; Franklin, Marsh and McLaren, 1994). We know much less about the effect of cues conveyed by another set of elites whose decisions on electorally salient issues are widely reported in the European mass media: the Council of the European Union. I argue that the adoption of an electorally salient policy by the Union’s main legislative body will lead to an increase in support for that policy by members of the European public. Elite cue theory leads me to expect that this effect only materializes among those members of the public that view the Council of the European Union as a trustworthy body. Moreover, the adoption of a policy by a unanimous Council signals unity among European government elites while the Council’s endorsement of the same policy despite vocal dissent indicates that divisions among elites, and the latter should lead to a smaller rally in support of the policy than the former.

To test this argument, I fielded experiments embedded in two original surveys that were administered to large nationally representative samples in Austria and Germany in 2020. The experiments describe scenarios involving two salient policies: economic recovery aid during the Covid-19 pandemic and refugee redistribution between member states. Respondents were randomly assigned to different cues about the endorsement or disapproval of policies by a united or divided Council and asked to express their own opinion about these policies.

The survey experiments indicate that publics respond to signals from Brussels. Cues about the Council's endorsement of fiscal transfers to member states hit hardest by the pandemic and refugee redistribution from Europe's South to its North increased German and Austrian respondents' support of these policies by three to seven percentage points. As expected, this average effect was driven by the subset of respondents who view the Council of the EU as trustworthy; their response to cues from the Council was more than twice as strong as it was in the full sample. Unanimous decisions tended to trigger an even larger rally in public support than policy choices over which Council members were divided.

This study makes several contributions to the literature on European integration and public opinion. First, it presents the novel argument that European publics take cues from the European Union when they form opinions about salient policies. Thus, it extends elite cue theory and sheds new light on signals conveyed by elites other than political parties. Second, the additional signaling effect of unanimity in the Council of the EU gives European governments an incentive to pursue consensus on salient policies to rally their publics in support of their decisions. In turn, this added value of consensus may help us understand why unanimous Council decisions are ubiquitous even in issue areas where the formal rules prescribe qualified majority voting. Third, this study leverages survey experiments to mitigate the risk of endogeneity (e.g., between unanimity in the Council of the EU and European public opinion) that tends to afflict studies that investigate public opinion with observational data. Fielding multiple experiments in more than one country ensures that the findings are not driven by the specific wording of the vignettes or the idiosyncrasies of a single national

context.

The findings from this study also contribute to our understanding of how international institutions influence public opinion more broadly. To date, the literature has not examined how policy endorsements by international organizations affect the public’s willingness to contribute to international redistribution, with the notable exception of Greenhill (2020). The effect of cues from international elites vary by issue area (Dragojlovic, 2013), and therefore we cannot extrapolate from previously studied topics to international redistribution. This study leverages the first evidence on international redistribution through an international organization from nationally representative surveys fielded in multiple countries on more than one redistributive policy issue. It concludes that cues from international organizations shape citizens’ willingness to contribute toward international redistribution between countries.

## **1 How public opinion affects European integration**

The ‘permissive consensus’ that allowed European governments to pursue regional integration without taking into account public opinion (Lindberg and Scheingold, 1970) has given way to a ‘constraining dissensus’ (Hooghe and Marks, 2009) marked by close referenda and divisive partisan debates on European cooperation. Numerous studies show that public opinion in member states shapes contemporary European integration, and that further steps toward integration are increasingly unlikely to be taken without popular consent (De Vries, 2018; Finke, 2010; Hobolt, 2009). Aggregate EU policy outputs also respond to European public attitudes (Bølstad, 2015; Toshkov, 2011). Not only the big picture questions of where the European Union is headed and which member states will be on board have become politicized, but individual EU policies also enter the sphere of political contestation (Schneider, 2019). In turn, politicization of EU policy decisions explains why policymakers are eager to signal responsiveness to public opinion. Thus, the EU commission responds to political contestation of specific EU policies by accommodating popular concerns (Bazzan and Migliorati, 2020). In the Council of the EU, public opinion affects member states’ initial

negotiation positions (Wrátil, 2018) and their subsequent voting decisions, leading them to abstain or cast negative votes to signal responsiveness to domestic publics when the latter disapprove of legislative proposals (Hobolt and Wrátil, 2020; Hagemann, Hobolt and Wrátil, 2017; Bailer, Mattila and Schneider, 2015). During the Euro crisis, Council members' preferences reflected their national public's attitudes (Degner and Leuffen, 2020; Wozniak Boyle and Hasselmann, 2014), and public opinion shaped the EU's policy response (Copelovitch, Frieden and Walter, 2016).

What motivates governments to signal responsiveness to domestic publics when they adopt legislation in the Council of the EU? Doing so improves the chance of remaining in office at a time when positions on EU issues increasingly impact vote choice in national and European elections. Thus, politicians who signal responsiveness to their voters' concerns during negotiations in the Council of the EU have higher approval ratings than other Council members (Schneider, 2019). Voters' attitudes toward European integration influence their choice in parliamentary elections (De Vries, 2007; Tillman, 2004), especially when domestic political actors politicize EU issues (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012). Similarly, EU attitudes affect vote choice in recent European parliament elections (Hobolt, 2015; De Vries et al., 2011; Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley, 2008), contrary to the earlier characterization of these elections as national second-order elections in which parties compete on domestic issues (Hix and Marsh, 2007; Reif and Schmitt, 1980). In short, the increasing electoral salience of EU issues incentivizes politicians in Europe to pay close attention to public opinion when they participate in the Union's policymaking on salient topics.

## **2 Explanations of public attitudes on issues on the EU's agenda**

What determines public opinion on European integration and EU policies? The extant literature points to three key explanations of individual-level attitudes: material cost-benefit

calculations, identity considerations, and cue-taking.<sup>1</sup> Economic self-interest accounts of EU attitudes hold that Europeans with higher educational attainment and marketable occupational skills are better able to compete in an integrated labor market and thus more supportive of European economic integration (Gabel, 1998; Hobolt, 2014). Affluent Europeans benefit from EU policies that reduce inflation, public sector spending, and restrictions on open financial markets, and they also tend to favor European integration (Gabel and Palmer, 1995). Low-income voters may also be guided by material self-interest when they oppose EU fiscal transfers out of fear of losing welfare benefits (Kleider and Stoeckel, 2019). The Eurozone crisis increased the public’s knowledge about the economic effects of monetary integration and thus enabled it to attach more weight to cost-benefit assessments when forming attitudes (Hobolt et al., 2015).

Recent studies challenge the earlier scholarship’s focus on material self-interest explanations by showing that cultural identity and political values tend to better predict EU support. Thus, persons who conceive of national identities as inclusive of other territorial identities are more likely to support European integration than those who hold exclusive national identities (Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Carey, 2002). Negative attitudes toward the EU and its economic policies are correlated with hostility to immigration and to other cultures (Kuhn and Stoeckel, 2014; Teney, Lacewell and De Wilde, 2014; de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2005; McLaren, 2002). In turn, exclusive national identities and anti-immigration sentiments shape public opinion on refugee redistribution between EU member states (Gerhards et al., 2020), as do notions of fairness (Bansak, Hainmueller and Hangartner, 2017). In rich member states, cosmopolitan values (Kuhn, Solaz and van Elsas, 2018; Bechtel, Hainmueller and Margalit, 2014), personal ideology and altruism (Daniele and Geys, 2015), and cultural openness (Kleider and Stoeckel, 2019) help explain popular support of EU fiscal transfers.

A third strand of the literature focuses on citizens’ reliance on heuristics in the process

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<sup>1</sup>Several studies conclude that EU integration and policies such as redistribution in the EU are multi-dimensional and entail multiple economic and identity considerations (Margalit, 2012; Hooghe and Marks, 2004) and that the relative importance of these three factors varies across issue area, member states, and individuals (Pannico, 2017; Guerra and Serricchio, 2015).

of opinion formation. First, the literature shows that Europeans use national governance as a benchmark when evaluating European integration and EU policies. While Armingeon and Ceka (2014) and Hobolt (2012) conclude that citizens' confidence in national institutions has positive spillover effects on their assessment of the EU, Kumlin (2011), Rohrschneider (2002) and Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) find that citizens who are satisfied with national governance are more likely to view the EU as flawed than those who experience political dysfunction in their own country. Second, studies indicate that citizens' EU attitudes are influenced by cues from their preferred political party and news media source. Specifically, party elite cues inform partisans' attitudes toward European integration (De Vries and Edwards, 2009; Hellström, 2008; Steenbergen, Edwards and de Vries, 2007; Gabel and Scheve, 2007*a*; Ray, 2003) and on specific EU policies, such as bailouts (Stoeckel and Kuhn, 2018), trade agreements and fiscal austerity (Pannico, 2017), as well as energy policy (Pannico, 2020). Party cues do not only affect EU attitudes but also influence party sympathizers' vote choice in EU referenda (Franklin, Marsh and McLaren, 1994; Hobolt, 2007). Elite cues from news media sources also shape EU attitudes (Azrout, Spanje and de Vreese, 2012; Maier and Rittberger, 2008).

### **3 Theory**

Elite cue theory posits that most members of the public form their opinion about foreign affairs on the basis of signals conveyed by knowledgeable and trusted elites (Zaller, 1992). In this context, the term elites refers to “individuals - often but not exclusively government officials - who by role, experience, or expertise are in a position to comment on matters of public concern and are seen to be in that position by those who would contribute to public understanding ...” (Brody, 1991, 65). Studies of U.S. public opinion show that members of the public take political cues from various domestic elites, including government and party leaders, military generals, journalists and news commentators, and even celebrities (e.g., Golby, Feaver and Dropp, 2018; Gelpi, 2010; Pease and Brewer, 2008; Berinsky, 2007; DellaVigna and Kaplan, 2007). Americans also rely on cues from foreign elites when forming their at-

titudes on foreign affairs (Leep and Pressman, 2019; Murray, 2014; Hayes and Guardino, 2011; Thompson, 2009). International organizations in particular convey informative signals about foreign elite opinion to members of the U.S. public and shape the latter's political attitudes (Greenhill, 2020; Bearce and Cook, 2018; Grieco et al., 2011; Chapman and Reiter, 2004). Cues sent by international organizations and other foreign elites also influence public opinion about foreign affairs in China (Fang and Sun, 2019), Japan (Tago and Ikeda, 2013; Ikeda and Tago, 2014), and the United Kingdom (Johns and Davies, 2014; Maliniak and Tierney, 2014).

What do these findings about foreign elite cues tell us about the formation of EU attitudes by European publics? Existing scholarship cannot answer this question. The large literature on public opinion about European integration and EU policies has focused entirely on elite cues conveyed by domestic political parties and news media, and it has neglected signals from a variety of other sources (see Hobolt and De Vries (2016) for a recent review of the literature). Studies show that EU decisions - and individual member states' votes - affect government approval ratings (Schneider, 2019) and that EU governments' voting behavior in the Council of the EU reflects their desire to signal responsiveness to domestic public opinion on the issues under consideration (Hobolt and Wrátil, 2020; Hagemann, Hobolt and Wrátil, 2017; Bailer, Mattila and Schneider, 2015). At the same time, they leave open the question whether and how EU decisions (e.g., on refugee redistribution between member states) impact public attitudes on that policy issue. In contrast to the literature on EU responsiveness, this study argues that EU decisions do not merely respond to public attitudes in member states; instead, they also shape public opinion on the issues on the Union's agenda. While prior studies treat citizens' EU policy attitudes as exogenous, this paper posits that the public's views on salient topics are responsive to EU decisions.

If members of the European public form their opinions on political issues (at least partly) in response to cues they receive from knowledgeable and trusted elites, they should not only heed the advice they receive from their preferred party and news commentators but also

incorporate cues from other trusted elites. The institutions of the European Union are elite bodies that convey cues about policies that they endorse or oppose. The European Union is arguably the most advanced international organization in the world, and its budget dwarfs the resources available to other international institutions. The Council of the EU is the “single most powerful decision-making body in the EU” (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016, 424), where member states’ government ministers negotiate and adopt legislative proposals and the Union’s budget, coordinate member states’ economic and fiscal policies, monitor national budget policies, and handle the European Union’s external affairs. By virtue of its broad mandate and authority, the Council of the EU is capable of conveying cues on many salient issues to the European public.

Elite cues emitted by the Council of the EU reach the public primarily through the mass media’s news coverage. Such signals receive relatively intense coverage, because journalists tend to focus on reporting the opinions of authoritative elites who are in a position to influence policy outcomes (Baum and Groeling, 2010, 4). Studies conducted in the U.S. indicate that the news media tends to prominently features cues from international organizations and foreign governments in their reporting on international affairs (Murray, 2014; Hayes and Guardino, 2010). Analyses of foreign elite sources in European news media detect similar patterns. Archetti (2007) shows that foreign sources dominated French and Italian media coverage of the Afghanistan war. A content analysis of BBC news reporting on refugee arrivals in the United Kingdom and in Southern Europe indicates that foreign elites were featured more prominently than domestic ones, and that the Council of the EU was the most frequently referenced international elite source (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015). Hagemann, Hobolt and Wratil (2017) find a number of cases in which popular news outlets reported on decisions of the Council of the EU. After many years of increasing politicization of, and press coverage on, EU affairs, it is unsurprising that most Europeans are familiar with the Council. In the most recent Eurobarometer survey that included a question about awareness of the Council, 66 percent of respondents indicated that they had heard of

this institution (European Commission, 2019). Therefore, the Council of the EU does not only convey cues when it takes policy decisions, but it is also increasingly likely that mass media transmit such cues to a substantial share of the public. I expect that the endorsement of a policy by the Council of the EU will systematically affect support of the policy among members of the public (*hypothesis 1*).

Cues from the Council of the EU can only affect mass opinion if the public receives them. The fact that mass media coverage is the primary transmission channel for these signals implies a scope condition for my argument: Cues from the Council should only sway public attitudes when the news media finds Council decisions newsworthy. Important, electorally salient decisions of the Council (e.g., on the distribution of refugees between member states or on economic recovery aid during the Covid-19 pandemic) satisfy this scope condition. In contrast, less consequential Council decisions on more arcane issues are unlikely to be featured in news media coverage, and therefore members of the public will not take into account the Council's policy choices when they form attitudes on these non-salient topics.

Elite cue theory implies that members of the public take cues from knowledgeable and trusted elites (Zaller, 1992). In the context of EU attitudes, elite cues from a political party primarily affect the attitudes of citizens who sympathize with that party (Stoeckel and Kuhn, 2018; Maier, Adam and Maier, 2017), and cues from parties that lack popular trust have little mobilizing force (Guerra and McLaren, 2016; Klingemann et al., 2007). Analogously, I expect that the hypothesized average effect of the Council's cues on political attitudes is due to their impact on the subset of the public that places at least a modicum of trust in this body. In contrast, Europeans that do not trust the Council of the EU should not take cues from it. In the 2019 Eurobarometer survey, 38 percent of Europeans express trust in the Council of the EU whereas 35 percent indicate that they tend not to trust the Council (European Commission, 2019). I expect that approval of a policy by the Council of the EU increases support of the policy among citizens who trust this institution and that it does not

affect the policy attitudes of those who distrust it (*hypothesis 2*).<sup>2</sup>

When citizens form attitudes on policies, they consider whether elites agree or disagree on the policy: “when elites uphold a clear picture of what should be done, the public tends to see events from that point of view ... When elites divide, members of the public tend to follow the elites sharing their general ideological or partisan predisposition” (Zaller, 1992, 9). Hooghe and Marks (2005) adopt a similar reasoning when they observe that elite conflict transformed ‘permissive consensus’ into ‘constraining dissensus’ on European integration. Accordingly, pro-EU consensus across parties is associated with higher public support for European integration than divisions between parties (Guerra and McLaren, 2016; Stoeckel, 2013). If elites in the same political party are divided, they convey contradictory cues to the public, muddy the party’s message, and weaken its influence on citizens who trust the group (Steenbergen, Edwards and de Vries, 2007; Ray, 2003; Franklin, Marsh and McLaren, 1994; Siune and Svensson, 1993). I expect that, analogously to a political party, a united Council of the EU conveys a fundamentally different signal to trusting members of the public than a divided Council. Unanimous approval of a policy by the Council signals consensus among the government elites represented on the Council in favor of the policy. This cue should rally public opinion in support of that policy. In contrast, the policy’s endorsement by a divided Council signals that governments are split over the policy. Consequently, the adoption of a policy by a divided Council should have a smaller positive impact on public approval of the policy. In short, I expect that the unanimous approval of a policy by the Council of the EU causes a larger increase in public support of that policy than the endorsement of the same policy by a divided Council (*hypothesis 3*).

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<sup>2</sup>This argument on the effect of trust is different from (but compatible with) earlier scholarship on trust in the EU. While Kuhn and Stoeckel (2014) and Armingeon and Ceka (2014) show that a person’s trust in the EU increases her support of European integration and specific EU policies (bailouts), this study argues that trust in the Council of the EU increases the Union’s ability to shape her support of policies by endorsing them.

## 4 Research design

To test the three hypotheses presented above I fielded large national surveys in two EU member states. Experiments embedded in these surveys randomly assign respondents to one of multiple cues from the Council of the EU in order to causally identify the effect of these signals. This research design accounts for the following endogeneity between public opinion and signals from Brussels. EU legislation is responsive to public opinion (Schneider, 2019; Hagemann, Hobolt and Wratil, 2017), and therefore the adoption of a policy proposal in the Council of the EU is more likely - and occurs with a larger vote margin - when policymakers in Brussels expect popular support for that legislation, *ceteris paribus*. This anticipation effect implies that correlational analyses of actual Council decisions and time-series survey data overestimate the impact of cues from Brussels on public attitudes. In contrast, survey experiments avoid this bias.

Each survey confronted respondents to two experimental vignettes about fiscal transfers between EU member states and the Union's response to the influx of refugees across the Mediterranean. These issues were selected to satisfy the scope condition of the argument, which only applies to electorally salient issues. In the two countries where the surveys were conducted (Austria and Germany), the population views immigration and the state of member states' finances as two of the three most pressing issues facing the EU according to Eurobarometer surveys (European Commission, 2019). In both countries, immigration and financial transfers to Southern European states are electorally salient and have been identified as key motivations for support of far-right parties (Hobolt, 2015), which politicize EU actions on both issues.

I tested the argument with survey experiments on two different topics and in two countries to minimize the risk that survey responses are due to the specific formulation of the experimental vignette and/or the idiosyncrasies of a specific national political context. Apart from the high salience of immigration and fiscal transfers in Austria and Germany, these countries represent good test cases for several reasons. First, while both are large net contributors

to the EU budget and accommodate more refugees per capita than most other EU member states, stark differences exist between the policy positions of their governments: While the German government has consistently favored the reallocation of refugees stranded in Greece and Italy to other EU members, Austria's government has voiced opposition to this policy. Moreover, the German government was a main proponent of the 2020 Coronavirus economic recovery fund while Austria's government joined the fiscally conservative 'Frugal Four' countries that initially rejected and remained skeptical of this initiative. If I find similar effects of cues from the Council of the EU in both countries, I can rule out that these signaling effects hinge on the prior real-world exposure to congruent (or incongruent) cues about these policies from national government elites. In turn, concurrent results from both countries would increase my confidence that findings may generalize to other rich EU member states with pro-EU or more Euroskeptic governments.

Both survey experiments confronted respondents with hypothetical scenarios, which involved a policy proposal and the EU Council's decision to adopt or reject it. After reading a vignette about the scenario, respondents were asked to indicate whether they favored or opposed the policy in the scenario. The experiments were administered in random order to avoid context effects. The following script introduced each experiment: "You will now read about a situation that Europe has frequently faced in the past and will likely face again. It is not about actual events. We will ask for your opinion on a response to this situation by the European Union."

The recovery fund experiment presented the following scenario; the Austrian and German texts are collapsed here for convenience:

"The Coronavirus inflicted severe damage to the economy. Unemployment increased strongly, especially in Southern Europe. An economic crisis in Southern Europe would also hurt [Austria/Germany]. Germany and France want the European Union to take out loans in the amount of 500 billion Euro and to give the money to those member states that were hit the hardest by the crisis."

In the ‘refugees’ experiment, Austrian and German respondents read about the following situation:

“Over the course of the past few months, more than 70,000 persons crossed the Mediterranean and applied for asylum in Greece, Italy, and Spain. Many of these refugees want to move to [Austria/Germany]. Greece, Italy, and Spain want the other members of the European Union to help with the influx of refugees. Germany proposed to relocate 40,000 of these refugees to other members of the European Union; [800/11,000] of them would be relocated to [Austria/Germany].

The language in the vignettes was chosen to mirror news coverage of refugee and economic policy in widely read newspapers in these countries (e.g., Bild, Kronenzeitung, Kurier). The description of grants for member states that were hit the hardest by the pandemic was based on a proposal made by France and Germany in May 2020, which was debated by EU member states in the summer, endorsed by the Council of the EU in October (after the survey concluded), and formally adopted in February 2021 (Adler, 2020; Lofven, 2020; European Union, 2020*b*, 2021). The number of refugees who crossed the Mediterranean is based on data on asylum applications in Greece, Italy, and Spain in the six months prior to the launch of the survey (European Union, 2020*a*). Austrian and German resettlement quotas were modeled after the EU’s refugee resettlement plan that ended in 2017 (Der Standard, 2017; Trimborn, 2015).

Immediately after reading the vignette of either experiment, respondents were asked to express their attitudes on the proposed policies: “Would you favor or oppose the European Union taking out loans in the amount of 500 billion Euro and giving the money to those member states that were hit the hardest by the crisis?” and “Would you favor or oppose relocating 40,000 refugees to other members of the European Union and relocating [800/11,000] of them to [Austria/Germany]?” Respondents could choose between five options on an ordinal scale (strongly favor, somewhat favor, neither favor nor oppose, somewhat oppose, strongly oppose).

Each experiment manipulated respondents' perception of the Council of the EU's position on the proposal. Respondents who were randomly assigned to the 'unanimous Council approval' treatment condition read the following sentence at the end of the vignette displayed above: "In a unanimous vote, the Council of the European Union accepted this proposal." In contrast, respondents in the 'EU approval with dissent' condition were informed that "The Council of the European Union accepted this proposal, but [four small members of the European Union voted against it, because they opposed giving grants to countries in crisis/ five small members of the European Union voted against it, because they do not want to relocate these refugees]." Two additional treatment conditions conveyed the information that the Council opposed the policy: "The Council of the European Union did not accept the proposal, because [four small members cast a veto, because they are opposed to grants to countries in crisis/ France and Poland were opposed to relocating these refugees]." and "The Council of the European Union did not accept this proposal, because [most members of the European Union opposed giving grants to countries in crisis/ the majority of European countries were opposed to relocate these refugees]." If both experiments yield similar results even though the wording of the treatment conditions varies between them, I can be confident that the results do not hinge on the specific formulation of the experimental treatments.

Pretreatment attitudes towards the Council of the EU were assessed on a five-point scale that captures respondents' answers to two questions about their trust in the institution's judgment on economic and fiscal policy or refugee policy, respectively. The questions were posed at the end of the survey to avoid priming effects in the experiments.<sup>3</sup>

Randomized treatment assignment makes it unnecessary to add demographic controls to the model for the purpose of causal identification, but the results are robust to including these covariates: respondents' age, gender, education, income level, political orientation, and interest in politics and foreign affairs (see Appendix Table A.1 for descriptive statistics). Region (Bundesland) fixed effects are included in all models. OLS models with robust

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<sup>3</sup>The experimental treatments did not affect respondents' levels of trust, which are balanced across treatment conditions. These results will be included in the next version of this paper.

standard errors estimate the impact of the signals conveyed to respondents. The baseline is established by the responses of the group assigned to the unanimous Council of the EU approval condition. Dichotomous treatment variables indicate whether respondents were told that the Council approved the policy despite dissent, that some member states cast vetoes, or that most members opposed it.

The surveys were administered in late August to early September 2020 to large online samples that were nationally representative of the adult populations of Austria and Germany in terms of age, gender, and state of residence.<sup>4</sup> The sample size was 2,556 in Austria and 2,542 in Germany. The survey company Respondi recruited these respondents using an opt-in methodology and administered the experiments online. Only Austrian and German citizens who were located in their home country were eligible to take the German-language survey.

## 5 Results

### *5.1 Effect of cues from the Council of the EU*

A majority of respondents in both countries expressed support for EU cooperation on refugee resettlement and economic recovery aid during the Covid-19 pandemic. Across all treatment conditions, 52% of German respondents favored giving large amounts of aid to Southern European and other EU member states that were hit the hardest by the pandemic. 50% supported the relocation of refugees from Southern Europe to other EU member states, including Germany. 27% and 35% of German respondents opposed recovery aid and refugee resettlement, respectively. Support was slightly lower in Austria, where 47% favored (and 34% opposed) economic recovery aid and 48% backed (and 41% disapproved of) refugee relocation. These cross-country differences resonate with earlier findings of lower support for European solidarity in Austria than in Germany (Gerhards et al., 2020), but they may also

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<sup>4</sup>Future versions of this paper will compare sample demographic characteristics to census data.

be due to the fact that both experiments identify Germany as a proponent of the policies.<sup>5</sup> If cues from the Council of the EU impact survey respondents' attitudes in both countries despite these differences, we can be confident that the experiments pick up an effect that materializes across varying contexts.

Evidence from both surveys strongly supports the proposition that cues emitted by the Council of the EU affect public attitudes about policies on the Union's agenda. When the Council adopts (rather than rejects) a policy proposal, approval of that policy increases by 3 to 7 percentage points, on average (see Figure 1).<sup>6</sup> This estimate is based on the comparison of attitudes of respondents who were randomly assigned to cues of unanimous approval or endorsement despite dissent in the Council, on the one hand, and the views of those who learned that the Council rejected the proposal due to vetoes or broad opposition among member states, on the other hand. OLS models in Tables 1-3 confirm that the average effects of cues from the Council of the EU are statistically significant in both experiments in the the pooled sample of Austrian and German respondents and in the German subsample. In Austria, the effect is only significant for the Coronavirus recovery aid experiment. It is insignificant in the refugee experiment in Austria, where trust in the EU Council's judgment on refugee policy is so low that the average citizen does not take cues from this institution. As I will show below, the effect in the refugee experiment becomes marginally significant among those Austrian respondents who view the Council as a trustworthy elite group.

The effects reported so far represent averages across the two samples, which mask heterogeneous responses to cues from the Council of the EU. To test the argument that citizens who trust the judgment of the Council respond more strongly to these cues than others, I added respondents' pre-treatment levels of trust in the Council as well as its interaction

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<sup>5</sup>The independently randomized cues about domestic political elites, which vary between countries and are discussed below, cannot account for the observed cross-country differences, because the descriptive statistics presented in this paragraph describe the attitudes of the half of the sample that did not get cues about domestic elites.

<sup>6</sup>For this analysis the dependent variable was rescaled to a more easily interpretable scale that ranges from 0 (policy opposition) to 1 (policy support).

Table 1: Cues from Council of the EU and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from OLS models of 2020 survey data with five-point outcome variables

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor recovery aid		Favor refugee relocation	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
EU Council approval	0.237*** (0.055)	0.250*** (0.050)	0.165*** (0.066)	0.139** (0.056)
Female		-0.223*** (0.053)		-0.119** (0.060)
Age		0.006*** (0.002)		0.007*** (0.002)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)		0.031* (0.018)		0.038* (0.021)
Educ. (high school diploma)		0.063 (0.090)		0.327*** (0.099)
Educ. (vocational training)		-0.092 (0.068)		0.012 (0.075)
Educ. (college degree)		-0.012 (0.093)		0.238** (0.103)
Educ. (masters or doctorate)		0.000 (0.079)		0.388*** (0.089)
Interested in politics		-0.050 (0.037)		-0.087** (0.043)
Interested in foreign affairs		0.242*** (0.042)		0.213*** (0.048)
Political left		0.250*** (0.033)		0.440*** (0.036)
Trad./auth./nationalist		-0.096*** (0.009)		-0.134*** (0.010)
State f.e.	yes	yes	yes	yes
R-squared	0.019	0.194	0.013	0.279
Observations	2,036	2,029	2,032	2,024

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table 2: Cues from Council of the EU and Austrian public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from OLS models of 2020 survey data with five-point outcome variables

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor recovery aid		Favor refugee relocation	
	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
EU Council approval	0.152*** (0.058)	0.157*** (0.053)	0.058 (0.069)	0.042 (0.054)
Female		-0.107* (0.056)		-0.049 (0.056)
Age		-0.002 (0.002)		-0.005*** (0.002)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)		0.016 (0.020)		0.085* (0.021)
Educ. (high school diploma)		0.040 (0.091)		0.435*** (0.089)
Educ. (vocational training)		0.005 (0.081)		0.051 (0.081)
Educ. (college degree)		-0.153 (0.117)		0.509*** (0.123)
Educ. (masters or doctorate)		-0.162* (0.097)		0.527*** (0.098)
Interested in politics		-0.003 (0.039)		0.044 (0.039)
Interested in foreign affairs		0.124*** (0.044)		0.114** (0.045)
Political left		0.287*** (0.033)		0.565*** (0.034)
Trad./auth./nationalist		-0.106*** (0.009)		-0.137*** (0.010)
State f.e.	yes	yes	yes	yes
R-squared	0.015	0.206	0.009	0.409
Observations	2,042	2,033	2,038	2,030

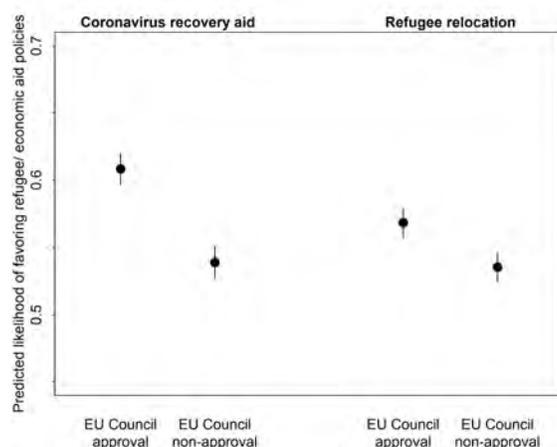
Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table 3: Cues from Council of the EU and Austrian and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from pooled OLS models of 2020 survey data with five-point outcome variables

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor recovery aid		Favor refugee relocation	
	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
EU Council approval	0.195*** (0.040)	0.203*** (0.037)	0.111** (0.047)	0.091** (0.039)
Female		-0.170*** (0.038)		-0.077* (0.041)
Age		0.003** (0.001)		0.002 (0.001)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)		0.026* (0.013)		0.065*** (0.015)
Educ. (high school diploma)		0.049 (0.062)		0.377*** (0.066)
Educ. (vocational training)		-0.041 (0.052)		0.012 (0.055)
Educ. (college degree)		-0.067 (0.073)		0.344*** (0.079)
Educ. (masters or doctorate)		-0.067 (0.061)		0.451*** (0.066)
Interested in politics		-0.027 (0.027)		-0.017 (0.029)
Interested in foreign affairs		0.181*** (0.031)		0.154*** (0.033)
Political left		0.272*** (0.023)		0.512*** (0.024)
Trad./auth./nationalist		-0.102*** (0.007)		-0.137*** (0.007)
State f.e.	yes	yes	yes	yes
R-squared	0.034	0.209	0.016	0.343
Observations	4,079	4,063	4,071	4,055

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Figure 1: Predicted probabilities of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement: effect of approval and non-approval of these policies by the Council of the EU



*Note:* The figure depicts the predicted probabilities of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement with 95% confidence intervals in the pooled sample of Austrian and German respondents. They are based on models that have the same specifications as models 10 and 12 in Table 3, except that the five-point outcome measure was rescaled to a more easily interpretable scale from 0 (policy opposition) to 1 (policy support).

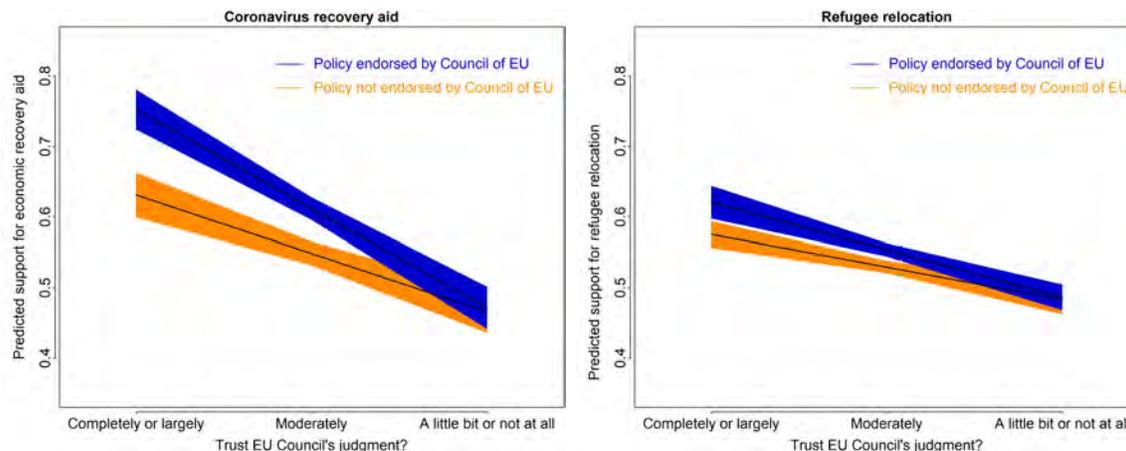
with Council approval of the policies to the models reported in Tables 4-5.<sup>7</sup> In those models, the coefficient of the main effect of Council approval indicates the effect of the cue among respondents in the omitted baseline category, who fully trust this institution. Among these respondents, the effect is more than twice as large, on average, as it is in the full sample analyzed in Tables 1-3.<sup>8</sup> The coefficient of the interaction term between Council approval and trust in the institution indicates that low confidence in the Council’s judgment reduces the effect of cues from that body on respondents’ views about the policy on the institution’s agenda. In both experiments, the interaction term is significant in the pooled models, but it becomes marginally significant or insignificant in the smaller national samples due to insufficient statistical power.

Cues about the endorsement of a policy by the Council of the EU increase support of the policy by 5-12 percentage points among respondents who place a lot of trust in the judgment

<sup>7</sup>Figure A.1 in the Appendix displays the distribution of trust in the Council of the EU.

<sup>8</sup>The coefficients of the main effect of Council approval in Models 13-18 are 169 percent larger, on average, than the corresponding coefficients in Models 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12.

Figure 2: Predicted probabilities of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement by level of trust in Council of the EU



*Note:* The figure depicts the predicted probabilities of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement by level of trust in the judgment of the Council of the EU in the pooled sample of Austrian and German respondents. 95% confidence intervals are plotted around the point estimates. They are based on models that have the same specifications as models 10 and 12 in Table 3, except that the five-point outcome measure was rescaled from 0 (for opposition to the policy) to 1 (for policy approval).

of this institution (see Figure 2). In contrast, these signals do not affect the attitudes of respondents who lack trust in the Council. Overall, the results corroborate the argument that respondents who view the Council as a trustworthy elite body take cues from it while others are less likely to form their policy opinions based on signals conveyed from the Council.

Results from the Coronavirus recovery aid experiment support the third hypothesis, which posits that the signaling effect of cues from the Council of the EU depends on whether the institution is united or divided. Both in Austria and Germany, the unanimous adoption of the proposed policy caused higher popular support of the policy than the endorsement of the same motion despite the dissent of a few small EU member states. In the models reported in Tables 6-7, the coefficient of dissent in the Council causally identifies this quantity. It compares the attitudes of respondents who were randomly assigned to the baseline condition, which was told that the Council unanimously approved the two policies, to the views of respondents in the treatment group that read that the Council endorsed these policies despite dissent. While unanimous in the Council increased public support of economic and

Table 4: Cues from Council of the EU, trust in Council, and Austrian and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from OLS models of 2020 survey data with five-point outcome variables

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor recovery aid		Favor refugee relocation	
	German sample (13)	Austrian sample (14)	German sample (15)	Austrian sample (16)
EU Council approval	0.450*** (0.098)	0.411*** (0.112)	0.218** (0.107)	0.203* (0.113)
Low trust in EU Council	0.301*** (0.039)	0.404*** (0.038)	0.202*** (0.041)	0.237*** (0.038)
Council approval * Low trust	-0.098** (0.040)	-0.131*** (0.044)	-0.030 (0.043)	-0.075* (0.043)
Female	0.204*** (0.048)	0.083 (0.053)	0.080 (0.052)	-0.016 (0.053)
Age	-0.008*** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.008*** (0.002)	0.004** (0.002)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)	0.009 (0.017)	0.014 (0.019)	0.017 (0.018)	-0.050*** (0.019)
Educ. (high school diploma)	-0.026 (0.081)	0.014 (0.085)	-0.203** (0.087)	-0.349*** (0.084)
Educ. (vocational training)	0.062 (0.061)	-0.035 (0.076)	0.020 (0.066)	-0.076 (0.075)
Educ. (college degree)	0.019 (0.083)	0.181 (0.111)	-0.199** (0.090)	-0.493*** (0.114)
Educ. (masters or doctorate)	0.007 (0.071)	0.232** (0.092)	-0.282*** (0.078)	-0.455*** (0.091)
Interested in politics	0.016 (0.034)	0.011 (0.036)	0.031 (0.037)	-0.036 (0.037)
Interested in foreign affairs	-0.141*** (0.039)	-0.074* (0.042)	-0.099** (0.042)	-0.065 (0.042)
Political left	-0.177*** (0.030)	-0.174** (0.032)	-0.341*** (0.032)	-0.422*** (0.032)
Trad./auth./nationalist	0.079*** (0.008)	0.092*** (0.009)	0.105*** (0.009)	0.119*** (0.009)
Trust in German government	0.227*** (0.030)	0.070** (0.032)	0.202*** (0.041)	0.247*** (0.031)
State f.e.	yes	yes	yes	yes
R-squared	0.346	0.300	0.450	0.486
Observations	2,029	2,033	2,024	2,030

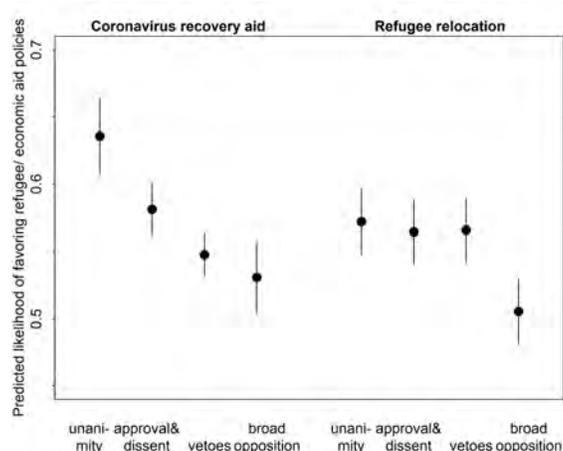
Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table 5: Cues from Council of the EU, trust in Council, and Austrian and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from pooled OLS models of 2020 survey data with five-point outcome variables

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Favor recovery aid	Favor refugee relocation
	Pooled sample (17)	Pooled sample (18)
EU Council approval	0.433*** (0.075)	0.228*** (0.078)
Low trust in EU Council	0.361*** (0.028)	0.236*** (0.028)
Council approval * low trust	-0.116*** (0.030)	-0.062** (0.031)
Female	0.152*** (0.036)	0.023 (0.037)
Age	-0.005*** (0.001)	-0.003** (0.001)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)	0.010 (0.013)	-0.019 (0.013)
Educ. (high school diploma)	-0.004 (0.058)	-0.266*** (0.085)
Educ. (vocational training)	0.002 (0.048)	-0.015 (0.050)
Educ. (college degree)	0.076 (0.068)	-0.316*** (0.071)
Educ. (masters or doctorate)	0.099 (0.057)	-0.358*** (0.059)
Interested in politics	0.018 (0.025)	-0.005 (0.026)
Interested in foreign affairs	-0.108*** (0.028)	-0.074** (0.030)
Political left	-0.175*** (0.022)	-0.384*** (0.023)
Trad./auth./nationalist	0.087*** (0.006)	0.114*** (0.006)
Trust in German government	0.144*** (0.022)	0.309*** (0.022)
State f.e.	yes	yes
R-squared	0.325	0.463
Observations	4,063	4,055

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. N varies across models due to missing values.

Figure 3: Predicted probabilities of support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement: effect of unity and divisions in the Council of the EU



*Note:* The figure shows how the predicted probabilities of publics' support of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee resettlement varies as a function of unity and divisions in the Council of the EU over these policies. Public attitudes in the pooled sample of Austrian and German respondents are displayed; 95% confidence intervals are plotted around the point estimates. They are based on models that have the same specifications as models 23 and 24 in Table 7, except that the five-point outcome measure was rescaled from 0 (for opposition to the policy) to 1 (for policy approval).

fiscal policy, the impact of unity and divisions was statistically insignificant in the refugee relocation experiment.

## 5.2 *Alternative explanations*

Further analyses rule out an alternative explanation of the results based on domestic elites. In the absence of any information on domestic elites in the experimental vignettes, respondents might make inferences about the position of those national actors from the information about the Council of the EU. If so, respondents could use the position of that body as a rough proxy for the stance of other, domestic elite groups. Thus, they might respond to cues about the Council of the EU even if they are indifferent about that institution's views. This alternative explanation of the observed effect of cues from the Council of the EU implies that this signaling effect of cues from the Council of the EU would change in the presence of a second cue about domestic elites' policy stance. To test this proposition, half of the respondents were assigned to cues about domestic elites. In the German experiment, this

Table 6: Cues from a united or divided Council of the EU and Austrian and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from OLS models of 2020 survey data with five-point outcome variables

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Favor recovery aid		Favor refugee relocation	
	German sample (19)	Austrian sample (20)	German sample (21)	Austrian sample (22)
Council approval: dissent	−0.157** (0.071)	−0.124* (0.074)	0.005 (0.079)	0.007 (0.075)
Council non-approval: veto	−0.265*** (0.071)	−0.210*** (0.075)	−0.027 (0.080)	0.049 (0.075)
Council non-approval: opposition	−0.393*** (0.071)	−0.231*** (0.074)	−0.245 (0.080)	−0.126* (0.075)
Female	−0.220*** (0.053)	−0.106* (0.056)	−0.115* (0.060)	−0.052 (0.056)
Age	0.006*** (0.002)	−0.002 (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	−0.005*** (0.002)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)	0.033* (0.018)	0.017 (0.020)	0.037* (0.021)	0.083*** (0.021)
Educ. (high school diploma)	0.062 (0.089)	0.041 (0.091)	0.329*** (0.099)	0.437*** (0.084)
Educ. (vocational training)	−0.096 (0.068)	0.010 (0.081)	0.026 (0.076)	0.046 (0.080)
Educ. (college degree)	−0.017 (0.092)	−0.147 (0.118)	0.241** (0.103)	0.513*** (0.123)
Educ. (masters or doctorate)	−0.003 (0.079)	−0.163** (0.096)	0.399*** (0.089)	0.533*** (0.098)
Interested in politics	−0.046 (0.037)	−0.003 (0.039)	−0.089** (0.043)	0.044 (0.039)
Interested in foreign affairs	0.238*** (0.042)	0.126*** (0.044)	0.216*** (0.048)	0.113** (0.045)
Political left	0.248*** (0.032)	0.288*** (0.033)	0.438*** (0.037)	0.425*** (0.034)
Trad./auth./nationalist	−0.097*** (0.009)	−0.106*** (0.009)	−0.136*** (0.010)	−0.137*** (0.009)
State f.e.	yes	yes	yes	yes
R-squared	0.198	0.208	0.282	0.410
Observations	2,029	2,033	2,024	2,030

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. *N* varies across models due to missing values.

Table 7: Cues from a united or divided Council of the EU and Austrian and German public attitudes on economic and refugee policies: Results from pooled OLS models of 2020 survey data with five-point outcome variables

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Favor recovery aid	Favor refugee relocation
	Pooled sample (23)	Pooled sample (24)
Council approval: dissent	−0.139*** (0.052)	0.005 (0.055)
Council non-approval: veto	−0.235*** (0.052)	0.009 (0.055)
Council non-approval: opposition	−0.310*** (0.052)	−0.185** (0.055)
Female	−0.171*** (0.038)	−0.076* (0.041)
Age	0.002** (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)
Income (in 1,000 EUR)	0.026* (0.014)	0.064*** (0.014)
Educ. (high school diploma)	0.048 (0.062)	0.382*** (0.065)
Educ. (vocational training)	−0.040 (0.052)	0.016 (0.055)
Educ. (college degree)	−0.065 (0.073)	0.347*** (0.079)
Educ. (masters or doctorate)	−0.070 (0.061)	0.460*** (0.066)
Interested in politics	−0.025 (0.027)	−0.018 (0.029)
Interested in foreign affairs	0.180*** (0.031)	0.155*** (0.033)
Political left	0.272*** (0.023)	0.511*** (0.025)
Trad./auth./nationalist	−0.103*** (0.007)	−0.138*** (0.008)
State f.e.	yes	yes
R-squared	0.211	0.345
Observations	4,063	4,055

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01. N varies across models due to missing values.

second treatment consisted in the information that “most parties in the German Bundestag support this proposal”. In contrast, Austrians were informed that “the majority of the Austrian Nationalrat opposes this proposal.” The information was displayed immediately after the cue about the Council of the EU. These treatment were randomized independently of the cues about the Council of the EU. They reflect the real-world positions of Austrian and German political parties on the two policy proposals. By cueing majority support and opposition from domestic political elites, I verify whether the hypothesized effect of cues from Brussels is independent of congruent (or incongruent) positions of domestic political elites. In both countries and in both experiments, the results reported above hold when the cue about domestic elite attitudes is added to the models.<sup>9</sup> These results indicate that respondents assign an intrinsic value to cues about the Council of the EU and do not merely use signals about it as proxies for the views of domestic elites.

## 6 Conclusion

While the recent literature argues that the European Union aims to signal responsiveness to public opinion on salient policy issues, this study indicates that the Union’s policy choices do not merely react to public opinion but also shape it. Survey experiments fielded to large national samples in Austria and Germany show that the endorsement of electorally salient policies by the Council of the EU, the Union’s “most powerful decision-making body” (Hobolt and De Vries, 2016, 424), increase popular support for these policies - but only among members of the public who trust the Council’s judgment. Among these respondents, cues of the Council’s approval of Coronavirus economic recovery aid and refugee relocation increases approval of these policies by 5-12 percentage points, on average.

Trust in the Council of the EU varies greatly between EU member states. According to

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<sup>9</sup>The appendix of future versions of this paper will report results of the models that replicate analyses in Tables 2, 2, 4, and 6 with an additional variable indicating domestic elite attitudes. The models with pooled survey responses from Austria and Germany are not replicated with an additional domestic cue measure, because domestic elite cues vary across countries.

the 2019 Eurobarometer survey, the share of citizens who tend to trust the Council ranges from 26% in France to 57% in Romania (European Commission, 2019). The findings from this study imply that the Council finds it more difficult to influence policy attitudes in member states with Euroskeptical publics than in countries where most citizens consider the Council a trustworthy elite actor from which they are willing to take cues.

The survey experiments conducted for this study also lend qualified support to the notion that a united Council has a larger signaling effect on public attitudes than a divided one. The effect of unanimity in the Council of the EU on public opinion may help us understand why EU members often make cumbersome compromises and costly side payments in order to secure consensus among all EU member states - instead of passing their preferred policy by qualified majority voting prescribed in many issue areas. Complementing other explanations of consensus decision-making in Brussels (Häge, 2013; Novak, 2013; Lewis, 2005), this study points to an additional incentive for states to pursue consensus in the Council on highly salient policies: to influence EU citizens' policy attitudes by signaling unity (instead of divisions) among EU governments.

Future research could examine how signals conveyed by policy decisions of the Council of the EU affect the attitudes and behavior of other audiences (in addition to domestic publics). Studies argue that individual Council members cast negative votes or abstain to send signals to domestic legislators and special interest groups (Hagemann, Bailer and Herzog, 2019; Bailer, Mattila and Schneider, 2015). Plausibly, these domestic audiences do not just respond to their own government's voting behavior, but also to cues of unity and divisions among other members of Council of the EU. In addition, unity and disunity among the union's member states also convey signals to government elites outside the Union and to financial markets. Thus, a credit rating agency concluded that a weakening in cohesion among EU member states over economic recovery aid during the pandemic could lower Europe's credit ratings (Khan and Stubbington, 2020). Decisionmakers in the Council of the EU are not just concerned about the signals they convey to their publics, but they also

care about the cues they transmit to other audiences. Analyses of their response to cues from Brussels could complement this study of public opinion.

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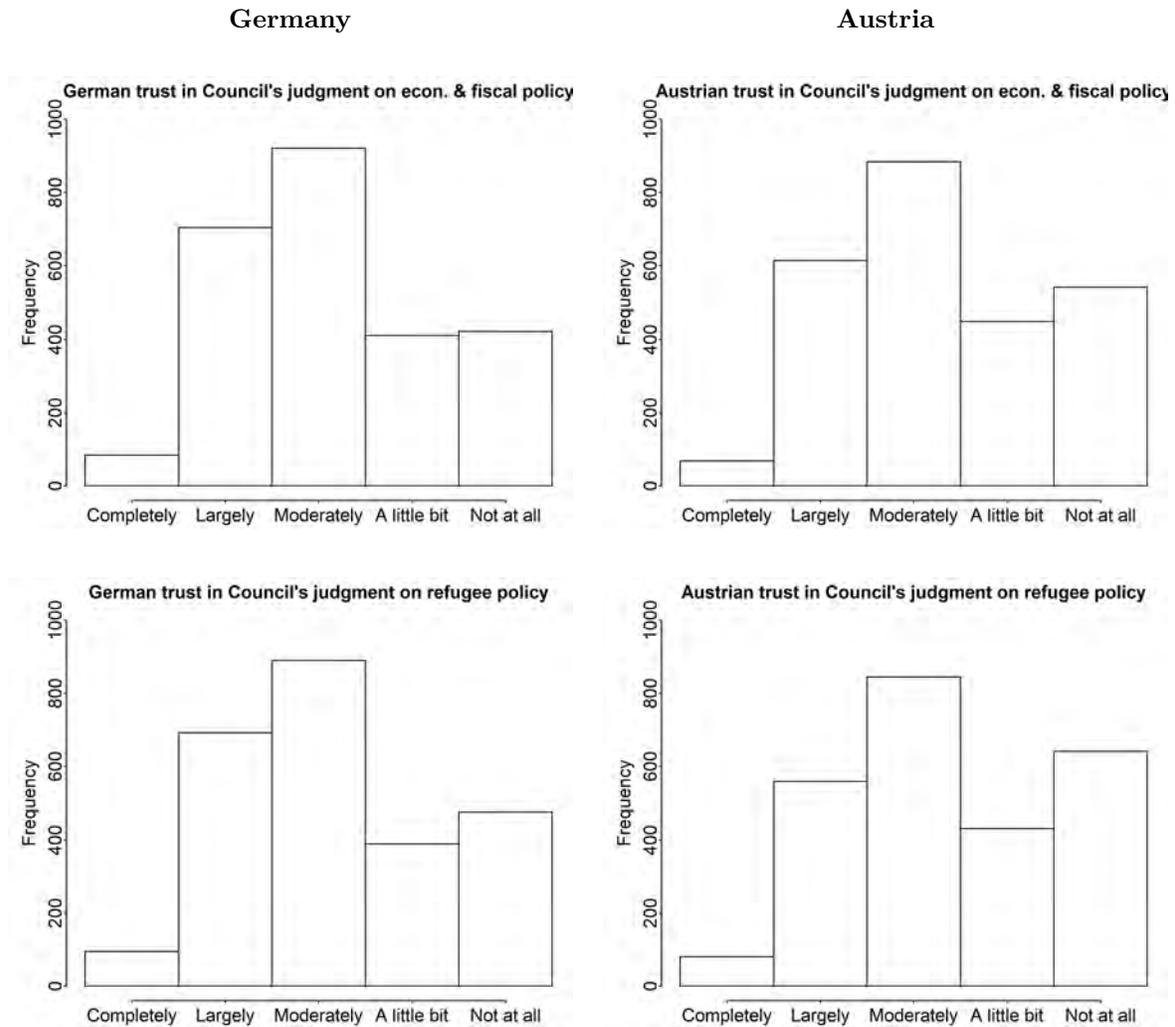
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## Appendix

Table A.1: Descriptive statistics

Variable	Austrian sample			German sample			Both samples	
	N	Mean	St.d.	N	Mean	St.d.	Min.	Max.
<b>Dependent variables</b>								
Support for economic recovery aid	2,043	2.996	1.324	2,037	3.346	1.244	1	5
Support for refugee relocation	2,039	3.034	1.552	2,033	3.257	1.478	1	5
<b>Randomized treatments</b>								
EU Council approval ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	0.502	0.500	2,037	0.500	0.500	0	1
EU Council approval ('refugees exp.')	2,039	0.496	0.500	2,033	0.504	0.500	0	1
Unanimous Council approval ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	0.247	0.431	2,037	0.250	0.433	0	1
Unanimous Council approval ('refugees exp.')	2,039	0.250	0.433	2,033	0.250	0.433	0	1
Council approval with dissent ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	0.256	0.436	2,037	0.250	0.433	0	1
Council approval with dissent ('refugees exp.')	2,039	0.247	0.431	2,033	0.254	0.436	0	1
Council non-approval: vetoes ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	0.244	0.430	2,037	0.251	0.434	0	1
Council non-approval: vetoes ('refugees exp.')	2,039	0.251	0.434	2,033	0.249	0.432	0	1
Csl non-app'l: Broad opposition ('eco. aid e.')	2,043	0.253	0.435	2,037	0.249	0.432	0	1
Csl non-app'l: Broad opposition ('refugees e.')	2,039	0.253	0.435	2,033	0.247	0.431	0	1
Domestic elite opinion cue ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	0.499	0.500	2,037	0.498	0.500	0	1
Domestic elite opinion cue ('refugees exp.')	2,039	0.501	0.500	2,033	0.501	0.500	0	1
<b>Pretreatment covariates</b>								
Trust in Council's judgment ('eco. aid exp.')	2,043	2.293	1.140	2,037	2.149	1.106	1	5
Trust in Council's judgment ('refugees exp.')	2,039	2.385	1.167	2,033	2.161	1.130	1	5
Female	2,043	0.503	0.500	2,037	0.490	0.500	0	1
Age	2,042	43.02	14.55	2,036	49.47	17.23	18	90
Family income (in EUR 1,000k)	2,043	2.776	1.362	2,037	2.73	1.459	0.050	6.5
Educ. (high school diploma)	2,043	0.235	0.424	2,037	0.134	0.341	0	1
Educ. (vocational training)	2,043	0.362	0.481	2,037	0.305	0.460	0	1
Educ. (college degree)	2,043	0.078	0.269	2,037	0.109	0.312	0	1
Educ. (masters or doctorate)	2,043	0.174	0.379	2,037	0.199	0.400	0	1
Interested in politics	2,043	3.317	0.920	2,037	3.406	0.925	1	5
Interested in foreign affairs	2,043	3.468	0.785	2,037	3.498	0.798	1	5
Political left	2,035	3.134	0.966	2,034	3.195	0.884	1	5
Trad./auth./nationalist	2,043	13.23	3.422	2,034	13.59	3.187	5	25

Figure A.1: Respondents' trust in the judgment of the Council of the EU about refugee policy and economic and fiscal policy: Descriptive statistics



*Note:* The upper two histograms display the distribution of respondents' level of trust in the Council of the EU's judgment on issues of economic and fiscal policy. The upper left panel shows that 67% of German respondents reported at least a moderate amount of trust in the judgment of the Council of the EU in this policy area. The upper right histogram displays the corresponding data for Austria, where 61% of respondents place at least moderate trust in the Council's refugee policies. The mean values amount to 1.8 in Germany and 1.9 in Austria on a five-point scale from 'completely trust' [0] to 'do not trust at all' [4]. The lower two histograms depict the patterns of trust in the Council of the EU's judgment on refugee policy. They show that 66% of German respondents and 58% of Austrian respondents place at least moderate trust in the Council's policy choices. The means amount to 2.2 in Germany and 2.4 in Austria on a five-point scale from 'completely trust' [0] to 'do not trust at all' [4].