

What Kind of EU Do the Citizens Want?

Studying Multidimensional Institutional Preferences Using a Multifactorial Survey Design

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Abstract

In 2017, the European Commission published a “White Paper on the Future of Europe” as a means to tackle the increasing lack of public legitimacy of the European Union (EU). However, the reform scenarios outlined in this paper related heavily to the output side of the EU’s political system, thereby neglecting potential changes on the input side. In this paper, we thus analyze to which degree European citizens derive their political support from the outputs or the inputs of the EU’s policy-making. First, we argue that more chances for effective citizen participation and greater information transparency in the policy-making process increases people’s EU support on the input side. Second, we expect that the effectiveness of EU policies and their relative national benefits lead to a greater willingness to accept EU policy decisions on the output side. We test these theoretical expectations by employing a multifactorial survey experiment in six European countries (Denmark, Germany, France, Hungary, Poland, Spain) with 2,000 respondents in each country. The results support our arguments in general but also reveal some striking nuances, as the institutional input and output factors are also outperformed or moderated by individual-level dispositions and attitudes.

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1. Introduction

All political systems need popular legitimacy to survive in the long run. However, the European Union (EU) relies more than other systems on the voluntary compliance of its citizens, as it represents a supranational governance structure with extensive policy-making powers but without coercive means to enforce its policies. For this reason, the notion of political legitimacy – a central concept in political science which refers to the acceptability and rightfulness of political power – is of vital importance for EU scholars. Traditionally, the legitimacy of European governance is studied from two different yet connected angles. On the one side, scholars assess its *normative* legitimacy by evaluating the EU against criteria that are provided by, for example, theories of representative democracy (see, e.g., Schmitt and Thomassen 1999, Lord and Pollack 2010, Mair and Thomassen 2010, Kröger and Friedrich 2013). On the other side, legitimacy is also studied from an *empirical* and citizen-centered perspective. In this logic, a political system can only be regarded as legitimate, “when it is accepted as appropriate and worthy of being obeyed by those affected by its policies” (Lindgren and Persson 2010: 451).¹

Based on this research framework, the study of popular attitudes towards European integration and the EU gained traction in the early 1990s. During this period, the nature of the European unification process completed its evolution from a predominantly economic and intergovernmental cooperation into a genuine political union with a more supranational character. Many citizens reacted with reservation to these fundamental institutional changes. Their skepticism became particularly manifest in the political arena when French and Dutch citizens voted down the EU Constitutional Treaty in 2005 and, even more profoundly, when the British public voted to leave the EU in 2016. Such developments led EU scholars to conclude that the former “permissive consensus” (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970) had finally been replaced by a “constraining dissensus” (Hooghe and Marks 2009) on the part of citizens.²

Reacting to these developments, the European Commission repeatedly attempted to strengthen its political legitimacy by proposing institutional reforms, e.g., to strengthen the electoral connection between citizens and EU institutions. In 2017, the Commission published the “White paper on the future of Europe” (EC 2017), in which it specifies ideas on five potential scenarios of the future EU. These scenarios range from a returning to a purely economic

¹ Empirical legitimacy is sometimes also called “descriptive”, “public”, “social”, or “sociological” legitimacy (Follesdal 2004, Lindgren and Persson 2010, Bodansky 2013, Dellmuth and Schlipphak 2020).

² The issue of European integration has become increasingly contested in the public domain during the same period and became more and more related to cultural instead of purely economic issues (Schäfer et al. 2020). Many political entrepreneurs, especially from the far-right of the ideological spectrum, exploited this politicization European integration to gain votes in elections (Hobolt and De Vries 2015, Hooghe and Marks 2018) – and still continue to do so.

union (“Nothing but the Single Market”) over the current status quo (“Carrying on”) to an ever-closer union (“Doing Much More Together”). In doing so, it mostly concentrates on what the EU produces as policy outputs and outcomes, thus focusing on what Scharpf (1999) famously called “output” sources of empirical legitimacy while largely neglecting the “input” sources of political legitimacy. However, it seems debatable whether this is what citizens are actually concerned about when thinking about the future development of the EU.

In this article, we empirically investigate to what extent citizens’ support for the EU depends on the output and input dimensions of the EU’s policy-making system. We distinguish between two sub-dimensions of input legitimacy – *participation of citizens* and *information transparency* – as well as two sub-dimensions of output legitimacy: the *effectiveness* of EU policies and the *relative national benefits* they may engender. We test the effects on people’s willingness to accept EU policy decisions by employing a multifactorial survey experiment administered in six European countries (Denmark, Germany, France, Hungary, Poland, Spain) with 2,000 respondents per country. In the survey, respondents were presented institutional scenarios of the EU varying in several key features of the EU policy-making structure that they were asked to evaluate and to choose between. In doing so, we contribute to the literature on EU support using experimental survey methods and conjoint analyses that are increasingly popular in the field of EU studies (see, e.g., Franchino and Segatti 2019, Hahm et al. 2019, Schneider 2019, Kuhn et al. 2020, Nicoli et al. 2020). Our findings bear important implications for scholars of European integration and for policy-makers seeking to reform the EU, as they provide a more fine-grained understanding of the effects that different institutional reforms can exert on citizens’ attitudes towards the EU and their legitimacy beliefs.

2. Literature review and research gaps

The research program on the EU’s empirical political legitimacy is primarily guided by the political support concept of David Easton (1965, 1975), which scholars have frequently applied to the European political system (Niedermayer and Westle 1995, Norris 1999, Krouwel and Abts 2007, Weßels 2007, Boomgaarden et al. 2011, Hobolt and De Vries 2016). Common to these approaches is the idea that attitudes towards the EU are not unidimensional but multidimensional, meaning that they can relate to different political objects at the supranational level. The exact conceptualization of these objects might differ, but often the main role falls to Easton’s main objects of political support: the political regime, its institutions, and the political community. However, such an understanding of multidimensionality seems a bit crude and

rarely reflects the institutional nuances of the present-day EU policy-making process. Consequently, we lack knowledge about the institutional features that people care most about when judging the EU's legitimacy. This gap in knowledge is regrettable, as it seems central for the further development of the European integration process to understand which potential reforms EU citizens deem most important.

So far, empirical research on EU support and public Euroscepticism mainly focused on explaining positive or negative attitudes towards European integration and EU membership, both on the micro and the macro level. A huge body of literature emerged from these efforts, broadly focusing on four different sets of explanations (Ejrnaes and Danis Jensen 2019). The first three of these were famously described by Hooghe and Marks (2005) as “calculation, community, and cues”. In order to cover the fourth approach, one would have to rephrase this into *calculation, community, cues, and comparisons*.

First, *utilitarian approaches* proclaim that citizens form their attitudes towards the EU based on personal or societal benefits (see, e.g., Eichenberg and Dalton 1993, Anderson and Kaltenthaler 1996, Gabel 1998). Such an instrumental understanding of support is understood to be primarily related to economic factors (Garry and Tilley 2015), but can also be connected to other policy preferences (Belot and Guinaudeau 2017). Second, *identity-based approaches* focus on people's cultural threat perceptions, such as the fear of losing their own cultural and national identities (Carey 2002, McLaren 2002) as well as hostility towards minority groups and immigrants (De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005). The third set of explanatory factors stresses the role of intermediary actors. These *cue-taking approaches* find significant effects of media frames (Vliegenhart et al. 2008, Marquart et al. 2018, Brosius et al. 2019, Van Elsas et al. 2019) and elite messages (Hobolt 2007, Steenbergen et al. 2007, De Vries and Edwards 2009, Vössing 2015, Pannico 2017). Fourth, *benchmarking approaches* show that people use national proxies or references, such as their evaluation of democracy at the domestic level or their trust in national institutions, when forming opinions about the EU (Anderson 1998, Rohrschneider 2000, Sanchez-Cuenca 2000, Kritzinger 2003, De Vries 2018). Taken together, we have a broad and deep knowledge about a variety of determinants for EU attitudes, but there is remarkably little focus on explanatory factors related to the EU itself – such as its institutional design or the nature of its policy outputs.

Moreover, although the concept of political legitimacy is frequently alluded to in empirical studies on EU attitudes (and attitudes toward the international level more generally), legitimacy theories are rarely employed to conceptualize the influence of institutional settings

for public support. This is particularly true for the rare cases where authors address the role of the EU's institutional architecture in surveys with experimental elements. In these few instances, however, the authors' choices of relevant institutional dimensions are hardly guided by theoretical concerns over political legitimacy and, thus, cannot make meaningful inferences about the EU's empirical legitimacy via the concept of EU support (De Vries and Hoffmann 2015, Hahm et al. 2019).

Yet, two studies provide important first findings regarding people's institutional EU preferences. First, De Vries and Hoffmann (2015) demonstrate that people prefer an EU of more or less the current size (28 members) that is predominantly designed to safeguard peace and security, as well as to promote economic growth, and about which they themselves can make decisions in referenda. However, the option for popular referendums is not pitted against other forms of citizen participation. Second, Hahm et al. (2019) analyze people's preferences towards the involvement of different EU institutions in various steps of the decision-making process. By doing so, the authors show that citizens want the European Parliament to have a right of legislative initiative, are in favor of majority voting in the Council, and support the co-decision procedure where the EP and the Council have equal weight. Unfortunately, the authors do not assess the relative impact of input factors vis-à-vis output factors.

Therefore, this paper not only builds on previous insights but also seeks to address remaining research gaps identified in the literature. In other words, we aim to investigate whether citizens care most about "input" or "output" dimensions of the EU's institutional design. Moreover, we are interested in the individual-level factors that moderate their legitimacy beliefs.

3. Theory and hypotheses

The two main dimensions of EU legitimacy are commonly called "input legitimacy" and "output legitimacy" (Scharpf 1999, Weiler 2012, Schmidt 2013), a terminology that is based on the systems theory of political science (Easton 1965) and that refers to the sources that legitimacy is derived from in the eyes of the people. *Input legitimacy* means that an institution's authority is regarded as legitimate based on its decision-making processes. Thus, democratic political systems are usually considered legitimate when citizens have the chance to influence policy-making via effective and equal participation mechanisms. The accountability of decision-making processes is essential for input legitimacy, which indicates the need for information transparency, participation of citizens, and clarity of responsibility (Lord and Magnette 2004). Legitimacy that relies mostly on procedural mechanisms is sometimes labeled

“throughput legitimacy” (Schmidt 2013, Schmidt and Wood 2019).³ Although Schmidt (2013: 2) defines it as being concerned with “the ‘black box’ of governance between input and output”, we agree with Hobolt (2012) that both input and throughput factors can be understood as two features of a “procedural-input-based model” of regime support (Hobolt 2012: 93). Traditionally, input legitimacy is considered to be rather weak in the case of the EU, which is why EU scholars mostly agree that the Union suffers from a “democratic deficit” (Follesdal and Hix 2006).⁴

Output legitimacy means that political authority is regarded as legitimate because policies are effective and beneficial for the majority of the people. In other words, output legitimacy is derived from positive outcomes of political decisions and the effectiveness of the policies adopted, even in cases where decisions emanate from procedures that do not conform to democratic ideals. For a long time, the powers vested in the EU have been primarily justified by the positive outcomes that the Union generated, especially in the economic realm. The idea that positive results per se justify political authority dates back to functionalist and neo-functionalist theories of European integration (Haas 1958, Mitrany 1966), and, for a long time, also seemed to satisfy the demands of European citizens (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970).

From a normative point of view, both forms of legitimacy seem to be deficient in the present-day EU, partly because the persisting economic and political crises can be seen as output failures caused by flaws in the EU’s institutional design. Hence, bridging the two legitimacy gaps should have positive effects on citizens’ support for the EU. Yet, the question of which source has the stronger impact on people’s legitimacy beliefs is still open. Although some authors argue that citizen support is more strongly related to the output side than the input side of the political system (Rothstein 2009), most studies on the subject show that the political legitimacy of the EU and other international organizations rests on a combination of both sources (Lindgren and Persson 2010, Hobolt, 2012, Bernauer et al. 2019). In the following, we argue that four factors – two on the input and two on the output side – should be particularly relevant for people’s willingness to accept EU policy decisions.

³ According to a recent definition, throughput legitimacy is “concerned with the quality of governance processes, as judged by the accountability of the policy-makers and the transparency, inclusiveness and openness of governance processes” (Schmidt and Wood 2019: 728).

⁴ A central reason for this deficit is that the linkage between citizens’ preferences and EU policies is not reliably ensured by institutional mechanisms, such as supranational elections that directly result in the formation of a government. Moreover, the chains of delegation in the EU are rather long, meaning that citizens or elected representatives are often unable to monitor and control decision-makers effectively. This leads to a lack of political representation and accountability that has not been resolved until today – despite successive Treaty reforms aiming to make the EU more democratic.

3.1. Input factors

We argue that two institutional features on the input side of the EU's political system should be particularly important for EU citizens and the political legitimacy of the Union: opportunities for citizens to *participate* in the policy-making and the overall *transparency* of the inter-institutional decision-making processes.

First, *participation* by citizens is a central concept in democratic theory (Dahl 1998), but has, until recently, been only poorly developed in the EU's political system. Although the first participatory instrument on the European level was established in 1979 with the direct election of the European Parliament, the EP remained a largely powerless institution until the introduction of the co-decision legislative procedure in the early 1990s. Yet, EP elections are still considered “second-order elections” where people perceive that there is less at stake than in national elections (Reif and Schmitt 1980). To strengthen its input legitimacy beyond these weak electoral linkages, the European Commission over time introduced other participatory instruments beyond the purely representative model. For example, it introduced the European Citizen Initiative (ECI) as the first element of direct democracy at the EU level and it increasingly used (online) consultations, which are mostly used by organized interest groups and civil society organizations. In 2019, the Commission announced a two-year process named the “Conference on the Future of Europe” aiming to “bring together citizens, including a significant role for young people, civil society, and European institutions as equal partners” and for European citizens to “have their say” (Von der Leyen 2019: 19). Apparently, the EU now puts great hope in the legitimizing function of such new elements of deliberative democracy (Cengiz 2018).

Another opportunity for citizens to have a direct influence on the European integration process is (or could be) through referendums. Until today, member states have tried to domestically legitimize European integration in more than 50 popular referendums (Lichteblau and Steinke 2017, Mendez and Mendez 2017). Besides such “EU membership referendums” like the 2016 Brexit referendum, they can also take the form of “Treaty revision referendums” or “EU policy referendums” (Mendez and Mendez 2017). The last of the three has been “the fastest growing category of EU referendums in recent years” (Mendez and Mendez 2017: 58), with votes on different policy issues, such as monetary policy or EU enlargement. Although there are currently no provisions for having EU-wide referendums, many scholars argue that this might be an option for the future development of the Union (Habermas 2001, Rose 2013). It has been shown that direct democratic instruments can provide empirical legitimacy to political

systems (Gherghina 2016), which makes them promissory tools for those who want to increase the EU's legitimacy.⁵

A second central input aspect that should provide legitimacy to the EU and its policies is the *transparency* of EU policy-making processes, which allows the accountability of political decisions to the responsible actors (Schmidt 2013). "Transparency means that citizens and political representatives have access to information about governance processes and that the processes along with the resulting decisions are public." (Schmidt and Wood 2019: 732). In the case of the EU, transparency refers to informative actions of EU institutions, i.e., when they make information about their internal processes available to the public. In particular, such practices seem important for the EU's legitimacy in the case of the Council (Novak and Hillbebrandt 2020) and when it comes to the access of lobbying and interest groups (Smismans 2014, Bunea 2018). Although empirical research finds positive effects between transparency and citizen satisfaction (Cucciniello et al. 2017), it is still up for debate whether increased transparency can enhance empirical legitimacy in the case of the European Union.⁶ However, the opacity of the EU's policy-making is still a major talking-point of many Eurosceptics, which is why we expect that enhancing the transparency of these processes should lead to increased support for the EU.

Taken together, we argue that two input factors should affect citizens' legitimacy beliefs. We expect, first, that the opportunities for *participation* should affect people's willingness to accept an EU policy decision. If deliberative and participatory elements of democracy are available to citizens, they should be more likely to support a given EU policy decision. In contrast, the perceived legitimacy of an EU decision should be comparably weak when participation is restricted to the indirect electoral channel (*hypothesis 1*). Second, we assume that the degree of *transparency* of the EU policy-making process should affect how legitimate EU policies are perceived by the citizens. The more information about the decision-making process is publicly available, the more likely should an individual citizen support a given EU policy decision. In contrast, if public information is limited and only available *ex post*, the perceived legitimacy of EU policy decisions should be weaker (*hypothesis 2*).

3.2. Output factors

⁵ However, apart from feasibility problems of EU-wide referendums (Mendez and Mendez 2017: 65), the observation of increasingly negative referendum outcomes – despite a rather pro-European consensus among political elites – can be interpreted as a representation/legitimacy gap on EU matters (Lichteblau and Steinke 2017: 198).

⁶ Interestingly, despite the widespread conviction that transparency negatively affects the efficiency of decision-making processes (Hood and Heald 2006), Brandsma and Meijer (2020) do not find a significant relationship between these two factors regarding EU policy decisions.

The relevance of output factors for political legitimacy is particularly high in the case of the EU. As laid out, the EU integration process has for a long time enjoyed the passive support of citizens, even though the transfer of competences to the supranational level was only insufficiently accompanied by institutional possibilities to affect policy-making. To put it bluntly, the EU had to deliver efficient policies with obvious collective benefits in order to be accepted by its citizens, especially in the realms of economic conditions (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993, 2007). In consequence, output failures such as the Euro crisis reveal that the EU's legitimacy is quickly contested when it fails to fulfill performance expectations (Serrichio et al. 2013, Braun and Tausendpfund 2014). Two output factors seem particularly important for the legitimacy of EU policy decisions: *effectiveness*, i.e., the degree to which a policy can solve an underlying problem, and the *relative benefits* that policies provide to individual member states.

While the problem-solving capacity of a policy decision should have obvious impacts on its perceived legitimacy, it is worth discussing how relative outcomes of policies should affect individual legitimacy beliefs. Evidently, not all member states benefit in the same way from any given EU policy: countries with large agriculture sectors might benefit more from the EU's common agricultural policy (CAP), and countries with large export industries might benefit more from international trade agreements. Supporting EU policy decision because of the perceived benefits for one's own country is in line with the utilitarian explanatory approach for EU attitudes (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993, 2007, Anderson and Kaltenthaler 1996) and with economic voting accounts in electoral research (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). In addition, the benchmark approach of EU attitudes centers explicitly on people's tendency to compare their domestic situation with other countries.⁷ Moreover, constant public debates around net-recipient and net-contributing member states and the support for European integration by regional parties whose regions receive disproportionately more EU funding (Gross and Debus 2018) are further indications for the importance of such benchmarking logics when it comes to EU preferences. Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed that EU citizens consider relative benefits of EU policies and reward them with higher support.

Taken together, we argue that the performance of EU policies should affect citizens' legitimacy beliefs in two ways. We expect, first, that the overall *effectiveness* of a policy decision should increase people's willingness to accept an EU policy decision. The more effectively a policy is expected to solve an underlying problem, the more likely should an individual citizen

⁷ This logic can also be traced back to benchmarking approaches in social psychology (Clark et al. 2008) and electoral research – both on the regional and the international level (Duch and Stevenson 2008, Kayser and Peress 2012).

support a given EU policy decision. In contrast, the perceived legitimacy of an EU decision should be comparably weak, when the expected problem-solving capacity of a policy decision is small (*hypothesis 3*). Second, we assume that *relative benefits* that an EU policy provides to a person's own country should affect how legitimate EU policies are perceived. The more one's own member state is expected to benefit from a given EU policy decision compared to other EU member states, the more likely should individual citizens support this decision. In contrast, if the relative benefits are expected to be smaller than for other countries, the perceived legitimacy of an EU policy decision should be comparably weaker (*hypothesis 4*).

3.3. Hypotheses overview

Above, we have theoretically derived four hypotheses about the impact of different input and output factors for people's EU support, and thus, for the EU's political legitimacy. Formally, our hypotheses read as follows:

H1: The greater the chances to participate are in the EU policy-making process, the greater is a person's willingness to accept the EU policy decision.

H2.: The more transparent the EU policy-making process is, the greater is a person's willingness to accept the EU policy decision.

H3: The more effective an EU policy is expected to be, the greater is a person's willingness to accept the EU policy decision.

H4: The higher the relative national benefit of an EU policy is expected to be, the greater is a person's willingness to accept the EU policy decision.

As mentioned, we are additionally interested in individual-level factors that moderate the effects of the input and output factors laid out in the four hypotheses. For example, it seems intuitively plausible that Europhiles and Eurosceptics might (de)value different features of the EU's institutional design. Moreover, the existence of populist attitudes could have effects on how input factors of the political system are evaluated. However, we do not form explicit theoretical hypotheses regarding these moderation effects at this stage.

4. Research design, data and experimental setting

In order to empirically test the theoretical hypotheses, we conducted an online survey in six different EU member states (RECONNECT Citizen Survey): Denmark, France,

Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Spain. In each country, the sample size is $n=2,000$ respondents, which yields an overall sample size of $n=12,000$.⁸ In order to improve representativity, the sample was stratified according to gender, age, and educational attainment (based on 2019 Eurostat population data). This “quota random sampling” has been conducted for an online access panel database provided by KANTAR. The interviews were led online between 11 September and 23 October 2020 and took, on average, between 12 and 14 minutes depending on the country.⁹

In the survey, we implemented a pre-registered survey experiment. It consists of a multifactorial survey module, where respondents were confronted with different fictional EU policy decisions and asked for their judgements. This experimental tool has become increasingly popular in political science, especially under the label “conjoint analysis” following Hainmueller and his colleagues (Hainmueller et al. 2014, Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015, Bechtel et al. 2017). The reason is that this technique allows researchers to analyze “situations in which a decision maker has to deal with options that simultaneously vary across two or more attributes” (Green et al. 2001: 57). With the help of multifactorial surveys, we can thus “identify the causal effects of various components of a treatment in survey experiments” (Hainmueller et al. 2014: 2). Other advantages of conjoint analyses are the possibilities to inform respondents with various information (enhanced realism), to test large number of causal hypothesis in a single study (cost efficiency), to evaluate the relative explanatory power of different theories (multiple treatment components), and to receive insights into practical problems (such as policy designs and institutional reforms).

Following Hainmueller et al. (2015), we presented eight EU policy decisions in four pairs, because “paired designs, in general, outperform the single-profile designs, and the evidence suggests that the paired designs induce more engagement and less satisficing among respondents.” (Hainmueller et al. 2015: 2400). To make sure that respondents were engaged with these hypothetical settings from the beginning, we asked them first to choose a policy area in which they “would prefer most that the EU takes political decisions”.¹⁰ Afterwards, respondents were explicitly presented EU decisions in the policy area chosen and reminded that these decisions “would have a substantial impact on people’s lives”. Each policy decision consists of six

⁸ In order to secure high data quality, we deliberately oversampled and then excluded 1,586 respondents (11.7%) on the basis of different quality criteria (e.g., IP and identity verification, interview length and number of missing values, honesty and other “survey health” checks.).

⁹ An initial pretest was conducted in all six countries on 13/14 July 2020.

¹⁰ The exact question wording is: “The European Union can take political decisions in several policy areas. However, other policy areas are reserved to the sole competence of the member states. In which of the following policy areas would you prefer most that the EU takes political decisions?” Respondents could then choose between twelve different policy areas (single choice, random rotation of responses).

attributes (dimensions), where each attribute varies randomly over three different values (levels). The 18 treatments (6 dimensions * 3 levels) add up to 729 (3^6) different experimental conditions, i.e., combinations of attribute levels (vignettes). Importantly, the size of this vignette universe (or “full factorial”) is much lower than the overall number of vignettes that respondents had to evaluate, which add up to 96,000 vignettes (12,000 respondents * 8 vignettes for each respondent).

Table 1: Dimensions and Levels of the multifactorial survey module (experimental treatments)

Dimension	Description	Levels
(1) Bindingness of policy decision	<i>How binding or optional is the decision for the EU member countries, including [Country]?</i>	• Every country must apply the decision • Single countries may deviate in exceptional circumstances • Each country may apply the decision voluntarily
(2) National veto power/ possibility of being outvoted	<i>If a country, including [Country], disagrees with the decision, can it be outvoted by other EU member countries?</i>	• A country cannot be outvoted (veto power) • A country can be outvoted only by a large majority (75%) • A country can be outvoted by a small majority (50%)
(3) Opportunities for citizen participation → H1	<i>How can European citizens influence the decision-making process?</i>	• Through parliamentary elections only • Through parliamentary elections and a citizen consultation • Through parliamentary elections and a referendum
(4) Transparency/ public information → H2	<i>Is information about the decision-making process publicly available for all citizens?</i>	• Not available • Available after the decision has been made • Available throughout the whole process
(5) Relative benefit for [Country] → H3	<i>What is the expected benefit of the decision for [Country]?</i>	• Less than for other countries • The same as for other countries • More than for other countries
(6) Effectiveness/ problem-solving → H4	<i>Based on previous experiences with comparable policy decisions, to what degree will the decision solve the underlying policy problem?</i>	• To a small degree • To a moderate degree • To a large degree

The experimental conditions are displayed in Table 1. To guarantee that respondents understand the dimensions, we presented them short descriptions beforehand, which were also readable during the evaluative tasks that followed (see Tab. 1, in italics). Of the six dimensions displayed, we use four to test our theoretical propositions (see Tab. 1, in bold). The indicators from the third (“Opportunities for citizen participation”) and fourth dimensions (“Transparency/public information”) are used to test hypotheses H1 and H2 regarding the effects of input factors. *Citizen participation* includes elements of electoral, deliberative and direct democracy, whereas transparency contains different extents to which information about the decision-making process are public. The treatments of the fifth (“Relative benefit for [Country]”) and sixth dimensions

(“Effectiveness/problem-solving “) are suitable to test our hypotheses H3 and H4 concerning the effects of output factors. For both dimensions, the three respective levels are quite straightforward.

As mentioned, every respondent evaluated eight different vignettes in four successive tasks. More specifically, respondents were given two mandatory tasks: a (discrete) choice task and a rating task.¹¹ Figure 1 illustrates these experimental task(s) in the version that the respondents in Germany faced (in German language). First, they were asked which of the two EU policy decisions displayed they would prefer. Second, they were asked how much they would be “in favor of or opposed to each EU policy decision”. This implies that for every single vignette, the first question resulted in a binary variable (0=vignette not chosen, 1=vignette chosen), whereas the second question yielded a rating score on an 11-point interval scale ranging from “totally opposed” (-5) to “totally in favor” (+5).

Figure 1: Example for the multifactorial survey module (German version)

	Option A	Option B
Verbindlichkeit	Jedes Land muss die Entscheidung umsetzen	Einzelne Länder können bei außergewöhnlichen Umständen von der Entscheidung abweichen
Möglichkeit, überstimmt zu werden	Ein Land kann nur von einer großen Mehrheit (75%) überstimmt werden	Ein Land kann nur von einer großen Mehrheit (75%) überstimmt werden
Bürgerbeteiligung	Nur durch Parlamentswahlen	Durch Parlamentswahlen und eine Bürgerbefragung
Öffentliche Informationen	Nicht zugänglich	Während des gesamten Prozesses zugänglich
Nutzen für Deutschland	Genauso wie für andere Länder	Geringer als für andere Länder
Problemlösung	In mittlerem Ausmaß	In starkem Ausmaß
	Welche der beiden politischen EU-Entscheidungen würden Sie bevorzugen?	
	○	○
	Wie sehr wären Sie für oder gegen die jeweilige politische Entscheidung der EU?	
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 Absolut dagegen Absolut dafür	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ -5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5 Absolut dagegen Absolut dafür

Zur Erklärung der Merkmale können Sie einfach den Cursor über das entsprechende Merkmal bewegen.

5. Empirical analysis and results

As the two resulting dependent variables are of very different nature, they are analyzed in two distinct steps of analysis. First, for the binary choice variable, we estimate logistic regression models (with respondent-clustered standard errors) and present average marginal component effects (AMCE) for each level of the four central dimensions (see Hainmueller et al.

¹¹ It was technically impossible for respondents to skip these tasks (an exception in the survey).

2014).¹² Additionally, we present the results as marginal means when it comes to sub-group analyses (see Leeper et al. 2020). Second, for the rating variable, we compute hierarchical linear regression models, where the 96,000 rated vignettes are nested in the 12,000 respondents. This allows us to correctly estimate interaction effects between the institutional features (i.e., the dimension levels) and respondent characteristics, all while avoiding biased standard errors and significance levels (Auspurg and Hinz 2015).

Figure 2: Predictors of choosing an EU policy decision (AMCEs, 99% CIs)

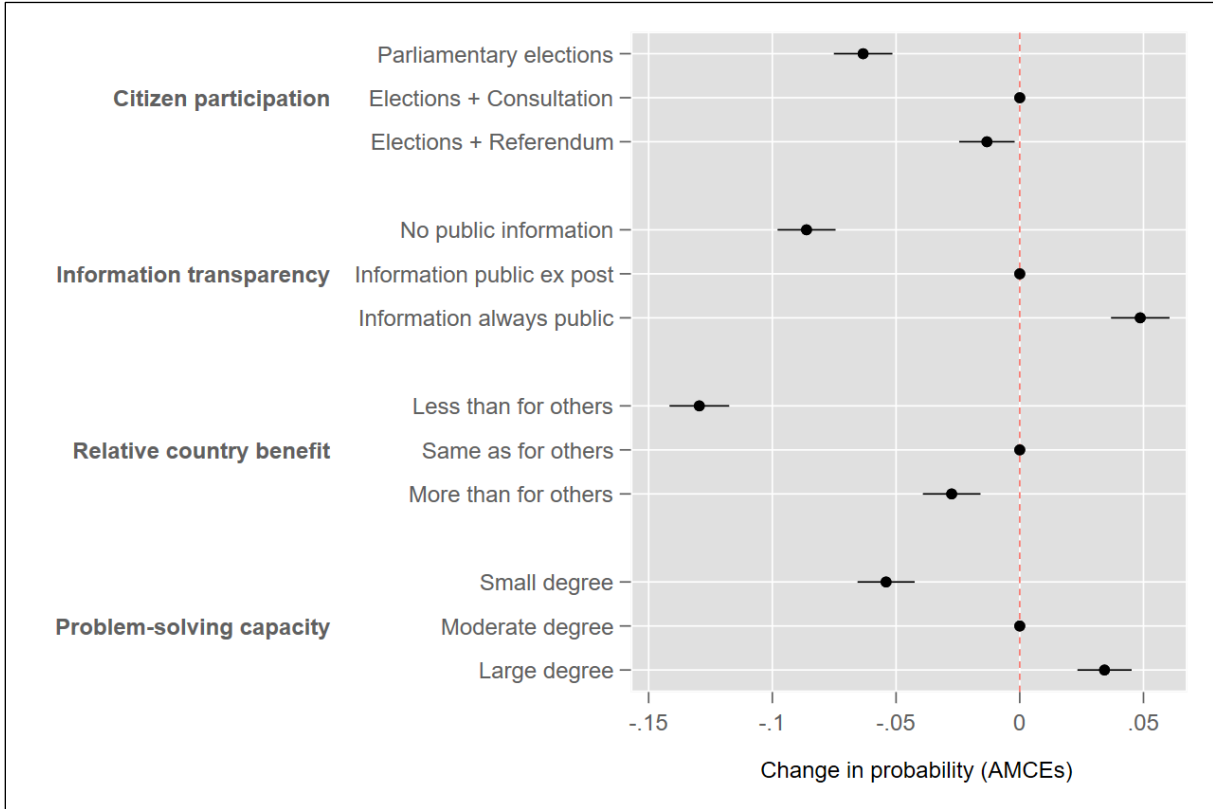


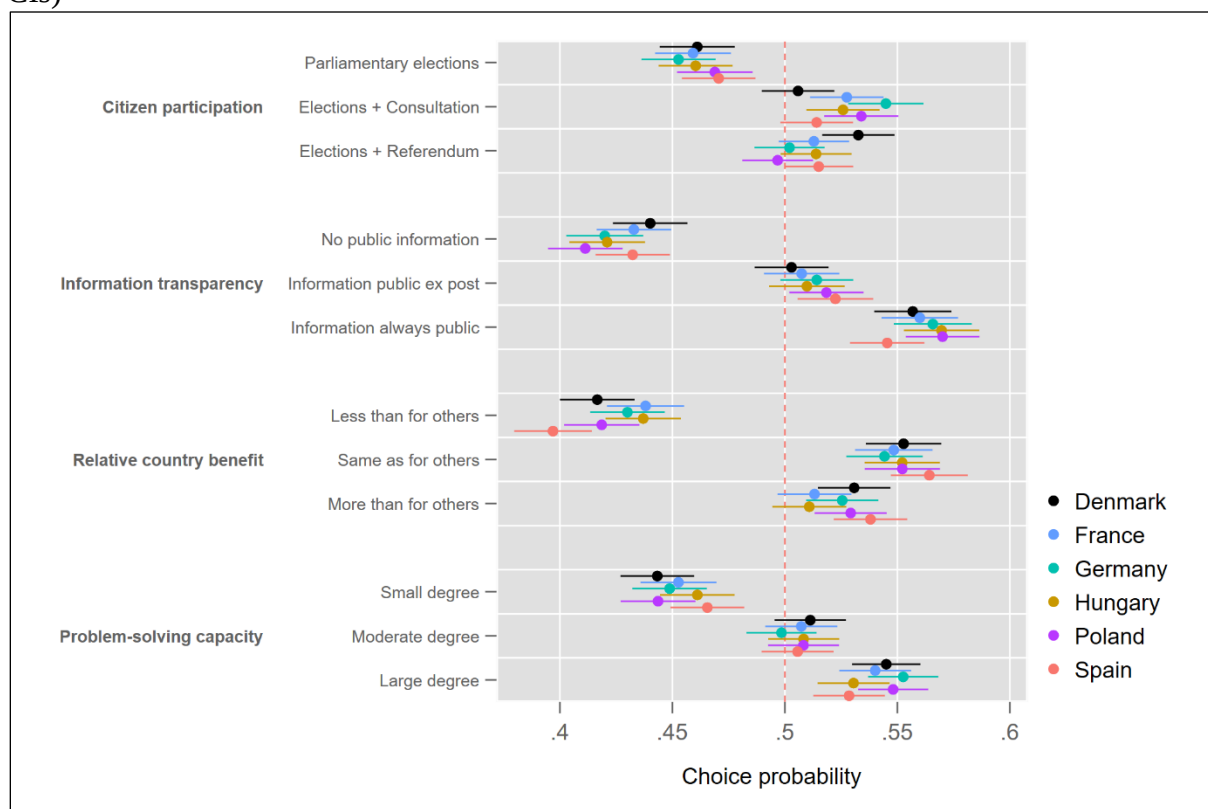
Figure 2 illustrates the central results of the first logistic regression model containing all 96,000 rated vignettes. Clearly, both input and output factors employ strong effects on the vignette choice. On the input side, *information transparency* has the more straightforward effect. Compared to the medium option (information “available after the decision has been made”), the most transparent level (“available throughout the whole process”) results in a higher probability of 4.9 percentage points to choose the policy decision vignette, whereas the least transparent option (“not available”) yields an 8.6-point lower likelihood. In contrast, citizen participation contains one level that is clearly less preferred than the other two: participation “through parliamentary elections only” yields a 6.3-point lower probability for the vignette to be chosen by respondents. Somewhat surprisingly, the most preferred participation value is the

¹² See Table A1 in the appendix for the full results of all logistic regression models.

deliberative option (“through parliamentary elections and a citizen consultation”), which produces a 2-point higher choice likelihood than the direct democracy option (“through parliamentary elections and a referendum”).

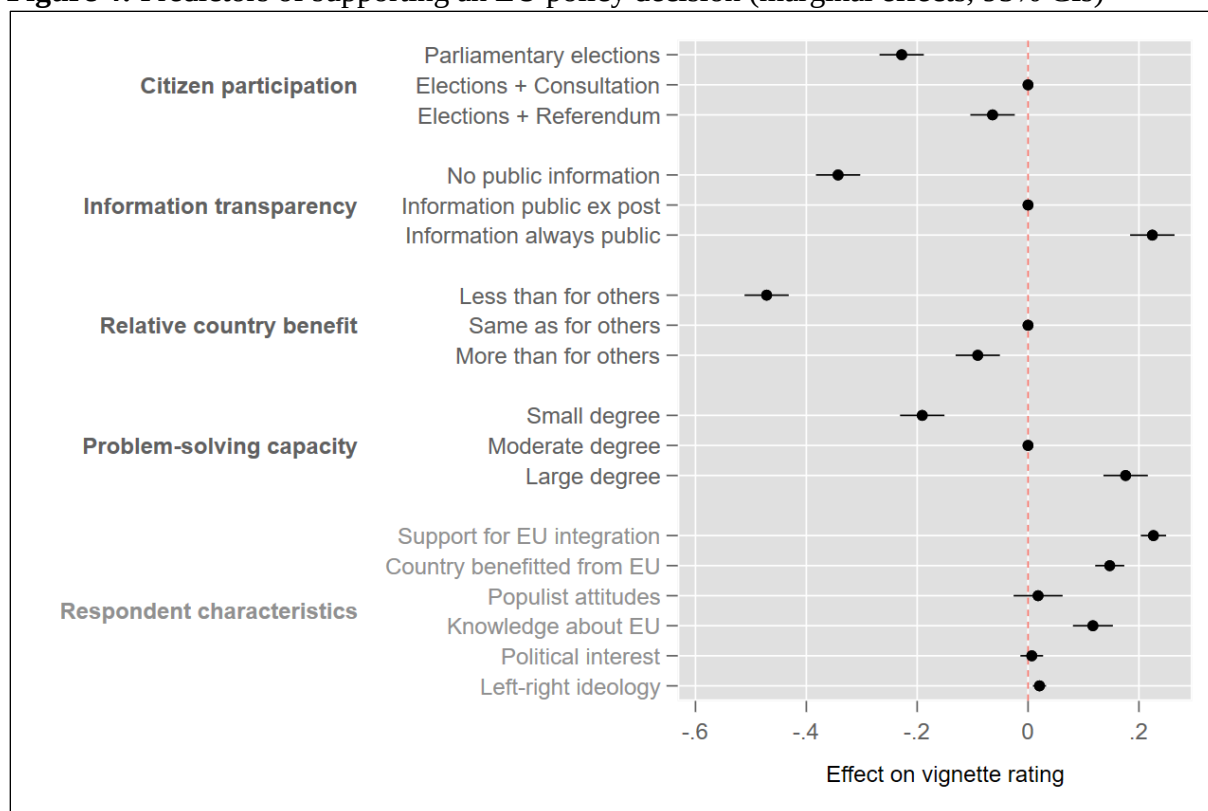
Still, output factors matter at least as much as input factors for citizens when it comes to judging the legitimacy of EU policy decisions. The *effectiveness* of policy decisions to solve underlying problems generates a linear effect from the weakest (-5.4 percentage points compared to the middle option) to the strongest level (+3.4 percentage points). Interestingly, the picture looks different for the *relative country benefits*. Here, the most preferred option is the middle level (“same as for other countries”), which yields a 2.8-point higher choice probability than the most beneficial level (“more than for other countries”). However, it is striking that the least beneficial level (“less than for others”) results in a comparably large drop in choice probability (-13 percentage points) compared to the middle option. Taken together, it seems that people prefer most an EU, that is transparent and in which they have a greater say, but that also delivers effective outputs and works for all countries similarly.

Figure 3: Predictors of choosing an EU policy decision across countries (marginal means, 99% CIs)



Looking at the regression for the six countries separately (see Figure 3), it becomes clear that the overall findings hold in most contexts.¹³ However, single deviations are noticeable. In Denmark, for example, people prefer referendums instead of citizen consultations. In contrast, the deliberative element of democracy is most popular in Germany and Poland. Information transparency is relevant in all countries, but remarkably less so in Spain. In contrast, the Spanish respondents are most sensitive for EU policy decisions that works less for them than for other countries, but they are less concerned with the overall effectiveness of policies. The latter is also true for people from Hungary. Taken together, it can be said that both input and output factors matter for EU citizens across Europe when it comes to express willingness to accept EU policy decision.¹⁴

Figure 4: Predictors of supporting an EU policy decision (marginal effects, 95% CIs)



Next, we estimate linear multilevel regression models with the vignette rating score as dependent variable.¹⁵ This enables us to include respondent characteristics in the models as well as to estimate interaction effects between those and the institutional features presented in the

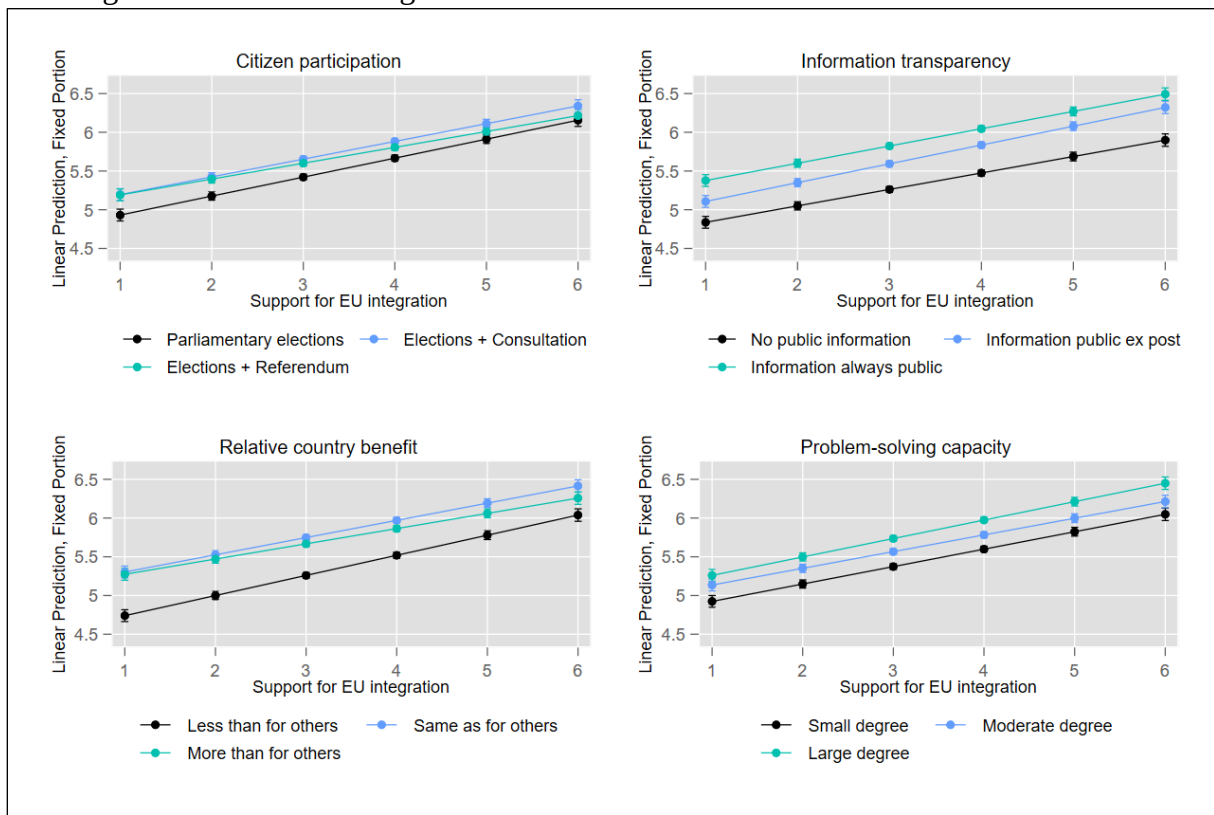
¹³ The results are displayed in marginal means (following Leeper et al. 2020), which means that they can range from 0 to 1 (0%-100% predicted choice probability). However, they are additionally expressed in AMCEs in Figure A1 (see appendix). Furthermore, the logit coefficients can be found in Table A1 (see appendix).

¹⁴ It can be added, however, that the (joint) relevance of input factors is highest in Germany and Hungary, whereas output factors dominate in Denmark and Spain (see Table A2 in the appendix).

¹⁵ See Table A3 in the appendix for the full multilevel regression results.

vignettes without producing biased standard errors. Figure 4 shows that the effects of the four vignette dimensions barely change when including respondent-level characteristics, such as support for EU integration, populist attitudes, political interest or left-right ideology. Of course, some of these variables employ strong effects on people's rating behavior. The more people support further European integration, for example, the rather they support a given EU policy decision, independently from the exact configuration of input and output factors. Moreover, these results underline that the effects are independent from the operationalization of the dependent variable, i.e. whether we analyze the choice task or the rating task.

Figure 5: Model predictions for the interaction effects between respondent-level support for EU integration and the main vignette dimensions



Last but not least, we are also interested in how certain respondent characteristics – particularly attitudes towards European integration¹⁶ and individual-level populism¹⁷ – moderate the effects of the input and output dimensions of the EU policy decisions. Therefore, we have also integrated interaction terms between these two variables and all vignette attributes.¹⁸

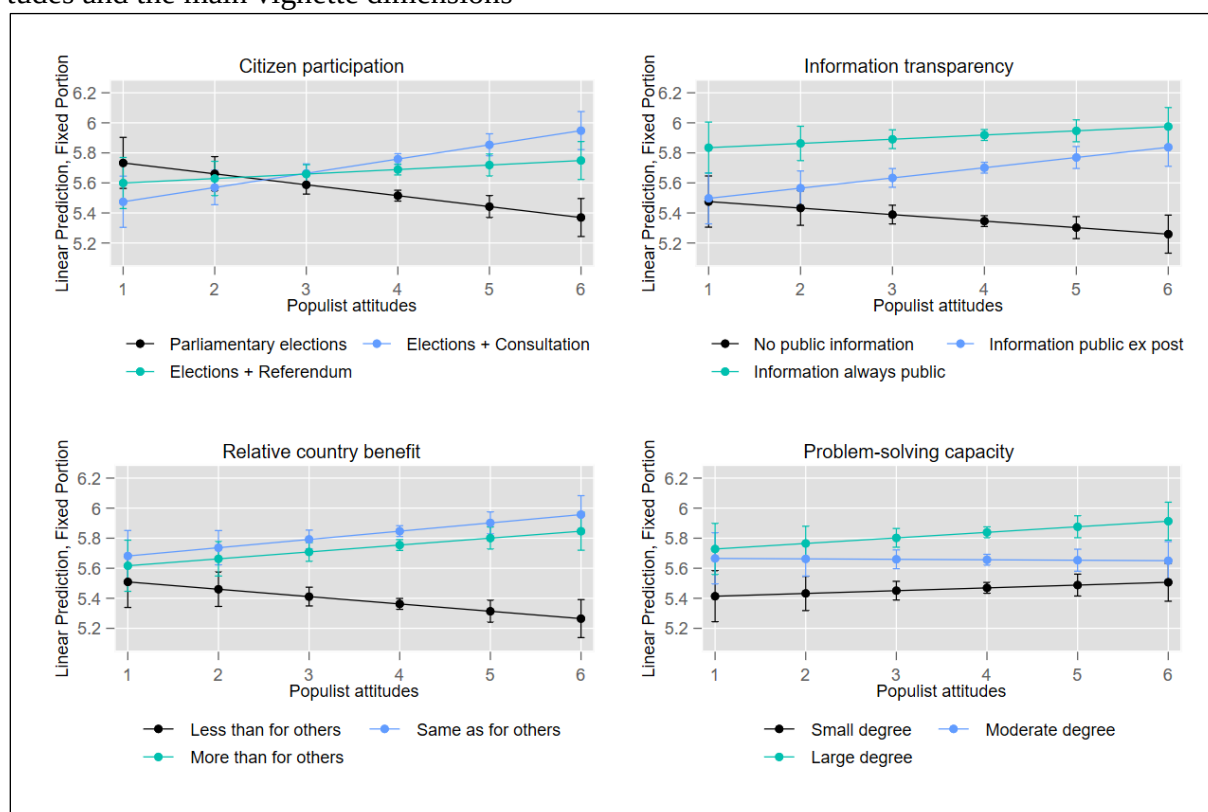
¹⁶ Item wording in the survey: “Some people say that the European Union should have more competences to take political decisions in Europe. Others say that the nation states should regain competences that were transferred to the EU. What is your opinion on this topic?” Response options on a scale from 1 (“Nation states should regain competences”) to 6 (“The EU should have more competences”) or “Don’t know”.

¹⁷ We adopted a populism score following Castanho Silva et al. (2018), which is a sum index of six different attitude questions. The index ranges from 1 (least populist) to 6 (most populist).

¹⁸ See Table A3 in the appendix for the complete regression results (“Interaction model”).

Figure 5 displays the interaction effects with individual support for EU integration, whereas Figure 6 illustrates the interaction effects with individual-level populism.¹⁹ It is evident that the first variable (EU integration support) is a key driver for supporting any EU policy decisions, but it barely interacts with the input and output factors of the vignette dimensions. In contrast, populist attitudes do not exert a direct effect on the vignette ratings (see also Figure 4), but employ interesting moderations with how respondents reacted to the two input and even one output factors. Whereas people with low populism scores do not show statistically significant differences in support for the EU policy decisions, highly populist individuals rate those vignettes higher that contain elements of deliberative or direct democracy. Moreover, these citizens give the lowest rating to vignettes that contain the “low transparency” and the “weak relative country benefits” options. The lower the populism score, the less relevant do these dimensions become for how much people supported the EU policy decisions.

Figure 6: Model predictions for the interaction effects between respondent-level populist attitudes and the main vignette dimensions



Taken together, we have thus seen that institutional input and output factors both matter quite equally for people’s legitimacy beliefs regarding the EU across Europe. However, they are partly outperformed or moderated by individual dispositions and attitudes.

¹⁹ The scale of the dependent variable ranges from 1 to 11 here (instead of from -5 to +5).

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Appendix

Table A1: Predictors of choosing a given EU policy decision (logistic regression results)

	Overall	Denmark	France	Germany	Hungary	Poland	Spain
Bindingness							
<i>(base: Opt-out possibility)</i>							
Mandatory implementation	-0.12*** (0.02)	-0.31*** (0.05)	0.12* (0.05)	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.15** (0.05)	-0.30*** (0.05)	-0.01 (0.05)
Voluntary compliance	-0.07*** (0.02)	-0.15** (0.05)	0.16*** (0.05)	-0.27*** (0.05)	0.12* (0.05)	-0.18*** (0.05)	-0.12* (0.05)
Council voting							
<i>(base: Qualified majority)</i>							
Unanimity (national veto)	-0.29*** (0.02)	-0.14** (0.04)	-0.15*** (0.04)	-0.37*** (0.04)	-0.39*** (0.05)	-0.31*** (0.04)	-0.39*** (0.05)
Simple majority	-0.29*** (0.02)	-0.29*** (0.04)	-0.14** (0.04)	-0.30*** (0.04)	-0.33*** (0.04)	-0.29*** (0.04)	-0.40*** (0.05)
Citizen participation							
<i>(base: Elections + consultation)</i>							
Parliamentary elections	-0.26*** (0.02)	-0.19*** (0.05)	-0.28*** (0.05)	-0.39*** (0.05)	-0.27*** (0.05)	-0.27*** (0.05)	-0.18*** (0.05)
Elections + referendum	-0.06** (0.02)	0.11* (0.04)	-0.06 (0.04)	-0.18*** (0.05)	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.16*** (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)
Information transparency							
<i>(base: Information public ex post)</i>							
No public information	-0.36*** (0.02)	-0.26*** (0.05)	-0.31*** (0.05)	-0.39*** (0.05)	-0.37*** (0.05)	-0.45*** (0.05)	-0.38*** (0.05)
Information always public	0.20*** (0.02)	0.22*** (0.05)	0.22*** (0.05)	0.21*** (0.05)	0.25*** (0.05)	0.22*** (0.05)	0.10* (0.05)
Relative country benefit							
<i>(base: same as for others)</i>							
Less than for others	-0.54*** (0.02)	-0.56*** (0.05)	-0.45*** (0.05)	-0.48*** (0.05)	-0.48*** (0.05)	-0.56*** (0.05)	-0.69*** (0.05)
More than for others	-0.11*** (0.02)	-0.09* (0.05)	-0.14** (0.05)	-0.08 (0.05)	-0.17*** (0.05)	-0.10* (0.05)	-0.11* (0.05)
Problem-solving capacity							
<i>(base: moderate degree)</i>							
Small degree	-0.22*** (0.02)	-0.28*** (0.05)	-0.22*** (0.05)	-0.21*** (0.05)	-0.20*** (0.05)	-0.27*** (0.05)	-0.17*** (0.05)
Large degree	0.14*** (0.02)	0.14*** (0.04)	0.14** (0.04)	0.23*** (0.04)	0.09* (0.04)	0.17*** (0.04)	0.10* (0.04)
Pseudo R²	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.03
Observations	96,000	16,000	16,000	16,000	16,000	16,000	16,000

Note: Displayed are logit coefficients with respondent-clustered standard errors in parentheses; the constant is not displayed; significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A2: Impact of input and output factors across countries (country model predictions: differences in predicted choice probabilities for least and most preferred options)

	Inputs			Outputs		
	Least preferred	Most preferred	Delta	Least preferred	Most preferred	Delta
Denmark	40.2%	58.9%	18.7 pp	36.1%	59.8%	23.7 pp
France	39.3%	58.8%	19.5 pp	39.1%	58.8%	19.7 pp
Germany	37.2%	61.0%	23.8 pp	38.0%	59.7%	21.7 pp
Hungary	38.2%	59.5%	21.3 pp	39.9%	58.3%	18.4 pp
Poland	38.1%	60.4%	22.3 pp	36.3%	60.0%	23.7 pp
Spain	40.3%	56.1%	15.8 pp	36.3%	59.3%	23.0 pp

Note: Displayed are adjusted predictions (predictive margins) based on the six country (logistic regression) models; “least preferred” inputs factors are defined as low transparency (no information available) and participation through parliamentary elections only; “most preferred” input factors are defined as high information transparency (information always available) and citizen participation via elections and citizen consultations (for Denmark and Spain: elections and referendum); “least preferred” output factors are weak relative country benefits (less than for other countries) and low problem-solving capacity (small degree); “most preferred” output factors are medium relative country benefits (same as for other countries) and high problem-solving capacity (large degree); the other variables are kept at their observed values.

Table A3: Predictors of support for EU policy decisions (multilevel linear regression results)

	Empty model	Vignette model	Respond- ent model	Full model	Interac- tion model
<i>Vignette features</i>					
<i>Bindingness</i>					
Mandatory implementation		-0.05** (0.02)		-0.04* (0.02)	-0.83*** (0.14)
Voluntary compliance		-0.03 (0.02)		-0.06** (0.02)	0.32* (0.14)
<i>Council voting rule</i>					
Unanimity (national veto)		-0.27*** (0.02)		-0.27*** (0.02)	0.34* (0.14)
Simple majority		-0.25*** (0.02)		-0.28*** (0.02)	-0.31* (0.14)
<i>Citizen participation</i>					
Parliamentary elections		-0.24*** (0.02)		-0.23*** (0.02)	0.37** (0.14)
Elections + Referendum		-0.08*** (0.02)		-0.06** (0.02)	0.27* (0.14)
<i>Information transparency</i>					
No public information		-0.34*** (0.02)		-0.34*** (0.02)	0.19 (0.14)
Information always public		0.21*** (0.02)		0.22*** (0.02)	0.45** (0.14)
<i>Relative country benefit</i>					
Less than for others		-0.44*** (0.02)		-0.47*** (0.02)	-0.20 (0.14)
More than for others		-0.08*** (0.02)		-0.09*** (0.02)	0.03 (0.14)
<i>Problem-solving capacity</i>					
Small degree		-0.20*** (0.02)		-0.19*** (0.02)	-0.31* (0.14)
Large degree		0.15*** (0.02)		0.18*** (0.02)	-0.05 (0.14)
<i>Respondent characteristics</i>					
Support for EU integration			0.23*** (0.01)	0.23*** (0.01)	0.23*** (0.02)
Country benefits from EU			0.15*** (0.01)	0.15*** (0.01)	0.15*** (0.01)
Populist attitudes			0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	0.18*** (0.05)
Knowledge about the EU			0.12*** (0.02)	0.12*** (0.02)	0.12*** (0.02)
Political interest			0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Left-right ideology			0.02*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)	0.02*** (0.01)
<i>Cross-level interactions</i>					
Mandatory implementation # EU_integration					0.18*** (0.01)
Voluntary compliance # EU_integration					-0.10*** (0.01)
Unanimity (national veto) # EU_integration					-0.13*** (0.01)
Simple majority # EU_integration					0.04** (0.01)

Parliamentary elections # EU_integration	0.02 (0.01)
Elections + Referendum # EU_integration	-0.02 (0.01)
No public information # EU_integration	-0.03* (0.01)
Information always public # EU_integration	-0.02 (0.01)
Less than for others # EU_integration	0.04** (0.01)
More than for others # EU_integration	-0.03 (0.01)
Small degree # EU_integration	0.01 (0.01)
Large degree # EU_integration	0.02 (0.01)
Mandatory implementation # populist	0.04 (0.03)
Voluntary compliance # populist	-0.01 (0.03)
Unanimity (national veto) # populist	-0.05 (0.03)
Simple majority # populist	-0.03 (0.03)
Parliamentary elections # populist	-0.17*** (0.03)
Elections + Referendum # populist	-0.06* (0.03)
No public information # populist	-0.11*** (0.03)
Information always public # populist	-0.04 (0.03)
Less than for others # populist	-0.10** (0.03)
More than for others # populist	-0.01 (0.03)
Small degree # populist	0.02 (0.03)
Large degree # populist	0.04 (0.03)

Unexplained variance					
Vignette level	4.43	4.28	4.75	4.59	4.54
Respondent level	1.19	1.21	1.03	1.05	1.06
Observations	96,000	96,000	67,664	67,664	67,664

*Note: Displayed are coefficients from five multilevel (random intercept) regression models (maximum likelihood estimation) with standard errors in parentheses; significance levels: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

Figure A1: Predictors of choosing an EU policy decision across countries (AMCEs, 99% CIs)

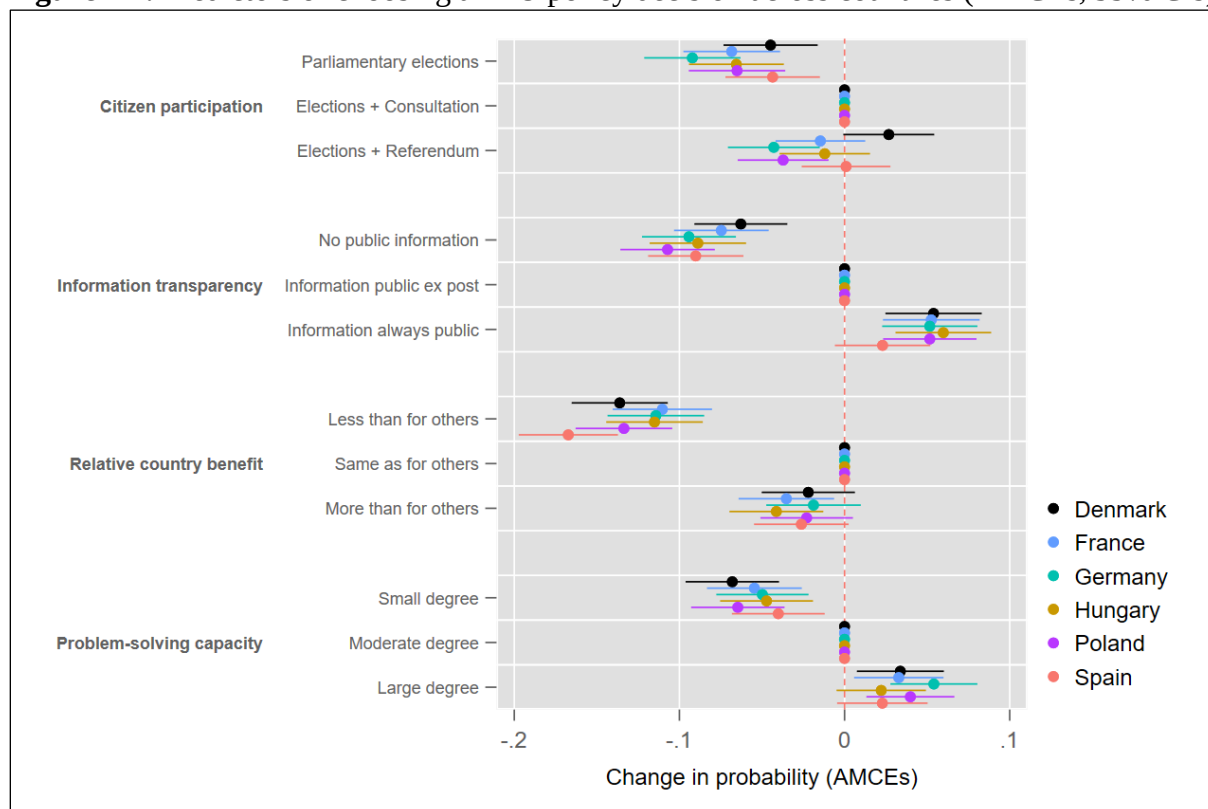


Figure A2: Predictors of choosing an EU policy decision across policy areas (Marginal means, 99% CIs)

