PAP – Salience, Complexity, and Cueing Effects in Public Preferences on EU policies

Main aims and research question:

The mass-elite linkages are key to gauge the functioning of a polity, especially one that is in the process of forming like the European Union (Feld 1976; Bartolini 2005, chap. 6), and especially in times of crisis (Steenbergen, Edwards, and de Vries 2007): i.e. when politicians can influence voters to achieve significant reforms of a political and voters feedback their evaluations of these reforms to politicians (Ferrara, Schelkle, and Truchlewski 2022). A module on cueing would inquire into the ways in which elites can influence the public acceptance of EU related policies and, more generally, EU support as a whole. As such, it speaks to the strength of bonding in the EU polity. More generally, an experiment on cueing could tell us how susceptible such bonding is to "crafting" from domestic actors under various conditions.

This specific experiment starts from the assumption that cueing is particularly prevalent when it comes to EU politics either because EU politics are too complex or because EU issues are not highly salient, with the two explanations not being parsed out in previous studies (Pannico 2020). Clarifying which of these two routes makes cueing more prevalent would have important implications in showing how volatile EU support is and in better decerning the effects of politicizing EU issues on bonding. Do people hold stronger attitudes when it comes to salient issues, or are they more easily swayed in their opinion when issues are presented as complex? And of course, what ideological-identitarian groups are more susceptible to these effects? The results are important because paradoxically if the salience hypothesis is true, it might be harder to sway/convince voters for EU policies during crises, for example, when it is all the more important to gather support around policies. Furthermore, there is ongoing research in economic behaviour (Dertwinkel-Kalt and Koster, 2023) that salience can mitigate the effects of complexity on cueing – does this happen in EU politics? In other words, what are the effects of salience and complexity in cueing when it comes to EU politics? Are people more easily swayed when presented with non-salient and highly complex issues? Can salience mitigate the effects of complexity on cueing?

Data and Experimental Design:

To answer these questions, I field a factorial survey with 2 factors (policy and cue source) in 16 European countries Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden. The data collection will be conducted until the 20th of June 2024 (when access to the data will be

gained) using CAWI methodology on YouGov's proprietary panel, on representative samples of around 2000 respondents per country (with the exception of Latvia with 700 respondents).

For the experimental design I vary 2 Factors, one with 4 levels and one with 3 levels, resulting in a universe of 12 vignettes. Levels within factors are randomized and each respondent is randomly assigned a single vignette from this universe. The experiment is placed at the end of a survey containing a wide-range of socio-demographic and political indicators that we aim to study in terms of effect heterogeneity, as further detailed below. The experiment also includes two pre-treatment assessments of the salience of the issues areas that the policies in Factor 1 involve.

Design:

Pre-treatment salience:

[FF1a] How important are the following issues to you?

Select a value from 0 to 10, where 0 means "Not important at all" and 10 means "Extremely important".

[F1a_1] Public health
[F1a_2] Energy and cost-of-living

<1> 0 – Not important at all
<2> 1
<3> 2
<4> 3
<5> 4
<6> 5
<7> 6
<8> 7
<9> 8
<10> 9
<11> 10 – Extremely important
<99> Don't know

Experimental set-up:

Please read the statement below carefully before answering the question which follows.

The European Commission has announced FACTOR 1.

FACTOR 2.

Attribute/ Factor	Levels	Restrictions to combinations

FF1 Salience - Complexity	LL1 – new measures to tackle the energy and cost of living crisis. The measures aim at protecting the EU economy from excessively high energy prices. The measures propose a better coordination of gas purchases and prices, and exchanges of gas across Member State borders in case of shortages. *#HighSalience_LowComplexity* LL2 – new measures to tackle the energy and cost of living crisis. In line with Regulation 2022/2578/EU the measures aim at establishing a market correction mechanism to protect the EU economy against excessively high energy prices that would not reflect prices on the world market. The measures propose aggregation of EU demand, joint gas purchasing, and default solidarity rules in case of supply shortages. *#HighSalience_HighComplexity* LL3 – new measures for the sharing of health data between Member States. The measures provide guidelines for the storing and sharing of health data in a common electronic format according to EU regulations. The measures would make health data be easily accessible anywhere in the EU and would promote exchange of patients' data. *#LowSalience_LowComplexity* LL4 – new measures for the sharing of health data between Member States. The measures provide guidelines on developing an Electronic Health Record System (EHR) that shall be interoperable and compatible with the Cross-Border Directive 2011/24/EU on the sharing of health data. The EHR system shall enable data sharing in a commonly used and machine-readable format that would make it easily accessible anywhere in the EU and would promote exchange of patients' data. *#LowSalience_HighComplexity*	
FF2 Cue Source	LL1 – *#notext* LL2 – The NATIONALITY government said it strongly opposes these measures. LL3 – Closest party: [Pipe-in party selected in [A17]] said it strongly opposes these measures.	LL3 can't be displayed if respondent selected 994 or 999 in A17 (see this question below). In this case, respondents will see "The main governing party strongly opposes these measures"

To what extent would you oppose or support a policy proposal along these lines? Select a value from 0 to 10, where 0 means "Strongly oppose" and 10 means "Strongly support".

<1> 0 – Strongly oppose
<2> 1

<3> 2
<4> 3
<5> 4
<6> 5
<7> 6
<8> 7
<9> 8
<10> 9
<11> 10 – Strongly support
<99> Don't know

Hypotheses:

Main Effects:

H1. F1-Policy type: The more salient and less complex policies are, the less neutral respondents are towards them (therefore in F1, LL1>LL2>LL3>LL4).

This hypothesis is guided by the idea that people hold stronger preferences for issues they care about (salience) and that they can understand more easily (complexity). Thus, the level of respondents picking the mid-point of the scale will be higher for low salience and high complexity policies following the ranking above.

H2. F2-Cue Source:

a) We expect cues, be they coming from the government or from specific political parties, to have a significant effect on policy opposition (as opposed to the control group receiving no cue – F2-LL1).

Given that cueing has been shown to work in EU politics (Pannico 2020) and even in national politics and high salience domains where it has been shown to influence the legitimacy of decisions and be used by respondents as a cognitive shortcut in forming their preferences (Chong 2000; Chong and Druckman 2007; Simon 1985; Zaller 1992), we expect cueing to be effective here as well given that all four of these policy proposals involve EU policymaking.

b) We expect cues from respondents' preferred political parties to have a stronger effect than cues from the government.

Our hypothesis is informed by results of Pannico (2020) showing that citizens take cue from their preferred parties when considering their positions on EU issues. In the choice between their preferred party and the government, respondents are expected to listen to the party they themselves identified as closest to them. On the other hand, incumbent biases in media attention and public opinion (Eubank and Gow 1983; Ansolabehere and Snyder 2002; Matsubayashi 2013) (Eubank and Gow 1983, Matsubayashi 2012) in favor of the government as well as the fact that governments take center-stage in EU policy-making might suggest that national governments should take center stage and be the actors to which respondents are most likely to take cues from. This experiment allows us to discern between these two

alternative hypotheses on partisan vs. governmental cueing, while expecting the first to trump the second.

H3. F1*F2:

a) Cues from political parties and the government will have stronger effects in low salience policy proposals (F1 LL3 and LL4 as compared to LL1 and LL2 respectively)
b) Cues from political parties and the government will have stronger effects in high complexity policy proposals (F1 LL2 vs. LL1 and LL4 vs. LL3)
c) I expect salience to have a mitigating effect on complexity, such that cues from political parties and the government will have weaker effects in a high-salience high-complexity policy than in a low-salience-low-complexity one(F1 LL3 > LL2)

Ongoing research on cueing in EU politics starts from the assumption that cueing is particularly prevalent when it comes to EU politics because EU politics are too complex are not highly salient and hence citizens' use cues from their parties and/or governments as informational shortcuts to form opinions (Pannico 2017, Pannico 2020). In line with this assumption, I hypothesize that cueing should work best for less salient (hypothesis H3a) and more complex policy scenarios (hypothesis H3b). Furthermore, in line with ongoing research in economic behaviour (Dertwinkel-Kalt and Koster, 2023) finding that salience can mitigate the effects of complexity on cueing, I also expect salience to play a more important role than complexity in terms of how strong prior attitudes are and how well cues function, such that cues from political parties and the government will have weaker effects in a high-salience high-complexity policy than in a low-salience-low-complexity one (hypothesis H3c).

<u>Effect Heterogeneity:</u>

H4. Previous salience*F2: How salient a particular issue previously is for a respondent significantly interacts with the strength of cueing, such that cueing will function less well when issues are highly salient.

This hypothesis follows the idea that citizens have stronger attitudes and are less swayed by a cue in issues that matter to them. I test this hypothesis via effect heterogeneity using the pre-treatment questions FF1a above.

H5. Trust in the EU/Views on integration*F1: Trust towards the EU & views on EU integration significantly interact with the support for the policy - those that trust the EU a lot would be more in favor of these EU level policies than those that have little trust in the EU.

H6. Trust in government*F2: The more trust in government respondents have, the more likely they are swayed by governmental cues, even if they might be affiliated with parties other than the ones in government.

H7. Political sophistication & interest *F2: The political sophistication and interest of respondents (operationalized through interest in politics, a knowledge battery on the EU, and time spent following news related to the EP elections) significantly interacts with the strength

of cueing, such that cueing will function less well for highly sophisticated and highly interested respondents.

This hypothesis is guided by previous results by Pannico (2017) showing that party cueing in EU politics is higher among less knowledgeable and less well-informed citizens.

H8. Country Differences: We expect significant cueing effects across all the countries included in the survey (with no expectation for Latvia).

Following results from several experimental studies on cueing in across diverse political systems and policy contexts (multiparty systems, new party systems, and highly-salient issues) that show cueing to influence political attitudes in spite of these variations (Conroy-Krutz, Moehler, and Aguilar 2016; Brader et al. 2020; Linde 2018), we expect cueing to work in all the countries included in our survey. Latvia will be a special case given the smaller sample here and hence reduced power.

Question wording on other variables included:

A17 on party closeness

[A17] Is there a particular party you feel closer to than all the other parties? If so, which one?

<1> Party A (list of all parties in the countries included
<2> Party B
<3> Party C
<4> …

<994> Other [SPECIFY]
<966>None
999. Don't know

Government Trust, EU trust & Attitudes:

Generally speaking, how much do you personally trust each of the following institutions?

Select a value from 0 to 10, where 0 means "Do not trust at all" and 10 means "Trust completely".

The [NATIONALITY] government
The European Union

<1> 0 – Do not trust at all
<2> 1
<3> 2
<4> 3
<5> 4

<6> 5
<7> 6
<8> 7
<9> 8
<10> 9
<11> 10 – Trust completely
<99> Don't know

Some say European integration should be pushed further. Others say it has already gone too far. How do you feel about this?

<1> 0 – European integration has already gone too far
<2> 1
<3> 2
<4> 3
<5> 4
<6> 5
<7> 6
<8> 7
<9> 8
<10> 9
<11> 10 – European integration should be pushed further
<99> Don't know

Political Sophistication & Interest:

[A1] How interested would you say you are in politics? Please select only one option.

<1> Very interested
<2> Quite interested
<3> Hardly interested
<4> Not at all interested
<99> Don't know

[A24] How often over the course of the campaign did you watch, read, or listen to news about the European Parliament elections on TV, radio, newspapers, or the internet?

<1>0 – Never
<2>1 – Less often than once a month
<3>2 – Once a month
<4>3 - Several times a month
<5>4 – Several times a week
<6>5 – Once a day
<7>6 – Several times a day
<99>Don't know

Knowledge battery [to be turned into a knowledge scale from 0 to 4, where 0 means not having answered any question correctly and 4 means having answered all questions correctly]

[E1] Which country voted in favour of leaving the European Union in 2016?

<1> The United Kingdom
<2> Spain
<3> Hungary
<4> Greece
<99 fixed>Don't know

[E2] Which of the following countries IS NOT a member of the European Union?

<1> Norway
<2> Sweden
<3> Lithuania
<4> Latvia
<99 fixed>Don't know

[E4] Who was the president of the European Commission from 2019 to 2024?

<1> Angela Merkel
<2> Emmanuel Macron
<3> Ursula von der Leyen
<4> Olaf Scholz
<99 fixed>Don't know

[E5] Who is the current president of the European Central Bank?

<1> Christine Lagarde
<2> Kristalina Georgieva
<3> Jens Stoltenberg
<4> Herman Van Rompuy
<99 fixed>Don't know

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