PAP – Experiment on Cueing Effects on support of defense policy at the national and EU level

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 (at different levels) 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 and/or European actors with implications that could go both ways for the EU polity (positive, if such cueing is effective in gathering support for EU policies, or negative if such cueing is particularly prevalent at the extreme ends of the ideological spectrum where Eurosceptic populist parties could sway domestic audiences in opposing EU solutions).

This specific experiment looks at differences in cueing between domestic and EU-level actors to inquire into who does/can do the cueing and at what level of the multilevel polity. It, therefore, also looks at how cueing varies at the domestic and EU level which would allow us to inquire into the difference in the nature, level, and difficulty of crafting support for policies comparatively at the two levels. First, we assume that cueing works well in EU politics because people do not know much about it, but is cueing really stronger in EU politics than in domestic politics and, if so, to what extent? Second, we know that national level actors do the cueing when it comes to EU politics (Ares, Ceka, and Kriesi 2017), but are they the only ones? Do actually EU level actors have any cueing power/matter for swaying the opinion of domestic publics? Is such cueing power a positive one on people that already hold pro-EU attitudes, or a negative one in terms of pushing Eurosceptics even further away, or both?

Data and Experimental Design:

To answer this question, I field a factorial survey with 3 factors (policy level, cue source, cue type) 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 10th of May 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 3 Factors each with 2 levels each, and an additional 2 control groups, resulting in a universe of 10 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.

Design:

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

[FACTOR 1]

[FACTOR 2] [FACTOR 3]

Attribute/ Factor	Levels	Restrictions to combinations
F1 Policy Level	L1 – EU level: Imagine that a new policy that proposes strengthening European Union's security and defence policy is currently being discussed. L2 – National level: Imagine that a new policy that proposes strengthening [COUNTRY]'s security and defence policy is currently being discussed.	
F2 Cue Source	L1 – *#notext* L2 – The NATIONALITY government said it L3 – The European Commission said it	
F3 Support vs. Opposition	L1 - strongly supports the proposal. L2 - strongly opposes the proposal.	Only possible for F2L2 or F2L3

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

Vignette example (what a typical respondent would see):

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

Imagine that a new policy that proposes strengthening European Union's security and defence policy is currently being discussed.

The NATIONALITY government said it strongly opposes the proposal.

To what extent would you oppose or support a policy proposal along these lines?

[small script]

Select a value from 0 to 10, where 0 means "Strongly oppose" and 10 means "Strongly support".

0 – Strongly oppose	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 – Strongly support	9'. Don't know

Hypotheses:

Main Effects:

H1. F1-Policy level: National level policies will be associated with higher levels of support than EU level policies.

Generally, this hypothesis is guided by the second-order election theory that argues that European policy considerations play a minor role in party campaigning, media coverage, and in the choices of voters compared to national policy consideration (Gattermann et al 2021). Furthermore, member states are "policymakers of last resort" in the multilevel EU polity especially in the defense realm, because this is where most of the capacity lies. On the one hand a bellicist argument (Kelemen and McNamara 2021) would imply that external threats should lead to preferences for polity centralization and transfer of capacity from the subunits to the center. On the other hand, more recent empirical results (Moise et al. 2024) show that, at least in the short term, given that the EU is a compound polity formed of already mature national states, this changes the calculus of polity formation in case of a threat increasing the cost of centralization and new capacity building at the center, with benefits being more apparent for increasing sub-unit (Member State) capacity.

H2. F2-Cue Source:

a) We expect politicians' cues, be they national or EU, to have a significant effect on policy support/opposition (as opposed to the control group receiving no cue). Positive cues will increase policy support, while negative cues will decrease policy support.

Due to the low salience of EU policies, citizens are more likely to be responsive to elite cues. Given that even in national politics and high salience domains, cueing 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 particularly effective given the characteristics of EU policymaking.

b) We expect cues from the government to have a stronger effect than cues from the European Commission.

Our hypothesis is informed by studies showing incumbent biases in media attention and public opinion (Eubank and Gow 1983; Ansolabehere and Snyder 2002; Matsubayashi 2013) (Eubank and Gow 1983, Matsubayashi 2012). We expect such biases in favor of the government to be present when it comes to policy preferences as well. Furthermore, again following the idea of the second-orderness of EU politics (Gattermann et al 2021), national governments should take center stage and be the actors to which respondents are most likely to take cues from.

H3. F3-Support, opposition:

a) We expect cues opposing a particular policy to have stronger effects than cues supporting a particular policy.

Cues opposing a policy are expected to have a stronger effect as they might trigger risk-aversion. Prospect theory predicts that people are more sensitive to potential losses than equivalent gains (Kahneman 2011; Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982; Thaler 1981; Kahneman and Tversky 1979). Since our policies imply a change in the status-quo with uncertain gains, loss aversion, as implied by the opposing cue, might trigger respondents to maintain such status-quo.

H4. F1*F2:

a) Cues from the government will have stronger effects than cues from the European Commission for both national and EU level policies.
b) Cues from the European Commission will have stronger effects for EU level policies than national level policies.

Generally, we expect cues from the government to have an effect at both policy levels given the first-order loyalty that citizens might have towards the domestic level in the EU polity. When it comes to European Commission cues, while these are generally expected to work less well than national cues (see H2b), they would still work better for EU level policies than for national level policies.

<u>Effect Heterogeneity:</u>

H5. Previous attitudes on defence*F3: Previous attitudes on defense significantly interact with the nature of the cue such as those who are against increases in national/EU defence

spending would be even more susceptible to negative cues, than those that are pro (and vice-versa, less susceptible to positive cues than those that are pro).

H6. Trust in the EU/Views on integration:

a) **EU attitudes*F1:** Trust towards the EU & views on EU integration significantly interact with the support for the European level policy - those that trust the EU a lot would be more in favor of the EU level policy than those that have little trust in the EU.
b) **EU attitudes*F2:** Trust towards the EU & views on EU integration significantly interact with the initiator of the cue - those that trust the EU a lot are more susceptible to cues from the EU commission than those that have little trust in the EU.

H7. Trust in government: 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.

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:

Government Trust and 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

Defence Attitudes:

What do you think is the most important issue or problem facing [COUNTRY] at the moment? Please select only one option.

<1>	Crime	<10>	The education system
<2>	Rising inflation and cost of living	<11>	The environment and climate
<3>	Taxation	<12>	Energy supply
<4>	Unemployment	<13>	Pensions
<5>	Terrorism	<14>	Living and working conditions
<6>	A potential war and military defence	<15>	Public debt
<7>	Housing	<16>	A natural disaster
<8>	Immigration	<95>	None of these
<9>	Health and social security	<99.>	Don't know

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

[COUNTRY] should increase military spending.

The European Union should strengthen its security and defence policy.

<1>Disagree completely
<2>Tend to disagree
<3>Neutral
<4>Tend to Agree
<5>Agree completely
<6>Don't know

And, regardless of whether you are in favour or against, are these issues important to you?

[COUNTRY] should increase military spending.

The European Union should strengthen its security and defence policy.

<1>Yes
<2>No
<3>Don't know

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