

# Mobilizing Citizens for Costly Policies: The Conditional Effect of Party Cues on Support for International Bailouts in the European Union\*

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## Abstract

Previous research finds citizens' attitudes towards international redistribution in the European sovereign debt crisis to be related to party preferences. This article further reveals the nature of this link. We show that citizens follow party cues on international bailouts, rather than having merely ideologically congruent positions. By employing an original survey experiment that exposes respondents to elite cues, we additionally uncover underlying dynamics. First, party cues mobilize support for bailouts even in the face of salient elite dissent and, second, even a strong elite consensus does not affect citizens without PID and low levels of political sophistication. The findings of the experiment are cross-validated with data from the voter survey of European Election Study 2014. The results suggest that current debates about international bailout packages deepen a polarization between politicized and non-politicized Europeans.

**Keywords:** EU public opinion; Euro crisis; party cueing; international bailouts; survey experiment

## Introduction

Perhaps one of the most far-reaching consequences of the Euro crisis is that resources of affluent EU Member States are used to assist other Member States in economic difficulties. Such international financial bailouts were met with great controversy in public opinion and political arenas, and have sparked scholarly interest in fiscal solidarity among EU citizens (Bechtel *et al.*, 2014; Hobolt and Wratil, 2015; Kuhn and Stoeckel, 2014). An important question is to what extent political elites can structure attitudes towards international bailouts. A large body of research has highlighted the power of the political elite to influence voters' policy positions (Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Kam, 2005; Steenbergen *et al.*, 2007; Zaller, 1992). Citizens often lack the relevant experience, knowledge, and time to have an informed opinion on complex political issues (De Vries *et al.*, 2011; Hobolt, 2007). They then tend to switch from systematic to heuristic thinking (Kam, 2005). Voters therefore refer to heuristics; that is, cognitive shortcuts that guide them through political problems. An important source of information is the position taken by like-minded political parties and trusted politicians (Kam, 2005).

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However, certain conditions render cue-taking from the political elite less plausible. When highly salient issues are at stake, for example policy decisions with redistributive consequences, voters have an incentive to switch to systematic thinking and to form their own informed opinion (Bechtel *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, negative information seems to flag an issue as important and urgent enough to require undivided attention (Kahnemann and Tversky, 1979; Soroka, 2014). International financial bailouts in the European sovereign debt crisis are one such highly salient issue where negative information and worst-case scenarios have been dominating newsrooms and boardrooms for years. While European integration had long been framed as a win–win situation, voters in wealthy Member States are acutely aware of the costs of international bailouts. The decreasing room for manoeuvre of national governments in the wake of the crisis has eroded citizen satisfaction with democracy and citizens' trust in national parliaments (Armingeon and Guthmann, 2014), thus limiting the cueing capacity of political elites. Consequently, public opinion on international redistribution in the crisis constitutes a hard case for testing the power of elite cues on public opinion.

Previous research finds citizens' attitudes towards bailouts to be related to party preferences (Bechtel *et al.*, 2014). Our contribution reveals the nature of this link. We show that citizens indeed follow party cues on international bailouts, rather than having merely ideologically congruent positions. By employing an experimental design that exposes respondents to different cues, we can uncover underlying dynamics. First, party cues mobilize support for bailouts also in the face of salient elite dissent while, second, even a strong elite consensus does not affect citizens without PID and low levels of political sophistication. This implies that debates about bailout packages deepen a polarization between politicized and non-politicized citizens.

The article relies on an online survey experiment fielded in early 2014. We check the external validity of the findings with the 2014 European Election Study (EES; Schmitt *et al.*, 2015). This research strategy allows us to better understand the causal link between receiving information on party stances and forming one's own opinion, while guaranteeing a high level of generalizability. We focus on Germany, a key player in European economic governance and a major contributor to European rescue mechanisms. Germany has witnessed the emergence of a new eurosceptical challenger party, Alternative fuer Deutschland (AfD), which gained 7 seats in the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections and up to 24 per cent of votes in German regional elections in 2016. Thus, Germans no longer only receive pro-European cues.

The article makes three contributions. First, the article speaks to the scholarly debate on support for European economic governance and international redistribution in the European sovereign debt crisis (Bechtel *et al.*, 2014; Daniele and Geys, 2015; Hobolt and Wrátil, 2015; Kuhn and Stoeckel, 2014). Considering the high costs of the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), party cues can be critical in garnering public support for redistributive policies in the EU.<sup>1</sup> While previous research (Bechtel *et al.*, 2014) showed that supporters of German mainstream parties approved past bailout packages, it remains unclear whether this association between elite and voter positions reflects party cueing rather than ideological congruence or the fact that parties listen to their voters

<sup>1</sup> While the ESM does not redistribute fiscal resources as the EU budget, it is financed by EU Member States and is critical for the economic wellbeing of struggling eurozone members.

(Steenbergen *et al.*, 2007). By randomly exposing respondents to exogenous cues, this study sheds light on the causal relationship between elite and voter positions.

Second, the article contributes to the debate on cueing effectiveness by providing insights into the question of when elite cues do *not* work (Bechtel *et al.*, 2015; Feldman *et al.*, 2012; Nicholson, 2011). It uncovers relevant limitations as it finds that cue-taking on European integration is more likely when citizens have at least moderate levels of political sophistication. Third, our empirical evidence from Germany provides insights into the generalizability of predominantly US research to a European multiparty system. As Bullock (2011, pp. 511-512) notes, ‘the most relevant research – about the relative influence of elite position-taking and policy descriptions on people’s policy choices – remains overwhelmingly American’ (but see Brader and Tucker, 2012). Arguably, the context of multiparty systems is more complex, as parties tend to be less polarized and governing parties blame coalition partners or EU level actors for forcing them to adopt policies that are unpopular with their electorate.

## I. Theoretical Framework

According to Zaller’s (1992) seminal RAS model of the relationship between elite<sup>2</sup> messages and public opinion, the effectiveness of elite cues hinges on three key processes: the reception, acceptance and sampling of information. Citizens receive political information mainly from political elites either in a one-sided stream of messages or in a stream containing opposing views. When thinking about politics or answering survey questions, citizens sample whatever information is accessible to form their opinions.

While there have been qualifications and criticism of elite cue effectiveness (Feldman *et al.*, 2012; Nicholson, 2011), a large body of literature has confirmed that elite positions are a relevant source of information that influences voters’ opinions on many political issues (Brader and Tucker, 2012; Chong and Druckman, 2007; Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2001; Kam, 2005; Levendusky, 2010; Slothuus, 2008). Research has also shown that Europeans rely on elite cues when forming their opinion of the EU (De Vries *et al.*, 2011; Hobolt, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; McLaren, 2001; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen *et al.*, 2007; Stoeckel, 2013). However, these contributions report findings prior to the European sovereign debt crisis, which altered the issue of European integration in two fundamental ways (but see Vössing, 2015). First, EU integration had long been an issue of low salience that was generally met with a ‘permissive consensus’ of the European public, which slowly gave way to more critical and more politicized public opinions (De Vries, 2007; Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). Second, European integration has long been presented as a process in which the economies of scale of a single market would be beneficial to all Member States (Kuhn and Stoeckel, 2014). Things have changed dramatically since the onset of the European sovereign debt crisis in 2009. As Hobolt and Wratil (2015, p. 241) put it,

‘the euro crisis is unique in that it has made the issue of European integration salient across Europe and that it has highlighted decisions at the European level that have very obvious redistributive consequences between and within countries’.

<sup>2</sup> Zaller (1992, p.6) defines political elites as ‘politicians, higher-level government officials, some activists, and many kinds of experts and policy specialists’. We follow him in operationalizing political elites as parties.

For the past few years, bad news about the European sovereign debt crisis has dominated the public debate. Both the high salience and the negativity of this issue are likely to make people 'think harder' (Hobolt and Wratil, 2015). In fact, voters tend to rely less on heuristics and make a greater effort to think systematically when presented with highly salient issues and issues that involve negative news (Kahnemann and Tversky, 1979; Kam, 2005; Nicholson, 2012).

Facing an increasingly eurosceptical public and the rise of anti-EU challenger parties such as AfD, pro-European mainstream parties across Europe have been sending weak signals on European integration in general and bailouts in particular (Adam *et al.*, 2017; Rovny, 2012). Analyzing party press releases for the 2014 EP elections, Adam *et al.* (2017, p. 261) conclude that 'pro-European catch-all parties with strong internal dissent [...] silence Europe and choose blurring or adoption strategies'. German Chancellor Angela Merkel's hesitation about funding the financial bailout for Greece in 2010 is a case in point. She only agreed to the bailout after the regional elections in North-Rhine Westphalia to avoid being punished at the ballot box (Schmidt, 2014). According to Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2016), German mainstream parties had contradictory incentives in the 2014 EP elections: to either follow increasingly eurosceptic public opinion and challenger parties or to stick to their reputation as promoters of European integration. Therefore, party stances on bailouts might be less clear than on other issues on which parties send clearer signals. Eventually, all German parliamentary parties sent positive cues on bailouts, albeit with different clarity: CDU/CSU (conservatives), FDP (liberals), the Green Party, and SPD (social democrats) voted for the ESM, which can be taken as indicative of these parties' positions on EU bailouts. The Left Party voted against the ESM, but blurred its position (Rovny, 2012) by putting forth an alternative bill that proposed a debt cut for struggling EU members. The Left Party also supports Eurobonds. While without seats in parliament, the eurosceptic AfD received attention by rejecting bailouts and the euro altogether. Given this pattern of party positions, public opinion on international financial bailouts in the European sovereign debt crisis is an ideal test case for scrutinizing party cue effectiveness.

It would be far-fetched to believe that all members of society rely on elite cues under all circumstances and in a similar fashion. Previous research has examined which individual characteristics render cue-taking more likely (Hellwig and Kweon, 2016; Kam, 2005; Slothuus, 2008). We focus on two individual characteristics, namely citizens' party identification (PID) and their political sophistication. Finally, we discuss the role of elite dissent as a contextual factor with a potential effect on party cueing.

PID is often seen as the most important heuristic helping citizens to navigate the political world. They are likely to condition elite cueing effects. A PID denotes a kind of social identity derived from the relatively stable attachment of a citizen to a particular party (Bakker *et al.*, 2015; Green *et al.*, 2002; Huddy *et al.*, 2015). Existing research analyzes how stable these attachments are, and in fact they are not written in stone (Carsey and Layman, 2006). However, they are unlikely to be changed by short-term events. Instead, PID is more likely to shape how citizens deal with political information (Bisgaard, 2015). That is, citizens do not apprehend all sorts of political information, but are more likely to accept and remember elite cues from 'their' party (Zaller, 1992).

This means that citizens without PID are less likely to follow any kind of party cue. Using laboratory experiments in Hungary, the United Kingdom, and Poland, Brader and Tucker (2012) show that self-identifying partisans are especially likely to follow their party's position. This motivates our first hypothesis:

*H1 Citizens with PID are receptive to elite cues on international redistribution in the EU, while citizens without PID are unaffected by elite cues.*

Another source of individual-level heterogeneity in cue-taking is political sophistication. Scholars disagree whether more politically aware individuals rely more or less on cues than less informed citizens. In Zaller's (1992) model, political sophisticates are on the one hand more likely to receive cues, but on the other are also more likely to resist them. Some authors (Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2001; Kam, 2005) contend that political awareness increases the likelihood of cue-taking. According to Kam (2005), politically aware individuals engage more easily in systematic thinking. They therefore process issue-relevant information rather than relying on heuristics. In contrast, people who lack political awareness tend to engage in heuristic processing when thinking about politics as it requires less effort. Using experimental evidence from the United States, Kam (2005) shows that political awareness decreases the likelihood of cue-taking. Equally, Haider-Markel and Joslyn (2001) find less knowledgeable people to be more influenced by alternative frames on gun policy than others. Hobolt (2007) suggests that party endorsements can help unknowledgeable voters to make competent vote choices.

However, some theoretical considerations and empirical findings point in the opposite direction. Summarizing a vast literature on public opinion and foreign affairs, Zaller (1994, p. 186) posits that 'the more citizens know about politics and public affairs, the more firmly they are wedded to elite and media perspectives on foreign policy issues'. Hellwig and Kweon (2016) find that party cues on immigration policy have a stronger impact on people with higher levels of education than on less educated people. They argue that immigration – like redistribution in the EU (Margalit, 2012) – is a multidimensional issue entailing diverse economic and cultural considerations. According to Hellwig and Kweon (2016), highly educated people receive and process a greater amount and more variety of information, which might be mutually contradictory. They might therefore be torn between different pressures when it comes to immigration policies and refer to their party's stance to form an opinion. Ray (2003) finds that politically interested people have a stronger tendency to follow party cues on European integration. Gattermann *et al.* (2016) show that only the most knowledgeable citizens were able to follow party cues to form preferences on *Spitzenkandidaten* for the 2014 EP elections.

Arguably, political sophisticates reason about international redistribution in the crisis differently to non-sophisticates. The latter might follow their gut feeling of 'don't pay other people's debts', while the former consider a whole range of aspects related to this complex and multidimensional issue. What are the alternatives to a bailout? What are the long- and short-term consequences of Greece and other Member States leaving the euro for the economy and the future of European integration? Given that redistribution in the EU is a highly complex, controversial and multidimensional issue (Margalit, 2012), we



expect political sophisticates to be overwhelmed with contradictory pieces of information and therefore to resort more to elite cues than people with low levels of political sophistication.

*H2 Ceteris paribus, elite cues are more effective among individuals with higher levels of political sophistication.*

An important question is how elite polarization influences party cue effectiveness (Druckman *et al.*, 2013; Levendusky, 2010). On many political issues, voters receive elite cues with opposing information, reflecting the political divides between the main parties. Public opinion is more likely to be polarized when different parties send opposing messages on an issue (Zaller, 1992), although there are examples of cue-ineffectiveness even under elite consensus (Feldman *et al.*, 2012). Hence, it matters whether citizens receive one-sided information or whether citizens receive different views on an issue, because the elite is divided. Duch and Taylor (1997, p. 69) attribute the increase in public support for European integration throughout the 1990s to ‘elite promoted diffusion of pro-European sentiment – an overwhelming consensus among political, economic, intellectual, and media elites’. Ray (2003) finds that party cues have a greater effect on attitudes towards European integration when elites are divided. Yet, more recent evidence suggests that citizens are less likely to reflect the positive outlook on European integration of mainstream parties when some parties take a more eurosceptical position (De Vries and Steenbergen, 2013; Stoeckel, 2013). We capture the role of elite dissent in the following hypothesis:

*H3 When receiving information on elite dissent about international redistribution, people respond less to the elite majority position than when receiving information on elite consensus.*

## II. Research Design

While research shows a correlation between party and voter positions on international bailout packages (Bechtel *et al.*, 2014), the causality underlying this relationship is unclear. Rather than voters following party cues, parties could respond to their voters’ preferences, or voter and party positions simply coincide. By randomly assigning respondents to exogenous party cues, we can isolate the effect these cues have on voters. We rely on an original survey experiment conducted among a random sample of 1,013 German citizens to test our hypotheses. We test whether individuals receiving information on their party’s position exhibit preferences more in line with the position of their party than respondents for whom their party’s position is not directly salient. To validate our experiment, we analyze the German voter sample of the EES 2014 ( $n = 1,648$ ).

Germany is a highly relevant and valid test case: Germany is a major contributor to the ESM, and the bailouts have been a salient issue in public debates. International bailouts are therefore anything but an abstract issue to the German public, and in contrast to some other countries, the role as contributor rather than as potential beneficiary of international bailouts is clear (Drewski, 2015). This excludes the possibility of supporting bailouts out

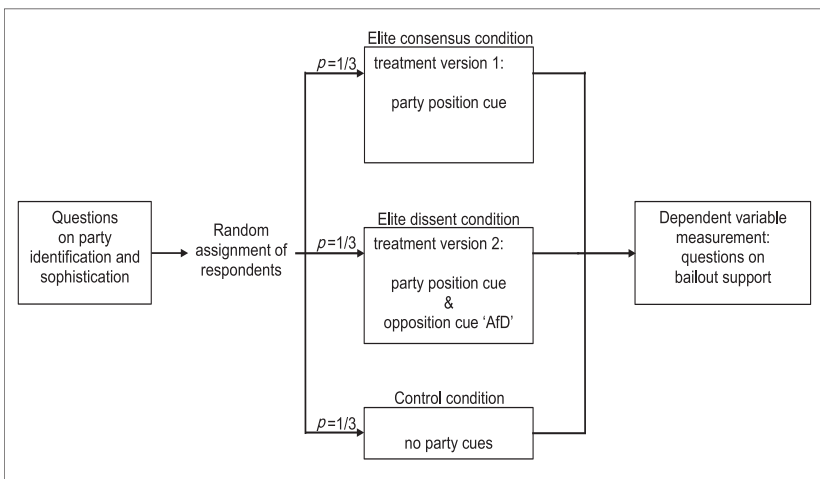
of mere reciprocity expectations. Moreover, the formation of the anti-Euro party AfD enables us to test the effect of elite dissent.

Survey experiments combine the advantages of an experiment, such as random assignment of treatment and control conditions, with the benefits of a large and diverse sample. The experiment was programmed in Qualtrics and data were collected in April 2014 by Dr.Grieger&Cie., a German market research company. Our random sample is indeed diverse in age, gender, occupation, income, education and ideological orientation (see Table A3 in the online Appendix).

The between-subjects design of the experiment is shown in Figure 1. Early in the survey we ask respondents' PID using the following question: 'Many people identify with a party even though they might sometimes vote for a different party. What about you? Do you identify with a party? If yes, which one is it?' All respondents are then randomly assigned to one of the three conditions with a probability of  $p=1/3$ : (1) an elite consensus condition, (2) an elite dissent condition, or (3) a control condition, before answering questions on bailout support.

For respondents with PID, the treatment conditions mention that their trusted party supports international redistribution in economic crisis situations along with all other parties in the German parliament. That is, respondents who identify with the Greens get position information on the Greens. About 30 per cent of respondents do not identify with any party, which is comparable to the EES data. For these respondents, the cue emphasizes that *all parties* in parliament support international redistribution in economic crisis situations. The control condition mentions no party positions before respondents answer questions on bailout support. We test Hypothesis 1 by comparing whether individuals who receive a party cue exhibit more support for bailouts than respondents in the control condition. A difference between bailout support in the treatment and control condition suggests effective cueing. Our expectation is that cueing only takes places when respondents with PID receive information from their trusted party, while respondents

Figure 1: Design of the Survey Experiment.



without PID are unaffected by the party position cue. We test Hypothesis 2 by analyzing the cueing effect among respondents with low, medium and high levels of sophistication.

According to Hypothesis 3, we expect party cues to be more effective when citizens are exposed to elite consensus rather than elite dissent. We test this by analyzing whether cueing only occurs in the elite consensus condition or also in the elite dissent condition. While respondents in the elite consensus condition read only about pro-bailout consensus in parliament, the elite dissent condition additionally emphasizes that a new challenger party, AfD, is against international redistribution (online Appendix Table A4 shows exact wording of each treatment).<sup>3</sup>

After receiving the cues, respondents answer two questions on international redistribution. The first item draws on an existing measure of bailout support (Bechtel *et al.*, 2014):

‘Germany and the other EU member states have agreed to establish a financial rescue fund which can be used to make bailout payments to over-indebted EU countries. Do you agree with the policy of using a European financial rescue mechanism to aid over-indebted EU member states?’ (Agree strongly/Agree/Neither agree nor disagree/Disagree/Strongly disagree)

Our second question measures willingness to contribute personally to an EU-wide redistributive scheme. We invoke the German solidarity tax, which was introduced in the wake of German reunification to decrease economic imbalances between Germany’s Eastern and Western parts:

‘If a solidarity tax were introduced to counteract economic imbalances in the EU, how much should it be?’

Respondents answer by choosing any value (with a slider) between 0.0 per cent and 10.0 per cent.

### III. Results

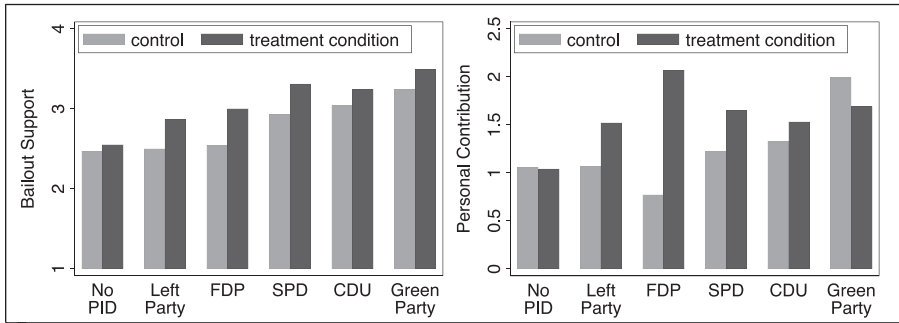
To test Hypothesis 1, we first compare mean bailout support in the control group with mean bailout support in the treatment groups. We conduct this comparison separately for respondents with PID and for those without. Bailout support among respondents with PID is significantly higher for individuals who saw information on their party’s position on bailouts ( $M=3.21$ ) than when such elite cues are not present ( $M=2.90$ ,  $t(676)=-3.22$ ,  $p=0.001$ , two-tailed). This pattern holds for all parties (Figure 2). Similarly, respondents are willing to make a higher personal contribution in the treatment group ( $M=1.60$ ) than in the control group ( $M=1.31$ ,  $t(676)=-1.70$ ,  $p=0.09$ , two-tailed).

We do not find a similar cueing effect among respondents without PID. The mean bailout support of citizens in the treatment group is not significantly different from that in the control group (2.55 vs. 2.47;  $t(281)=-0.59$ ,  $p=0.56$ , two-tailed). Moreover, being in the treatment group rather than the control group does not significantly influence the amount that respondents without PID are willing to personally contribute (1.06 vs.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, presenting the position of this new party does not imply dissent among equals, as for example in the bipartisan system of the US. However, AfD is the only German party that deviates from the pro-European consensus and has therefore been powerful in sending cues despite its relatively limited political power

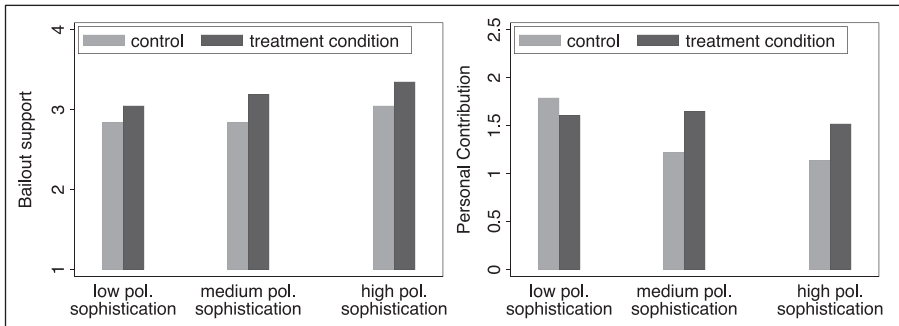


Figure 2: Effect of Party Cues by Party Identification.



Source: Authors' data.

Figure 3: Effect of Party Cues by Level of Political Sophistication among Citizens with PID.



Source: Authors' data.

1.04,  $t(281)=0.06, p=0.95$ , two-tailed). This supports Hypothesis 1 that elite cues affect citizens with PID, but do not influence people who do not identify with any party.<sup>4</sup>

Next, we test Hypothesis 2 and examine how political sophistication affects cue taking. We use educational attainment to proxy political sophistication: low education refers to respondents without high school diploma, medium education refers to people with high school diploma, and respondents with university degree were coded as having higher education.

The cueing effect is most consistent among voters with medium levels of education. We do not find a significant difference between mean bailout support of low educated respondents who see party cues (treatment group) and low educated individuals who do not see party cues (control group).<sup>5</sup> There is, however, a statistically significant difference

<sup>4</sup> For half of the respondents in the treatment group, the survey questions on international redistribution were introduced as a section about 'The policies of Germany', followed by a German flag. For the other half, the page mentioned that the policy questions were about 'Germany as part of the EU', which was followed by an EU flag. There are no statistically significant differences between responses under these headings.

<sup>5</sup>  $M=3.05$  (treatment) vs.  $M=2.84$  (control);  $t(139)=-0.97, p=0.33$ , two-tailed.

in bailout support between respondents in the treatment and control group among individuals with a moderate level of education.<sup>6</sup> The difference between highly educated individuals in the treatment and control group does not meet conventional levels of statistical significance, which might be due to the low number of observations with higher education.<sup>7</sup> The same pattern holds for our second dependent variable – how much one is willing to contribute to international redistribution.<sup>8</sup> We do not have enough evidence to confirm Hypothesis 2, which expected cue receptiveness to increase with levels of political sophistication.

Finally, we turn to elite dissent (Hypothesis 3). Receiving information on a dissenting challenger party does not impede the cueing effect for bailout support (Table 1a). Party cues significantly increase bailout support of citizens with PID, irrespective of whether the challenger party's position is salient or not. This effect is statistically significant when comparing the consensus group with the control group ( $M=3.23$  vs.  $M=2.90$ , Table 1a), but also when comparing the dissent group with the control group ( $M=3.20$  vs.  $M=2.90$ , Table 1a). Neither the consensus nor the dissent condition affects bailout support of citizens without PID.

However, regarding the willingness to personally contribute, the information on the challenger party matters (Table 1b). First, respondents with PID show a statistically significant increase in willingness to contribute in the consensus condition ( $M=1.67$  (consensus) vs.  $M=1.31$  (control), Table 1b), whereas the cueing effect is not significant in the dissent condition ( $M=1.53$  (dissent) vs.  $M=1.31$  (control), Table 1b). Second, respondents without PID do not react to the consensus condition, but they are significantly less willing to contribute in the dissent condition ( $M=0.66$  (dissent) vs.  $M=1.06$  (control), Table 1b). In sum, the consensus condition consistently increases support for international redistribution among individuals with PID. Party dissent affects only one of our two measures. Party cues seem less effective when dissent is salient, which also affects citizens without PID. This provides some support for Hypothesis 3 on the greater cueing capacity of the elite majority position in the absence of salient dissent.

### *External Validity in the EES*

To test the external validity of our experimental results, we analyze data from the German voter sample of the EES 2014. While we cannot replicate the cueing experiment, we analyze whether identification with one of the parliamentary parties (all of which sent pro-bailout cues at the time of the survey) is correlated with bailout support. The following item measures support for international redistribution:

‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? In times of crisis, it is desirable for Germany to give financial help to another EU Member State facing severe economic and financial difficulties?’ (Totally disagree/Tend to disagree/Tend to agree/Totally agree)

<sup>6</sup>  $M=3.19$  (treatment) vs.  $M=2.84$  (control);  $t(327)=-2.60$ ,  $p=0.01$ , two-tailed.

<sup>7</sup>  $M=3.35$  (treatment) vs.  $M=3.05$  (control);  $t(206)=-1.61$ ,  $p=0.11$ , two-tailed.

<sup>8</sup> There is no significant difference at low levels of education ( $1.61$  vs.  $1.79$ ;  $t(139)=0.53$ ,  $p=0.60$ , two-tailed), a significant difference at moderate levels of education ( $1.65$  vs.  $1.22$ ;  $t(327)=-1.73$ ,  $p=0.09$ , two-tailed), and a non-significant difference at high levels of education ( $1.52$  vs.  $1.14$ ;  $t(206)=-1.25$ ,  $p=0.21$ , two-tailed).

Table 1a: Bailout Support, Control vs. Consensus vs. Dissent Cues

	<i>Control</i>	<i>Consensus condition</i>	<i>Dissent condition</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>p-value</i>
R with PID	2.90	3.23		0.33 **	<0.01
R with PID	2.90		3.20	0.30 **	<0.01
N	229	225	224		
R without PID	2.47	2.47		0.00	0.98
R without PID	2.47		2.64	0.17	0.30
N	102	95	86		

Note: Two-tailed *t*-tests, <sup>+</sup> *p* < 0.10, \* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001.

Source: Authors' data.

Table 1b: Personal Contribution, Control vs. Consensus vs. Dissent Cues

	<i>Control</i>	<i>Consensus condition</i>	<i>Dissent condition</i>	<i>Difference</i>	<i>p-value</i>
R with PID	1.31	1.67		0.36 <sup>+</sup>	0.07
R with PID	1.31		1.53	0.22	0.24
N	229	225	224		
R without PID	1.06	1.39		0.33	0.24
R without PID	1.06		0.66	-0.40 <sup>+</sup>	0.07
N	102	95	86		

Note: Two-tailed *t*-tests, <sup>+</sup> *p* < 0.10, \* *p* < 0.05, \*\* *p* < 0.01, \*\*\* *p* < 0.001

Source: Authors' data.

For PID, we use a question from the EES that mirrors the item used in our experiment (see online Appendix, Table A5). We operationalize political sophistication by relying on objective knowledge: correct answers to three knowledge questions relating to EU and national politics (Table A5, online Appendix; Zaller, 1992, p. 17). Dummy variables measure education: full-time education until the age of 15 years, respondents with education up to the age of 19 years, and all individuals with more education (Hakhverdian *et al.*, 2013). We control for respondents' economic situation with a question on whether respondents had difficulties paying their bills. We differentiate between respondents who are working, retired, unemployed and students. A dummy variable controls for European identification ('definitely' or 'to some extent' feeling as citizens of the EU vs 'not' or 'not really' feeling as EU citizens). We control for age and gender.

PID plays a major role in citizens' attitudes towards international redistribution also in the EES sample (Table 3). We estimate an OLS regression (online Appendix Table A1 for an ordered logit model). Positive and significant regression coefficients (model 1) reveal that partisans of CDU/CSU, the Greens, SPD, and the Left Party support bailouts more than individuals without PID (reference category), which is consistent with the notion of a cueing process. Partisans of FDP or other parties do not differ significantly from citizens without PID.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Only 18 individuals identify with the FDP, which makes it difficult to detect a significant effect. Following a landslide loss in the general elections in 2013, the FDP failed to enter parliament, which might have limited its cueing power in 2014.

Table 3: Correlates of Bailout Support (European Election Study 2014)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	beta	SE	beta	SE	beta	SE
Sex	-0.07	(0.04)	-0.06	(0.08)	-0.10	(0.05)
Age	0.00	(0.00)	0.01*	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)
Education: Medium	0.10	(0.06)	0.24*	(0.10)	0.03	(0.07)
Education: High	0.39***	(0.06)	0.55***	(0.14)	0.31***	(0.07)
Pol. sophistication	-0.01	(0.02)				
Unemployed	-0.22**	(0.07)	-0.23	(0.12)	-0.21*	(0.09)
In education	0.24*	(0.10)	0.32	(0.24)	0.20	(0.11)
Retired	-0.05	(0.07)	0.04	(0.13)	-0.08	(0.08)
<i>Party identification</i>						
CDU/CSU	0.15*	(0.06)	0.01	(0.12)	0.23**	(0.07)
FDP	0.17	(0.21)	0.17	(0.44)	0.21	(0.24)
SPD	0.26***	(0.06)	0.01	(0.13)	0.36***	(0.08)
Green	0.42***	(0.09)	0.06	(0.23)	0.53***	(0.10)
Left Party	0.29**	(0.09)	0.15	(0.18)	0.35***	(0.10)
Other Party	-0.05	(0.06)	-0.15	(0.11)	-0.01	(0.08)
European identity	0.65***	(0.05)	0.53***	(0.09)	0.74***	(0.06)
Low income	-0.19***	(0.05)	-0.17	(0.10)	-0.19**	(0.07)
Constant	1.84***	(0.13)	1.67***	(0.22)	1.85***	(0.15)
Observations	1,535		499		1,036	
Adj.-R <sup>2</sup>		0.22		0.15		0.25

Notes: \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; reference categories: education (low), occupational status (employed), income (no difficulties paying bills), no party identification, no European identity, male. OLS regression, standard errors in parentheses; two-tailed tests.

Source: European Election Study 2014.

Model 2 includes only respondents with low political sophistication (0–1 correct answers to the three political knowledge questions). In this subset of voters, individuals with PID do not exhibit more support for bailouts than those without PID. In contrast, when analyzing only individuals with high levels of political sophistication (2–3 correct answers to the knowledge questions; model 3), we find that individuals with PID exhibit significantly more support for bailouts. A robustness check with interaction terms yields substantively similar results.<sup>10</sup> We find consistent evidence that low sophisticates are the least likely to follow elite cues, which is in line with Hypothesis 2. Political sophistication increases the receptiveness to cues, albeit the analyses of the experiment and the EES data reveal slight distinctions.

## Conclusion

We have leveraged a survey experiment to assess the scope conditions of party cueing on a highly salient issue: to what extent does information regarding party positions on

<sup>10</sup> Table A2 (online Appendix) shows a significant interaction term only for one party. Yet, marginal effect plots (Figure A1 in the online Appendix) reveal significant marginal effects for almost all parties at higher levels of political sophistication. Since these effects are significant for high sophisticates but not low sophisticates, we split the sample in Table 3.

international bailouts influence public support for bailouts and the readiness to personally contribute to them? We emphasized individual-level heterogeneity in cue-taking by analyzing the intervening effect of party identification and political awareness. We also assessed whether information on elite dissent influences cue effectiveness.

Our results suggest that voters rely on party cues on highly salient and controversial issues such as a large international crisis bailout, even under elite dissent. However, only those who feel close to a party follow party cues. Individuals who do not identify with any party – a growing majority in Western democracies – are not influenced by information on party positions. Existing research is divided on whether high or low political sophisticates are more likely to follow cues. Our results suggest that elite cues are least effective among citizens with little political sophistication.

This study has some limitations. The survey experiment did not directly measure political awareness but used educational attainment as a proxy. We therefore cannot exclude that other aspects of educational attainment influence cue-taking. Second, given the great controversy surrounding the bailout packages, the survey experiment did not happen in a political vacuum. Consequently, respondents in the control group might also have been aware of parties' positions. While this renders the distinction between control and treatment groups less clear-cut, it does not diminish the validity of the significant difference between groups. In fact, one might expect even stronger effects if the empirical design allowed this possibility to be excluded.

With respect to the wider implications for EU politics, our results suggest that there is a growing polarization between European voters who feel close to a particular party, follow elite cues, and are generally more supportive of European integration, and individuals who do not feel close to a party, do not listen to political leaders, and are eurosceptic. The latter seem to be politically apathetic, and the predominantly pro-European discourse and behaviour of mainstream parties might alienate them even more. This conclusion paints a bleak picture for the future of European democracy, where a growing share of the electorate feels alienated from the political elite (Armingeon and Guthmann, 2014), which provides fertile ground for populist parties such as AfD. Our results on whether these challenger parties can undermine the pro-EU cues of the mainstream were mixed. While information on elite dissent did not influence cue taking on general bailout support, it did matter with respect to personally contributing to redistribution. This latter question affects voters more directly and might therefore be more sensitive to the influence of eurosceptic challenger parties. This heterogeneity calls for further research on whether eurosceptic fringe parties can influence preferences of citizens who do not vote for them – and thus have an impact that goes far beyond their electorate.

Another interesting question is how voters react to anti-bailout cues coming from mainstream rather than challenger parties. Given that, at the time of the experiment, all German mainstream parties endorsed international redistribution in the crisis, it was not possible to test this without deceiving (and potentially confusing) our respondents. However, as mainstream parties are also becoming more eurosceptic – and eurosceptic challenger parties are gaining importance across Europe (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016), this scenario is becoming more realistic. Further research could investigate this question by comparing the cueing power of eurosceptic mainstream and challenger parties.

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## Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found online in the supporting information tab for this article.

**Table A1:** Ordered logit analysis of EES 2014 data

**Table A2:** Analysis of EES 2014 data with interaction effects

**Table A3:** Descriptive statistics: EES 2014 and authors' data

**Table A4:** Question wording of treatment conditions

**Table A5:** Operationalization of all variables

**Figure A1:** Marginal effects plots based on interaction effects displayed in Table A2