Clarity of Responsibility beyond the Pocketbook: How Political Institutions Condition EU Issue Voting

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Abstract

One of the most influential findings of the voting behavior literature of the past two decades was the realization that the clarity of the domestic institutional context influences the relationship between economic perceptions and vote intention. This article extends this so-called “clarity of responsibility” argument beyond economics to another policy field – European integration. To what extent do national political institutions influence levels of EU issue voting? Using data from the 2004 European Election Study, we provide evidence that clarity of responsibility affects the strength of EU issue voting. Specifically, EU issue voting is accentuated when the domestic institutional environment provides clear lines of responsibility.

Much of the literature on voting behavior over the past two decades has centered on the interactive relationship between domestic institutional contexts and vote choice. In particular, scholars interested in the link between the economy and incumbent vote have demonstrated that economic judgments are more likely to have a bearing on how (and even whether) to vote when responsibility for government performance is clear (Powell & Whitten, 1993; Anderson, 1995, 2000; Lewis-Beck 1988; Whitten & Palmer, 1999; Nadeau et al., 2002; Samuels, 2004; Bengtsson, 2004; Tillman, 2007). The basic argument is that institutional ambiguity camouflages responsibility for policymaking decisions and outcomes, hampering citizens’ ability to express their discontent by voting politicians out of office.

Clearly the economy is not the only policy area for which voters assign responsibility. Indeed, it stands to reason that the so-called “clarity of responsibility” hypothesis advanced by economic voting scholars should be broadly applicable. We apply these arguments to an alternative policy field, focusing in particular on how domestic political institutions influence the degree of EU issue voting. Specifically, we ask whether the simplicity of the lines of accountability in a given political context moderates the extent to which vote choices are affected by citizens’ attitudes towards European integration.

The EU provides a useful backdrop for studying this relationship between clarity of responsibility and voting behavior. Similar to the economy, European integration is today an inescapable issue for governments of all political stripes. The extension of EU competencies from market integration into non-economic issues means that European integration in the post-Maastricht era can no longer be treated as simply a foreign policy issue. Quite the contrary, national governments must deal with EU matters on a daily basis and, as we assert below, are increasingly judged by European citizens on their capabilities and decision-making regarding such issues.
In choosing to concentrate on the EU, we also benefit from rich cross-national data. The 2004 European Election Study (EES) administered comparable surveys in member states across the EU, so we are able to analyze EU issue voting in twelve Western European countries. Importantly, the countries included in the survey also exhibit considerable variation in their institutional settings, which is key since we are interested in how the clarity of political environments influences voting behavior.

The results of our analysis lend credence to the clarity of responsibility argument, indicating that institutional clarity affects the strength of EU issue voting. This finding echoes those found in previous studies on the relationship between the economy and the vote. In environments where the lines of responsibility are clear, voters are better able to decipher which actors to reward or punish for EU decisions when they step into the ballot box. By contrast, in settings where the domestic institutional context blunts clarity, individuals are less likely to factor EU judgments into their vote choice since they are unable to apportion responsibility and consequently not sure whom to hold accountable.

The implications of our findings are important for voting scholars as well as those interested in EU studies. Since Powell and Whitten’s influential work on clarity of responsibility in 1993, students of voting behavior have continuously sought to confirm and expand their initial theory and results. By and large, however, this research has remained in the field of economic voting (Tavits, 2007 being an exception). The results presented here demonstrate the portability of the clarity of responsibility hypothesis beyond the realm of economic policies.

This article also contributes to the literature on European integration. In focusing on EU issue voting, it speaks directly to the debate on the impact of European integration on domestic politics and particularly to questions regarding the Europeanization of party and electoral politics (e.g. Börzel & Risse, 2003, 2007). Moreover, our article is relevant to

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1 The following countries are included in the analysis: Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom.
the ongoing academic discussion on the democratic deficit in the EU (e.g. Føllesdal &
Hix, 2006; Moravcsik, 2002; Zweifel, 2002; Coultrap, 1999; Katz, 2000). Do national
elections provide an effective indirect mechanism helping “to ensure that EU
policymaking is, in nearly all cases,” as Moravscik claims, “clean, transparent, effective and
politically responsive to the demands of European citizens” (2002: 605)? The evidence
presented in this study yields only a qualified ‘yes’ to this question. Though we find
support for EU issue voting, suggesting that European citizens are able to use national
elections to express their views on the EU, we also find that this “electoral connection”
(Carrubba, 2001) is conditioned by the national institutional context. Indeed, we illustrate
that while voters’ ability to express approval or dissatisfaction with EU policymaking can
be effective when the lines of responsibility are simple, an opaque institutional setting that
is characterized by competing political actors and multiple loci of control obscures
responsibility, with potentially detrimental effects for democratic accountability.

The article proceeds as follows. We begin with a discussion of European
integration and its growing influence on domestic electoral behavior. We then turn to the
clarity of responsibility hypothesis and apply this argument to EU issue voting. The
following sections describe the data, analysis, and results. Finally, we conclude with a
summary of our findings and a discussion of the implications of this study for future
research.

**EU Politics and National Electoral Behavior**

An expanding body of research indicates that European matters play a role in national
politics, particularly in national electoral politics. Rising salience and conflict regarding the
EU in the post-Maastricht era have resulted in what some scholars term a “constraining
dissensus” whereby European citizens and political parties alike actively monitor the
course of integration and where necessary voice their fears and objections (Hooghe & Marks, 2008).

Indeed, there is ample evidence of the growing politicization of the EU in domestic politics (see Hooghe & Marks, 2008). The large body of research on citizen support for European integration in both Western and Eastern Europe points to perceptions of economic benefit and social identity as factors influencing public opinion (e.g., Gabel, 1998; McLaren, 2002; Carey, 2002; Tucker et al., 2002; Elgün & Tillman, 2007). Moreover, political parties are no longer turning a blind eye to European publics on such matters, but are instead taking increasingly open and distinguishable positions on European integration that are at least minimally responsive to citizens’ attitudes (Carrubba, 2001; Steenbergen et al., 2007). Often this has come at a high price for political parties, as intra-party dissent over European integration has become manifest in party systems throughout Europe (Edwards, 2007). Taken together, this suggests the development of a range of structured public opinion and differentiated party positions on European integration, leading Van der Eijk and Franklin (2004) to describe the EU issue as a “sleeping giant” in electoral politics.

The influence of EU issues on domestic electoral politics can occur through a number of ways. It can take place indirectly, either through the influence of European Parliamentary elections on national voting behavior (e.g. Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996; Van der Eijk et al., 1996; Marsh 1998) or through the impact of European integration on economic voting in national elections (e.g. Scheve, 1999; Bohrer & Tan 2000; Tillman, 2008). But it also can occur directly through a mechanism referred to as EU issue voting. EU issue voting is the process whereby individual preferences over European integration influence vote choices in national elections (Tillman, 2004; De Vries, 2007).

In a national election, political parties campaign on a myriad of issues, any one(s) of which citizens might base their vote choices on. What leads an individual to consider a
particular issue – in this case the EU – when casting his/her vote? As Carmines and Stimson suggest, two factors are key for an issue to influence voting behavior: “[t]he public must not only perceive a difference in party issue stands, but it must also care about this difference” (1986: 903). In other words, in order for EU issue voting to occur, European integration must be salient to a non-trivial segment of society, and there must be significant disagreement among the parties for voters to be able to identify which parties are closer to them on the issue.

Recent studies provide evidence of EU issue voting. As expected given the discussion above, this research shows that the degree to which voters’ positions on European matters influence their vote choice varies cross-nationally depending on the level of EU issue salience among the electorate as well as on the choices on offer by political parties regarding European issues. In his examination of Austria, Finland, and Sweden, for example, Tillman (2004) finds evidence of EU issue voting at the time of accession, a period in which EU membership can be assumed to have been salient and at least somewhat divisive. Similarly, De Vries (2007) finds evidence of EU issue voting in Denmark and the United Kingdom, two countries characterized by high levels of partisan conflict over Europe, yet fails to find such evidence in Germany or the Netherlands, where partisan conflict over the EU is far more limited. Looking at the 2005 German elections, Schoen (2008) argues that attitudes towards Turkey’s potential accession to the EU played an important role, with voters being more likely to support parties that held closer positions to their own on the Turkish question. EU issue voting also appears to be important in the Central and Eastern EU member states. Indeed, De Vries and Tillman (2008) find higher levels of EU issue voting in the Central and Eastern compared to Western European countries. The authors attribute this difference to the greater fluidity within these party systems, which makes it easier for parties to politicize the EU issue by bundling it with their broader political ideologies. Taken together, these findings suggest
that European issues can influence domestic elections in situations where there are significant elite and public disagreements over European integration.

A factor neglected in this work on EU issue voting is the role of national political institutions. This is surprising in light of findings from the economic voting literature which highlight that differences in ‘pocketbook voting’ largely stem from variations in institutional settings (see Powell & Whitten, 1993 among others). The extent to which the domestic institutional context may also affect the degree of EU issue voting is what we turn to next.

**Clarity of Responsibility and EU Issue Voting**

There is an expansive body of literature on the extent to which differing political-institutional contexts influence citizens’ voting behavior. In particular, political scientists working in the field of economic voting have sought to explain cross-national differences in the relationship between the economy and government support by arguing that clarity of responsibility conditions this relationship (Powell & Whitten, 1993; Anderson, 1995, 2000; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Whitten & Palmer, 1999; Nadeau et al., 2002; Samuels, 2004; Bengtsson, 2004; Tillman, 2007). The basic contention is that domestic political systems that diffuse power among multiple actors (parties in particular) obscure the lines of responsibility, making it difficult for voters to evaluate and punish the government in power for economic or policy decisions. To date, the vast majority of research on clarity of responsibility has remained in the areas of economic voting and economic performance, but as Tavits (2007) has recently suggested the potential application of this argument is wide-ranging. The notion of clarity of responsibility applies to government accountability and the degree to which institutions work to diminish or enhance actors’ influence over policymaking, broadly defined. In this article, we focus on EU policy. We are interested in the extent to which citizens use their vote in national elections to hold
their governments accountable for actions taken regarding the EU and, more importantly, how this relationship is affected by the clarity of the formal institutional setting.

The basic clarity of responsibility argument as applied to EU issue voting is that citizens’ ability to assign responsibility for a nation’s policies regarding European integration and to express approval or disapproval by voting them out of office is filtered by the domestic political environment (Anderson, 2000: 153). The assumption is that vote choice is at least in part a product of citizens’ evaluation of a government’s EU policies. Moreover, voters prefer governments whose EU stances coincide with their own and are apt to punish governments with opposing views by voting incumbent parties out of office. But accountability for policymaking is seldom transparent. As Anderson notes: “responsibility frequently is shared by competing political actors through mechanisms such as coalition government or simply obscured because of multiple levels of decision-making and political control” (2000: 153; also see Anderson, 1995). Citizens are only able to assign credit or blame for a government’s EU policies to the extent that they are able to discern who is in fact responsible (Powell, 2000; Anderson, 2000).

Note that implicit in our argument is the notion that the positions and/or opinions of both individuals and parties can shift over time, meaning that the proximities between voters and parties on EU matters are subject to change. These changes lead citizens to re-evaluate their perceptions of each party’s competence regarding the EU and adjust their support accordingly. As an individual’s support for the government’s EU stance increases (i.e. as the proximity between the individual’s and the government party’s EU positions decreases), he/she is more likely to cast a vote for the incumbent. A widening gap, in contrast, would make an opposition vote more likely.

Our expectation is that EU issue voting will be greater in higher clarity systems, in which a single, unified party has primary control over policymaking, than in lower clarity settings, in which such power is dispersed among multiple parties or in which
policymaking coalitions are continuously shifting (Powell, 2000: 11). The rationale for this is two-fold. First, institutional structures that encourage power-sharing arrangements among multiple actors blur partisan accountability for EU policies. Since there are numerous participants involved in formulating policy, it is difficult for citizens to apportion responsibility and, in turn, to hold a single party accountable for the government’s policies. Consequently, the likelihood that individuals will base their voting decision on EU issues is less in low clarity environments. Second, it is often unclear in low clarity systems whether a citizen’s vote will actually induce a change in a government’s EU policy. Elections in multi-party systems can be far from decisive; instead of producing a clear winner, they tend to serve as the basis for coalition bargaining among a number of parties (Powell, 2000). Voters’ ability to punish or reward government officials for their EU stances is therefore incomplete, as it may be unclear which parties will participate in any newly elected government. Thus, as Tillman notes in discussing economic voting, when there is a lack of clarity of responsibility individuals’ capacity to factor an issue into their voting behavior is affected in two ways: “Citizens may be unable to predict the ultimate outcome of the election (in the sense of knowing which parties will govern), and they may be unable to hold all policy makers accountable in an election” (2007: 6). Here we apply this logic to EU issues.

A number of different institutional arrangements disperse power throughout a political system and thereby cloud responsibility. In this study, we focus on a subset of indicators identified by Powell and Whitten (1993) and later amended by others (Powell, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Royed et al., 2000; Nadeau et al., 2002; Bengtsson, 2004) as markers for clarity of responsibility, namely type of electoral system, majority status of government, opposition influence on policymaking, and party system concentration. We discuss each of these below.
First, the electoral rules of the game often serve to diffuse government responsibility and obscure clarity in a political system (Powell, 2000: 26-7). Majoritarian versus proportional systems envision rather different roles for elections in connecting the preferences of citizens to government policy. Within a majoritarian vision elections allow citizens to directly choose between alternative governments, while a proportional view “sees elections as choosing representatives who can bargain for their voters’ interests in post-election policy making” (Powell, 200: 26). While both systems link votes to policy, this connection is much clearer within majoritarian systems compared to proportional systems. Consequently, pure majoritarian systems allow for high levels of clarity, while proportional systems exhibit low clarity. Mixed systems which combine elements of both ideal types fall within these extremes and can be characterized by middling levels of clarity.

A second feature central to determining clarity of responsibility is the majority status of government (Powell, 2000: 52). Clarity of responsibility is at its maximum when a single-party government is responsible for policymaking, i.e. when leaders of one party hold the chief offices of the executive and command enough seats in the legislature to initiate and make changes to policies at their discretion. True minority governments in which a party holds the prime ministership but lacks the seats to control the legislature occupy the other extreme of the spectrum. Here, the government party(ies) is completely dependent on other parties for its survival in office and for successful passage of its policies. Responsibility is blurred because “the party or parties…can always claim that their best efforts were blocked by other parties and that responsibility for policy failures must be shared by them” (Powell & Whitten, 1993: 401). At the same time, the parties outside of the executive are not readily identifiable as policymakers, making it difficult for voters to hold them accountable (Powell, 2000: 52). The myriad of coalition types falling between these extremes exhibit intermediate degrees of clarity.
Third, the extent to which opposition parties are able to influence policymaking can further complicate clarity of responsibility. Strong committee systems that provide opposition parties with “both real and symbolic bases of power” (Powell & Whitten, 1993: 400) in the legislature may be beneficial from the standpoint of representation of interests, but they cloud responsibility by facilitating (and sometimes even requiring) the dispersal of policymaking influence to numerous groups, including opposition parties (Powell, 2000: 32). In such systems, Powell notes, “even the most attentive observers may be hard put to say which party should bear the major responsibility for the final shape of a particular piece of legislation” (2000: 63).

The degree to which a party system is concentrated (or fragmented) provides a final indicator of clarity of responsibility. Two logics apply in this case. According to Anderson’s “available alternatives” argument, the ability of voters to hold a government accountable by throwing it out of office hinges on citizens being able to identify a credible alternative to the incumbent government (2000: 155). A large number of effective parties vying for power heightens uncertainty about the likely form of any future alternative government. In such settings, there is a greater possibility that members of the existing government coalition may stay on as participants in the new coalition, rendering voters’ punishment efforts useless (Anderson, 2000: 155-56; also see Lewis-Beck, 1986: 340-41, 1988). Kernell (1997) offers a slightly different line of argumentation, suggesting that a large number of opposition parties leads to a coordination problem for the voter; in essence, there are too many options from which to choose (also see Nadeau et al., 2002: 410-11).

Data and Operationalization

To examine the influence of clarity of responsibility on EU issue voting, we employ mass survey data from the 2004 European Election Survey (EES). Our choice to rely on the
EES instead of national election surveys stems from the breadth (cross-nationally) of the EES and the nature of the questions included. Unlike many national election surveys, the EES contains questions probing voters’ self and party placements on an European integration scale. This information is paramount, as it allows us to determine the extent to which voters’ EU preferences influence their vote choice (i.e. the extent of EU issue voting). Moreover, since the EES administers comparable surveys in member states across the EU, we are able to analyze how political-institutional arrangements influence EU issue voting in twelve Western European countries.

The dependent variable in our analysis is an individual’s intention to vote for the incumbent government. It is constructed using the following EES question: “If there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?” Based on respondents’ party vote choice, we create a dummy variable, with 1 denoting a vote for a party in government and 0 denoting all others. We are thus interested in whether individuals holding like-minded views on the EU as the government are more likely to give their support to an incumbent party and, more importantly, whether this relationship is influenced by the clarity of governmental responsibility.

We capture the extent of EU issue voting by creating an EU issue proximity variable. This measure is based on EES questions asking respondents to place themselves and parties on a 10-point scale ranging from the process of European integration “has already gone too far” (1) to the process of European integration “should be pushed further” (10). We operationalize EU issue proximity as the distance between a respondent’s self-placement and the mean position of the government party(ies) as perceived by all voters. In order to derive a Euclidian distance measure, we use the squared distance. We then recode the variable so that higher values indicate greater agreement with the incumbent government’s stance on the EU and lower values signal greater disagreement. We expect voters to vote for the party that most accurately
resembles their own EU positions. Thus, if EU issue voting is present, the value of the EU issue proximity variable should be positive and significant, indicating that as the distance between a respondent and a party decreases, the likelihood that the individual will vote for an incumbent party should increase.

*Clarity of responsibility* is measured by constructing an index incorporating the four indicators discussed in the previous section – electoral system, majority status of government, opposition influence, and party system concentration. These measures closely mirror those employed in earlier voting behavior studies. First, our operationalization of *electoral system* stems from Powell’s (2000: 41) three-category scheme, whereby systems are classified as predominately proportional, mixed, or predominately majoritarian. We assign these groups numerical scores reflecting the varying degree of clarity associated with each: predominately proportional=0, mixed=1, and predominately majoritarian=2. Our second indicator – *majority status of government* – follows Tavits’ (2007) application of Powell (2000: 56-7). The coding reflects ascending degrees of clarity, with minority governments receiving a score of 30, coalition governments a score of 60, and majority governments a score of 100. Third, we operationalize *opposition influence* on policymaking by considering the strength and inclusiveness of the formal committee structure in a given country. The number of permanent committees, proportional sharing of committee chairs between the government and opposition, and committee specialization corresponding to government departments provide powerful indicators of the potential influence of committees relative to the government as well as the influence of the opposition in the committee system. Taken together, these indicators capture the extent of opposition influence and thus reflect the diffusion of responsibility in a political system (Powell, 2000: 31-6, 63-4; also see Strom, 1990: 71). Combining them, we construct a trichotomous variable to operationalize opposition influence, where 0=high influence, 1=some influence, and 2=low influence (Powell, 2000: 59). Finally, we
take up Anderson’s (2000) argument concerning clarity of alternatives by including an indicator of party system concentration (also see Kernell, 1997). Here, we rely on Golder’s (2005) coding of effective number of parties.

We obtain a single, country-level measure of clarity of responsibility by aggregating the above variables into a four-component index. We do so by first standardizing the indicators and then averaging the scores by country. The outcome is a variable ranging from -0.88 (low clarity) to 1.86 (high clarity). The breakdown of countries that we attain is roughly the same as those found in other studies on clarity of responsibility (e.g. Powell & Whitten, 1993: 406; Nadeau et al., 2002: 412). In general, three groups emerge: low = Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Italy; middle = Austria, Germany, Portugal, and Spain; high = the United Kingdom, France, Greece, and Ireland. Since we are primarily interested in the role that clarity of responsibility plays in moderating EU issue voting, we use this index to create an interaction term – *Clarity of Responsibility * EU proximity.*

In order to determine if EU issue voting occurs independently of other sources of voting behavior, we control for non-EU related policy factors as well as for the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents. The policy variables include: left/right proximity, government approval, and prospective and retrospective national economic evaluations. The socio-economic controls include: gender, education, income, social class, religiosity, and residency. These variables are incorporated to control for dominant models explaining vote choice, such as economic and cleavage-based voting. In addition, the inclusion of these controls ensures that a respondent’s attitude toward European integration is not merely a proxy for other factors. Much of the research on EU support points to socio-economic attributes to explain support or opposition to European integration. The argument is that economic integration in Europe has created differential benefits for EU citizens (Gabel, 1998) depending on their income and education levels as
well as on the basis of their employment status. A detailed description of these variables and the others included in the analysis is provided in Appendix A.

**Analysis and Results**

Our empirical analysis proceeds in two parts. We first consider the complete index of clarity of responsibility and then disaggregate the measure to examine the independent effects of its constituent parts – electoral system, majority status of the government, opposition influence, and concentration of the party system. Since our dependent variable throughout the study is dichotomous (1=incumbent government, 0=opposition), all models utilize multivariate logistical regression, clustering on the country of the respondent.

Table 1 provides the results of the logistical regression analysis incorporating the clarity of responsibility index. In order to gain a sense of the contribution of clarity of responsibility to the overall fit of the model, we calculated a log-likelihood ratio test which compares the full model including all predictors to a nested model excluding clarity of responsibility and EU issue proximity*clarity of responsibility. The test indicates that the overall fit of the complete model is significantly better than the baseline model; the improvement in terms of log-likelihood is 445.087 (p<.001). These results provide initial support of the utility of accounting for differing political-institutional settings when examining EU issue voting.

Turning next to the individual predictors included in the full clarity of responsibility model, we find additional corroboration of our theoretical predictions. It is important to recall that the coefficients in the model show the change in the log odds of voting for the government party(ies) versus the opposition as a result of a one-unit increase in the independent variable. In other words, a positive coefficient indicates an increased likelihood of voting for an incumbent party rather than an opposition party. By
itself, EU issue proximity is highly significant and in the expected positive direction. Moreover, when EU issue proximity is estimated in interaction with the clarity of responsibility index, we find that clearer responsibility enhances the effects of EU issue voting considerably (i.e. the coefficient is positive and significant).

As suggested above, interpretation of logistic regression coefficients and interaction terms is less than straightforward given that they convey changes in log odds and conditional effects. To express the results in a more intuitive fashion, we therefore conduct post-estimation simulations to gain a sense of the marginal effect of each variable and interaction on predicted voting behavior. These predicted probabilities show the likelihood of an individual choosing to vote for a government party under a given set of values for the independent variables. By manipulating the values of each independent variable (while keeping the others constant at their respective means), we are able to observe changes in the predicted probabilities (first differences) of choosing the incumbent government over the opposition. In the case of EU issue proximity, for example, the figure indicates the predicted change (first difference) in the likelihood of an individual choosing to vote for a government party as his/her position on the EU grows closer to that of the government, while holding all other variables constant at their means.

The results of these post-estimation simulations are provided in Table 1 (columns labeled $\Delta y / \Delta x$\textsuperscript{2} and Figure 1. Overall, the findings fit our expectations regarding EU issue voting, demonstrating that the likelihood of an individual voting for the government increases as his/her outlook on the EU falls more in line with the positions held by the government parties (i.e. as EU issue proximity shifts from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean, the probability of voting for the government increases by .22). The simulations also illustrate a strong influence of both left-right

\textsuperscript{2} All post-estimation simulations are performed using \textit{CLARIFY}, which employs Monte Carlo simulations to convert raw statistical results into more intuitive findings without changing the statistical assumptions (King et al., 2000). \textit{CLARIFY} 2.1 can be downloaded from Gary King’s website: http://gking.harvard.edu/clarify/.
proximity and government approval on citizens’ voting behavior. These results should not come as a surprise. Previous research suggests that the left/right dimension is the main predictor of vote choice. Moreover, it is completely logical that an individual will be more inclined to vote for the incumbent when he/she feels the government has performed well. It is also worth noting that we find support, albeit mild, for the economic voting hypothesis. The likelihood of a citizen to vote for the incumbent government increases as his/her retrospective or prospective judgment of the economy improves.
### Table 1
Exploring the Interaction between EU Issue Voting and Clarity of Responsibility

<table>
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<th>Clarity of Responsibility Model</th>
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<td>of Responsibility</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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### Notes:
Table entries are standardized logistic regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses and marginal effects.

*** p ≤ .001; ** p ≤ .01; * p ≤ .05; ° p ≤ .1 (two-tailed).

We are primarily interested in the moderating influence of clarity of responsibility on EU issue voting. Are individuals in higher clarity environments more likely to take EU considerations into account when casting their votes than those in lower clarity settings? Figure 1 sheds light on this question. The chart illustrates the impact of EU issue proximity on the likelihood that an individual will vote for a government party, taking into account different institutional contexts. The x-axis denotes the institutional setting (i.e. levels of clarity of responsibility), while the y-axis captures the change in the probability of
voting for a government party as EU issue proximity shifts from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above the mean. The bars paint a clear picture of the affect of clarity of responsibility on EU issue voting. The predicted change in vote probability under high clarity conditions is 19.2 percent compared to only 3.5 percent when clarity is low. This conforms to our expectations. Political systems that concentrate power enhance the EU issue voting relationship, generating higher levels of EU issue voting in high-clarity systems as compared to their low-clarity counterparts.

Notes: Values indicate the predicted change in the probability of choosing a government versus an opposition party as EU issue proximity changes from one standard deviation below to one standard deviation above its mean value. Low clarity = Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, and Italy; middle clarity = Austria, Germany, Portugal, and Spain; high clarity = the United Kingdom, France, Greece, and Ireland. All changes are significant at p ≤ .05 (two-tailed).

Figure 1
Predicted Changes in Vote Probability as EU Issue Proximity and Clarity of Responsibility Change
What about the individual components of clarity of responsibility? Are the findings above driven by a subset (or perhaps even one) of variables included in the clarity index, or does each have a direct impact on the strength of the EU issue voting relationship? We can further explore the influence of clarity of responsibility on EU issue voting by breaking down the index into its constituent parts and examining the individual effect of each on EU issue voting. To do so, we run separate models for the four indicators—electoral system, concentration, majority status of government, and committee influence. The results are reported in Table 2.

The findings of the analyses attest to the robustness of our argument. For each of the components, the coefficients and the key interaction terms are statistically significant. This suggests that the separate indicators exert independent influence on the strength of EU issue voting. In all instances, the higher the level of clarity, the more likely it is that an individual will choose to vote for the government on the basis of EU issues. Specifically, majoritarian electoral systems, majority governments, weak opposition influence, and lower effective number of parties are each individually associated higher levels of EU issue voting.

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3 Since the indicators are intended to capture the same underlying concept of clarity, they are highly correlated. Including all of them in a single analysis would therefore not be particularly fruitful, since the independent effects would likely be underestimated given the high degree of multicollinearity.
Table 2
Exploring the Interaction between EU Issue Voting and Different Components of Clarity of Responsibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>Electoral System</th>
<th>Majority Status</th>
<th>Committee Influence</th>
<th>Concentration</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>EU Issue Proximity</td>
<td>.79*** (.05)</td>
<td>.32*** (.06)</td>
<td>.44*** (.05)</td>
<td>.54*** (.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral System</td>
<td>-.27*** (.05)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority Status</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.20*** (.04)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee Influence</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.29*** (.04)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.35*** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU Issue Proximity*</td>
<td>1.22*** (.05)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electoral System</td>
<td>-.27*** (.05)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority Status</td>
<td>1.34*** (.08)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Committee Influence</td>
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<td>.92*** (.05)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU Issue Proximity*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.57*** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left-Right Proximity</td>
<td>1.00*** (.06)</td>
<td>1.51*** (.11)</td>
<td>.61*** (.07)</td>
<td>1.14*** (.07)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government Approval</td>
<td>1.27*** (.04)</td>
<td>1.32*** (.04)</td>
<td>1.46*** (.04)</td>
<td>1.39*** (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retrospective Economic Considerations</td>
<td>.15*** (.05)</td>
<td>.17*** (.05)</td>
<td>.11** (.05)</td>
<td>.19*** (.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prospective Economic Considerations</td>
<td>.26*** (.05)</td>
<td>.23*** (.05)</td>
<td>.21*** (.04)</td>
<td>.24*** (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.05 (.04)</td>
<td>-.02 (.04)</td>
<td>-.01 (.04)</td>
<td>-.01 (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
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<td>-.01 (.04)</td>
<td>-.06° (.04)</td>
<td>-.01 (.01)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td>.20** (.07)</td>
<td>-.06 (.04)</td>
<td>.20*** (.05)</td>
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<td>Social Class</td>
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<td>.06 (.04)</td>
<td>.05 (.04)</td>
<td>.08° (.04)</td>
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<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>.10** (.04)</td>
<td>.19*** (.04)</td>
<td>.05 (.04)</td>
<td>.10** (.04)</td>
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<td>Residency</td>
<td>-.03 (.04)</td>
<td>-.01 (.04)</td>
<td>-.05 (.03)</td>
<td>-.02 (.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.43*** (.04)</td>
<td>-1.39*** (.06)</td>
<td>-.57*** (.04)</td>
<td>-.63*** (.04)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Wald $\chi^2$ 2091.02*** 1592.15*** 1474.63*** 1707.38***
Log Likelihood -2284.277 -2283.212 -2426.970 -2460.303
Pseudo $R^2$ .42 .42 .39 .38
N 5836 5836 5836 5836

Notes: Table entries are standardized logistic regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses.

*** p < .001; ** p < .01; * p < .05; ° p < .1 (two-tailed).
In sum, these results show that political institutions influence the level of EU issue voting via clarity of responsibility. Institutional environments that concentrate executive power, i.e. where the lines of responsibility are clear, allow voters to better decipher which actors to reward or punish for the state of European integration. This finding adds to the growing body of scientific work on EU issue voting by highlighting a factor that thus far has been largely neglected, namely the role of domestic institutional contexts.

Conclusion
This article examines whether EU issue voting is conditioned by political institutions. Drawing on strong evidence from the economic voting literature, this study argues that the extent to which a domestic institutional environment presents clear lines of accountability for government policy regarding European integration affects the degree to which EU preferences inform voters’ ballot choices. In other words, the link between European integration and incumbent vote is more extensive when responsibility of government performance is clear. The empirical analysis presented in this study provides compelling evidence for the extension of the clarity of responsibility argument beyond the context of economic voting. Using European Election Study (EES) data from twelve Western European countries, we demonstrate the impact of the formal institutional setting on levels of EU issue voting. In particular, we show that in institutional settings that focus executive power, i.e. in those where the lines of responsibility are clear, voters are better able to determine which actors to reward or punish for the state of European integration.

This study makes two important contributions. First, its findings are important for students of voting behavior. Since the concept of clarity of responsibility was coined in the early 1990s, economic voting scholars have preoccupied themselves with corroboration and refinement of these ideas. To date, however, no other study has
exported or tested the clarity of responsibility hypothesis in other fields of issue voting. Consequently, the evidence presented here is significant in that it demonstrates the applicability of the clarity of responsibility argument beyond the ambit of economic policies. Second, this research contributes to the field of EU studies in that it adds to our understanding of the conditions under which EU issue voting takes place. Interestingly, by demonstrating that EU issue voting is moderated by political institutions in largely the same way as economic voting, this study suggests that the EU issue behaves more or less like any other policy issue in electoral competition.

We conclude by outlining several future avenues of research that this study has not considered. First, in a next step we intend to expand the number of countries and the time-span of investigation. We are particularly interested in whether the findings presented here translate to the newer EU member states of Eastern and Central Europe. Secondly, it is worthwhile to compare these results to issue voting in other areas, such as immigration or the environment. Is issue voting on these increasingly salient matters also conditioned by institutional characteristics? Finally, this study has focused solely on horizontal clarity of responsibility at the national level. An additional line of research concerns an important and often omitted component of political context and clarity of responsibility, namely the vertical dimension of multi-level governance (see Anderson, 2006). Indeed, the development of the EU institutions itself may have obscured responsibility for government policy at the national level. Policymaking in contemporary Europe takes place in a tangled web of institutional responsibilities, meaning that governments throughout the EU no longer hold a sole monopoly over policymaking. As a result, it may be interesting to examine the extent to which these developments have resulted in the blurring of government responsibilities in the eyes of voters by a comparison of EU and non-EU member states.
References


## Appendix A: Variable Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Incumbent Vote**             | Dummy variable indicating whether the respondent voted for an incumbent party. Based on the following EES question: “If there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you vote for?” 1=vote for an incumbent party, 0=vote for opposition party.  
   *Source:* 2004 European Election Study                                                                                                   |
| **EU Issue Proximity**         | Operationalized as the absolute value of the distance between a respondent's self-placement and the mean position of the government party(ies) as perceived by all voters. Based on the following EES questions: “Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it has already gone too far. What is your opinion? And about where would you place the following parties on this scale?” (1=unification has already gone too far; 10=unification should be pushed further) Variable recoded so that higher values indicate greater agreement with the incumbent government's EU stance and the lower values signal greater disagreement.  
   *Source:* 2004 European Election Study                                                                                                    |
| **Clarity of Responsibility**  | Trichotomous variable indicating the type of electoral system. Coding reflects ascending degrees of institutional clarity of responsibility: predominately proportional=0, mixed=1, and predominately majoritarian=2.  
   *Source:* Powell, 2000                                                                                                                     |
| **Electoral System**           | Trichotomous variable indicating the majority status of government. Coding reflects ascending degrees of institutional clarity of responsibility: minority government=30, coalition government=60, and majority government=100. For a similar coding scheme, see Tavits, 2007.  
   *Source:* Powell, 2000                                                                                                                     |
| **Majority Status**            | An index indicating the degree of committee influence in a legislative system. Based on three components: number of permanent committees, proportional sharing of committee chairs between the government and opposition, and committee specialization corresponding to government departments.  
   (0=high influence, 1=some influence, and 2=low influence.  
   *Source:* Powell, 2000: 59                                                                                                                  |
| **Concentration**              | Variable indicating the degree of concentration of a party system. Operationalized as the effective number of parties in a system.  
   *Source:* Goldel, 2000                                                                                                                     |
| **Left-Right Proximity**       | Operationalized as the absolute value of the distance between a respondent's self-placement and the mean position of the government party(ies) as perceived by all voters. Based on the following EES questions: “In political matters people talk of ‘the left’ and ‘the right’. What is your position? And about where would you place the following parties on this scale?” (1=left; 10=right) Variable recoded so that higher values indicate greater agreement with the incumbent government’s left/right stance and the lower values signal greater disagreement.  
   *Source:* 2004 European Election Study                                                                                                   |
| **Governmental Approval**      | Dummy variable indicating whether the respondent approves of the incumbent party(ies) performance in office. Operationalized using the following EES question: “Do you approve or disapprove the government’s record to date?” 1=approve; 0=disapprove.  
   *Source:* 2004 European Election Study                                                                                                   |
| **Retrospective Economic Considerations** | Operationalized using the following EES question: “Compared to 12 months ago, do you think that the general economic situation in this country is 1=a lot better; 2=a little better; 3=stayed the same; 4=a little worse; 5=a lot worse?” Variable recoded so that higher scores reflect better economic considerations.  
   *Source:* 2004 European Election Study                                                                                                   |
**Prospective Economic Considerations**

Operationalized using the following EES question: “And over the next 12 months, how do you think that the general economic situation in this country will be? 1=a lot better; 2=a little better; 3=stayed the same; 4=a little worse; 5=a lot worse.” Variable recoded so that higher scores reflect better economic considerations. *Source:* 2004 European Election Study

**Gender**

Dummy variable indicating the sex of the respondent, recoded 1=female; 0=male. *Source:* 2004 European Election Study

**Education**

Respondent’s age when completed education, recoded 1=high; 0=low. *Source:* 2004 European Election Study

**Income**

Respondent’s household income, recoded 1=high; low=0. *Source:* 2004 European Election Study.

**Social Class**

Respondent’s subjective class identification, recoded 1=high; low=0. *Source:* 2004 European Election Study.

**Religiosity**

Respondent’s church attendance, recoded 1=high; low=0. *Source:* 2004 European Election Study.

**Residency**

Respondent’s area of residency, recoded 1=urban; 0=rural. *Source:* 2004 European Election Study.