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**Trust in the institutions of the European Union:
A cross-country examination**

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Abstract: Trust in political institutions is one of the key elements which make representative democracies work. Trust creates a connection between citizens and representative political institutions. Democratic governments which enjoy a large degree of trust also tend to have higher degrees of legitimacy and policy efficacy. In Europe's multi-level governance structure, it is imperative to understand the determinants of trust in the institutions of the European Union. With the increasing salience of the European Union, are domestic proxies still a key determinant of evaluating its institutions? Are there differences across the institutions and across the member states? We demonstrate that country-level corruption levels are what drives the relationship between domestic and European institutional trust. The majority of the variation in trust in the institutions of the European Union is, however, driven by individual-level predictors. We also find that individuals across Europe evaluate the institutions of the European Union through a single attitude dimension of political trust rather than through separate evaluations.

Keywords: Public opinion; legitimacy; democracy; institutions; national parliaments; European Central Bank; European Commission; European Council; European Court of Justice; European Parliament; multilevel governance.

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Introduction

Trust in political institutions is one of the key elements allowing representative democracies to work. Put simply, the level of trust citizens have in their political institutions is an intuitive measure of the congruence between their political preferences and the outputs of the representative political institutions. Institutional arrangements which are largely supported by the population, and consequently enjoy high degrees of trust, also enjoy higher degrees of legitimacy and policy efficacy. In recent decades we have witnessed a decline in trust in political institutions in many countries. This phenomenon has been documented both in established as well as newly created democracies (Norris, 1999; Pharr and Putnam, 2000; Dalton, 2004). The recent financial crisis exacerbated this trend and trust in national institutions has now fallen to an all-time low in many European countries (Roth, Nowak-Lehmann and Otter, 2011).

The European Union (EU), since its creation, has developed into a complex governance system with its own institutional arrangements whose scope and structure continue to evolve. These institutions have faced their own challenges, and scholars and practitioners alike have questioned their transparency and democratic responsiveness (Follesdal and Hix, 2006; Hix, 2008; Hurrelmann and DeBardeleben, 2009). Trusting institutions in general, and EU institutions in particular, is a prerequisite for increasing the legitimacy of the European Union and the likelihood of people and national decision-makers following the rules and practices of a European polity. Noting the decline in trust in domestic political institutions and the increase in complexity of the EU governance structures, it becomes imperative to disentangle the link between public trust in national and EU institutions, as a better understanding of these patterns may add another facet to our knowledge of the scope and nature of the democratic deficit in the European Union.

It is essential to assess how citizens directly evaluate EU institutions, which are positioned in a complex multi-level system of interaction with national and local agents (Hooghe and Marks, 2001; 2003). Given the growing interest in dynamics of European integration, and especially in light of the debates over the perceived deficit of EU democracy and the persistence of Euroskepticism, it is surprising that there are only a handful of studies that examine the correlates of trust in EU institutions. With the exception of recent investigations by Biernat (2007), Kaltenthaler, Anderson and Miller (2010) and Munoz, Torcal and Bonet (2011), the literature on public opinion about EU integration mostly focuses on the determinants of support for the EU, overlooking critical aspects of this dynamic, namely how trustworthy these institutions are to the public. In this paper, we model trust in EU institutions and assess its correlates, accounting both for the interplay between the domestic and EU political context and for direct predictors of EU institutional trust. Attempting to understand these correlates, we assess how well structured public opinions are on the EU institutions and examine the key predictors of these attitudes.

We evaluate the merits of the main findings reported in the literature by comparing the share of the variance accounted for by information on people's trust in their national institutions with the variance explained by other predictors. We assert that when considering the interplay between national and EU level institutions, there may be yet another option, which was largely overlooked. This option is the existence of orthogonal relations between the levels of trust in institutions at both levels.

We argue that previous research has come to ambiguous findings, since these relations were assessed without accounting for country-level random variance. Many analyses in the literature focus exclusively on trust in one or two European institutions, thus implicitly assuming that people's attitudes towards one EU institution are interchangeable with their attitudes towards another. As ad hoc litmus-tests, we evaluate whether a multitude of explanatory factors are associated with trust in all five central EU institutions, or alternatively, whether some factors are better predictors of trust in a specific institution, while others are better in predicting trust in other institutions.

Finally, we assess whether cross-country variation creates systematic differences in the levels of trust in EU institutions. In line with recent findings (Munoz, Torcal and Bonet, 2011) we show that context matters when country-level characteristics such as the levels of corruption, volume of welfare spending and decision-making power in the EU are taken into account. We find that citizens of countries with more widespread corruption are more likely to trust external and supranational institutions of governance. Accounting for country differences will allow a calibration of the dynamics of trust identified in previous research. In this paper we propose that in order to accurately explain the dynamics of support for the European Union or trust in its institutions, there is a need to account for the level of corruption, on top of indicators of trust in national institutions.

The paper proceeds in four stages. First, we review key theories and empirical findings from previous research on support for the European Union and trust in the European institutions. Next, we develop our theoretical framework by hypothesizing the expected relationships, and focus on the largely understudied role of the level of aggregate corruption and its effect on the level of trust in EU institutions. We also specify our expectations about these relationships both at the individual and country level. Subsequently, we use Eurobarometer (EB) data linked with aggregate indicators to test our key hypotheses, and discuss the insights these findings provide above and beyond what we already know from prior research. Finally, the paper concludes by highlighting the broader implications of our findings and providing perspectives for future research.

1. Determinants of trust in institutions of the European Union

Modeling attitudes towards European integration has mostly been done in terms of people's general support for European membership, rather than people's appreciation of the institutions of the Union. These studies have been devoted to explaining the longitudinal and cross-national dynamics of attitudes towards the EU, and to exploring the determinants of support for membership and further integration.

This line of research has recently been extended by the proposition that trust in EU institutions is becoming a central indicator of the legitimacy of the European Union. Scholars have, thus far, focused almost exclusively on the European Parliament (EP) and the European Central Bank (ECB). Initial evidence indicates that institutional evaluations are becoming more consequential and the ECB, for example, has grown to be a "[...] central concern in the process of European integration" (Kaltenthaler, Anderson, and Miller, 2010, p. 1262). The rationale for this assertion lies with the observation that EU institutions are virtually not accountable to EU citizens, the subjects of the integration process. Thus, low trust in these institutions may very well indicate a lack of legitimacy of the integration process (Rohrschneider, 2002).

Furthermore, we argue that focusing on the levels of trust in several of the EU institutions will give us a more nuanced picture of attitudes towards European integration, as these levels of trust are strongly correlated with the levels of support in EU membership.¹ It has been observed that in the majority of European countries, extreme opposition to European integration and a rejection of EU membership are still rare, while criticisms of specific EU issues, policies and institutional performance are much more common (Taggart, 1998; Kopecky and Mudde, 2002; Henderson, 2008). Thus, the relatively high variance in the trust items will provide useful insight for understanding public opinion on European integration. Recognizing the centrality of EU institutions as key agents in the integration process and as complimentary measures of this latent trait, we expect to gain a sharper understanding of the associations between the salient explanatory factors discussed in the literature and attitudes toward the EU.

Studies so far have modeled EU trust either as a function of individual characteristics or as a result of contextual factors. Rarely was this outcome assessed by means of a multilevel analysis employed to determine the cross-level random effects on it. Notwithstanding some of the drawbacks in different research strategies in terms of units of analysis, selection of variables, and employment of statistical methodologies, several key factors have been repeatedly identified as salient predictors of evaluations of the European Union. We classify these variables into five

¹ In an analysis not shown here strong longitudinal associations between these metrics have been found, with an overall Chi-square (with 10 degrees of freedom) = 41802, $p < 0.001$.

variables families: 1) trust in domestic institutions, 2) the level of political corruption, 3) political capital, 4) ideology, and 5) socio-economic status and pre-disposing characteristics. We will next discuss each of these categories in more detail. Since there are very few studies focusing specifically on EU institutions, we review models developed to assess general EU support, and employ their insights in understanding the correlates of institutional trust.

1.1. Trust in domestic and EU institutions: Congruence, compensation or no direct associations?

Previous works have identified associations between trust in institutions at the national and EU level. Recent findings indicate that European integration has become more politicized and that public opinion on it is becoming more and more incorporated in the general dimensions of political contestation in Europe (Evans, 1999; van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004; Tarrow, 2004; Kriesi, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). In this literature, it is argued that since people's trust in EU institutions is largely a reflection of their levels of trust in national institutions, the latter is a valid proxy of the former. In other words, citizens are presumed to use their domestic political context as a reference for evaluating the European Union, its policies and institutions (Petersen 1998; Rohrschneider, 2002; Brinegar and Jolly, 2005; Scheuer and van der Brug, 2007).

These dynamics were first explored in the seminal "second-order" model of voting behavior in European elections (van der Eijk, Franklin and Marsh, 1996). This dominant paradigm has demonstrated that results in European elections are largely driven by domestic political considerations and by the low salience of European issues among citizens. Similarly, Anderson (1998) asserts that domestic institutional trust plays a key role in determining evaluations of the European Union due to the low levels of information about the supranational institutions and the direct involvement of national governments in European policy-making. This literature suggests that there is congruence between evaluations of the domestic political system and evaluations of the EU (Blondel, Sinnott and Svensson, 1998; Rohrschneider, 2002; Biernat, 2007; de Vries and van Kersbergen, 2007; Scheuer and van der Brug, 2007), so that a high level of trust in the national institutions corresponds with a high level of trust in EU institutions, and vice versa.

Another strand of research, investigating the link between the national and EU sphere in public opinion formation, theorizes that the relationship is less straightforward than expected. Known as "compensation" (Munoz, Torcal and Bonet, 2011) or the "different assessments" model (Kritzinger, 2003), this approach asserts that citizens are in fact more likely to have a higher approval of the EU when their trust in their national institutions is low, and vice versa. In this case, the underlying causal mechanism assumes that citizens view the two centers of authority as separate or even as alternatives to one another. Thus, perceiving one's national government as incompetent or inefficient can generate the expectation that EU policies can mitigate some of the

shortcomings of these national institutions. On the other hand, citizens who are satisfied with their domestic policies may fear that transferring sovereignty to the supranational authorities may undermine an otherwise well-functioning national political system. This hypothesis has been confirmed in numerous studies, employing both individual as well as aggregate data in their analyses (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Kritzinger, 2003; Listhaug and Ringdal, 2008; Ilonszki, 2009).

Munoz, Torcal and Bonet (2011) attempted to reconcile the congruence-compensation debate by explaining that both mechanisms – congruence and compensation – are linking citizen's trust in national and EU institutions, but operate on a different level of analysis. Analyzing the individual level data, they found that as the level of trust in national institutions increases, one's trust in the EU institutions correspondingly increases. Conversely, at the country level, the relationship is reversed, and lower levels of trust in national institutions lead to higher levels of trust in EU institutions. While all three of these approaches differ in their expected effect of national institutions, they all share the notion that trust in EU institutions is a function of trust in national institutions. Attempting to test these approaches on the expected relations between trust in national and EU level institutions, we formulate our first two competing hypotheses:

H1: There is a positive relationship between trust in national and EU institutions. The higher the level of trust in national institutions, the higher the level of trust will be in EU institutions.

H2: There is a negative relationship between trust in national and EU institutions. The higher the level of trust in national institutions, the lower the level of trust will be in EU institutions.

We contend that conceptually the association between trust in national and EU institutions may in fact be a function of a third latent trait, specifically, the level of corruption, which shapes evaluations of both domestic and EU institutions. However, in addition to assessing the correlates of corruption and trust, a precondition to test this hypothesis and to establish that there are no direct associations between the levels of trust in national and EU institutions would be to reject H1 and H2.

Corruption and trust in institutions

Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) proposes that corruption should be accounted for when modeling support for the European Union. Other scholars have also documented that corruption is a highly salient and publicized issue, especially in the new member states (Miller, Grodeland and Koshechkina, 2001; Karklins, 2002; Grigoresku, 2006; Andreev, 2009; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006). Additionally, Munoz, Torcal and Bonet (2011) have recently provided evidence of the importance of aggregate corruption estimates across Europe, both for the old and the new member states, thus strengthening the need for further examination of its effects. Despite the evidence that corruption levels are structuring people's attitudes towards the EU, however, only few attempts have been made to incorporate this factor in general models of support for European integration.

Focusing on corruption may help us provide a direct link between political systems' reputation and the level of trust people have in EU institutions. We theorize that evaluations of domestic political institutions may be subsumed by the general corruption patterns present in the country, thus making corruption levels a more direct indicator of domestic institutional performance, and a more robust correlate of trust in EU institutions. We expect citizens from more corrupt countries to be more likely to turn to the EU in search of better governance. A link in people's mind between political corruption and low expectations of their national institutions, results in citizens being far more likely to consider EU supranational institutions as a preferred alternative to national institutions. This also leads to a perception of lowering the costs associated with a process of eroding national sovereignty (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000). Thus, potentially, the EU institutions may be becoming associated in citizens' minds with the image of an external democratic actor monitoring domestic crime and corruption trends. In line with the above discussion, we formulate two further hypotheses:

H3: The aggregate perceived level of corruption in EU member states is positively associated with an individual's likelihood to trust EU institutions. The higher the levels of corruption, the higher the levels of trust individuals will have in these institutions.

Rohrschneider and Loveless (2010) point out that surprisingly few studies have examined the effect of institutional quality on EU attitudes. Put differently, the levels of trust people have in their national institutions is in itself dependent upon the performance of these institutions, and as such, may not be directly associated with the level of trust in EU institutions. Thus, an interaction effect needs to be considered. Such an interaction term measures the assessments of citizens regarding the actual performance of the political system by linking the level of corruption with an evaluation of the levels of trust in these (national) institutions. We expect this interaction to have a significant effect on the outcome variable. We further expect that accounting for this interaction will turn the direct associations between trust in national and EU institutions insignificant. The following hypothesis postulates the aforementioned interaction effect:

H4: Citizens of countries with high levels of perceived corruption who nevertheless trust their national institutions will be more likely to trust the EU institutions, compared to citizens of countries with lower levels of perceived corruption who trust their national institutions.

Political capital and trust in European institutions

The third category of predictors we label "political capital", referring to the leverage gained by a country when possessing: 1) a greater number of politically engaged citizens, 2) higher levels of satisfaction with the functioning of its democracy and, in the case of the EU, 3) higher satisfaction with its membership in the European Union. Thus, we need to stress that we are not defining political capital as an outgrowth of the "social capital" manifested in civil society,

interpersonal and state-citizens relations (Putnam, 1993; 1995; Booth and Richard, 1998). Rather, we refer to the greater legitimacy that governments acquire when their citizens are both interested in the process and satisfied with the outputs of governance structures.

We use cognitive mobilization as an indicator of citizens' engagement in politics. Given the complexity of the institutional structure of the EU and its relative distance from the average citizen, individuals who are more cognitively mobilized would be more likely to understand, and consequently support European integration (Inglehart, 1970). This ability is often operationalized through interest and engagement in politics, as well as level of attained education. As individuals' cognitive mobilization increases, they are less threatened and more supportive of European integration (Inglehart, Rabier and Reif, 1991; Janssen, 1991). In other words, knowledge breeds support. Empirical studies have provided partial support for this hypothesis (Inglehart, Rabier and Reif, 1991; Anderson, 1998; Gabel, 1998a, 1998b; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002). This effect may be more prominent in the new member states which have had much shorter time period to familiarize themselves with the nature of European institutions. However, it could also be expected that in recent years this relationship has become more tenuous since greater contestation on EU issues has emerged in European societies. McLaren (2007) finds no effects of education on attitudes towards the European Union; however, interest in politics as exemplified by engaging in political discussions, remains a significant predictor. Cognitive mobilization theory equates knowledge with support, but it may no longer be justified to assume that greater education, higher socio-economic status and greater political interest automatically translate into greater support for the European Union and its institutions.

An examination of the link between cognitive mobilization and trust in EU institutions may be particularly important since these institutions are frequently viewed negatively by Euroskeptic elites. New studies attempt to examine this link and account for the possibility that having greater political knowledge can strengthen one's awareness and, consequently, sharpen one's concerns about the allegedly unrepresentative and insufficiently transparent EU institutions (Karp, Banducci and Bowler, 2003). Thus, knowledge may in fact decrease support for the European Union. Our study examines the validity of the original cognitive mobilization hypothesis in the face of changing public opinion trends across Europe. We tentatively hypothesize that higher cognitive mobilization would increase trust in the institutions of the European Union; however, we allow for the possibility that this relationship may be weak or even reversed in light of the rise of Euroskepticism and political contestation over EU issues.

H5: Citizens with higher cognitive mobilization (i.e. greater interest in politics, higher education and higher socio-economic status) will have a better understanding of the dynamics of the EU, and will therefore be more prone to trust its institutions.

Our second predictor of political capital captures general satisfaction with the functioning of the national democratic system. As the European Union is often criticized for having a deficit of democracy and representation, citizens' satisfaction with the quality of domestic democracy may affect their perceptions regarding EU institutions as well. Scholars have long noted that institutional legitimacy is closely interconnected with democratic legitimacy and evaluations of political institutions need to be considered in the context of evaluations of the functioning of democracy (Klingemann, 1999; Norris, 1999). Such an anticipated effect of satisfaction with domestic democracy on trust in the European institutions may help settle the dispute between the rival hypotheses discussed earlier in the context of the congruence-compensation debate. Accounting for satisfaction with the functioning of democracy has the added value of expressing sentiments towards the entire political system, not only its institutions. We therefore hypothesize that:

H6: Satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in one's country is correlated with the level of trust one has for EU institutions. People who are satisfied with democracy will be more likely to evaluate the EU positively in general and support its institutions in particular.

Another predictor discussed extensively in the literature and associated with increased output legitimacy of the EU governance system, is one's perception of the utilities of membership in the European Union. Specifically, in these studies scholars juxtapose people's perceived costs and benefits derived from membership in the EU and their support for the EU (Anderson and Reichert, 1995). Since its initial conceptualization, the utilitarian hypothesis has survived the test of changing European policies and structures and remains one of the most consistent predictors of support for European integration. Studies have tested the relationship with both individual and country level data, examined the difference between egocentric and sociotropic economic evaluations and juxtaposed utilitarian factors to political and cultural ones. Still, there remains a strong systematic impact of benefits from EU membership on support for the European Union (Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Gabel, 1998b; Tucker, Pacek and Berinsky, 2002; Brinegar and Jolly, 2005; McLaren, 2007).

In light of the strong effects shown in previous studies, we set forth to examine the effect of perceived benefits from membership on trust in the European institutions. We expect a positive relationship across individuals and we expect this relationship to hold after we include contextual country-level predictors.

H7: Individuals who perceive their country's membership in the EU as beneficial are more prone to trust European institutions. Since the subjective utilities perceived by individuals have been found correlated with the objective net contribution we expect this relationship to hold even after we control for contextual effects.

Ideology

With European integration becoming more politicized and incorporated in national political debates, it is essential to consider the effect of citizens' self-reported position on the left/right scale of distributional conflict on trust in the EU institutions. While a rather broad concept, ideology is additionally useful in further confirming or rejecting the expectation that the national political context is the main source of attitude formation on the EU. Left-right ideology is a traditional reference point for forming party allegiances and specific political opinions in the national sphere. Since European integration is becoming more incorporated in domestic political discourse, it follows that the left-right scale might also begin to capture citizens' opinions on the European Union.² In this study, we test the applicability of the left-right attitude dimension in structuring attitudes of individuals towards the institutions of the EU. Forming expectations about the direction of this relationship is not a straightforward undertaking as the European Union can be criticized from the economic left for eroding social protections and from the 'cultural' right for imposing the norm of multiculturalism on national communities. In light of the previously documented robustness of utilitarian indicators in determining EU attitudes, we believe that the economic conception of "left-right" is more likely to correlate with trusting EU institutions.

H8: Individuals who identify as further to the left in terms of the left-right ideological scale will be less likely to trust the institutions of the European Union.

Country welfare expenses, decision-making power and trust in EU institutions

In order to account for the country-level context, our study includes a number of aggregate predictors. One of them – aggregate corruption levels – we have already discussed above as potentially having an important interaction effect with trust in domestic and EU institutions. While we contend that corruption would account for the largest share of cross-country variation, we believe additional factors may also influence trust in the institutions of the European Union. The first of those – the welfare state and social spending – has long been established as conditioning individuals' political attitudes and guiding political behavior (Rokkan, 1999; Kumlin, 2002; Derks, 2006; Crepaz and Damron, 2009). However, less is known about the effect of the welfare state on attitudes towards the European Union and its institutions. Most analyses, so far, have contended that citizens of more generous welfare states are more likely to fear that European integration will undermine some of the social benefits and social structures inherent in a developed welfare state (Perrineau, 2005; Eichenberg and Dalton, 2007; Sauger, Brouard and

² On the other hand, Hooghe and Marks (2009) demonstrate that when it comes to political parties, the left-right dimension is not a clear predictor of party positioning on European integration – it is the more identity-based GAL-TAN dimension that structures party positions.

Grossman, 2007). Thus, being from an EU member state with more generous welfare spending would decrease one's support for the European Union (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Kumlin, 2009). Munoz, Torcal and Bonnet (2011), however, find no support for this claim thus pointing to the need for further critical examination of the relationship between the welfare state and support for European integration.

In our study we theorize that, as far as institutional trust is concerned, higher social spending at the national level will in fact boost trust in the institutions of the EU. The safety-net created by national welfare states would make citizens feel more secure and, while policy changes resulting from the deepening and widening of European integration may lead to an increased perception of economic threats, this effect is minimized to the extent to which citizens feel protected by the national welfare states.

H9: Individuals living in countries with developed welfare systems and relatively high social spending will be more likely to trust EU institutions.

In addition, we are interested in the possible effect that differences in formal decision-making power across member states may have on trusting EU institutions. While previous research has demonstrated that actual voting is rarely used and most decisions are taken by consensus, larger countries can still be presumed to have an advantage in setting the policy agenda and influencing the direction of European integration. Therefore, if citizens perceive their country to be a more important player in the EU, they may be more likely to have a positive view of European institutions as it is their national representatives who have greater opportunities to shape the structure and agendas of these institutions. Or, alternatively – individuals from smaller member states may feel European institutions give them a greater say in European affairs than they would have had merely through conventional bilateral diplomatic channels. Thus, if European institutions are perceived to empower small states, the decision-making variable may in fact be negatively related to evaluations of European institutions. We believe the latter proposition holds greater potential in explaining patterns of trust since it takes into account the informal but well-documented (Lewis, 1998; Sherrington, 2000; Heisenberg, 2005; Novak, 2010) consensual decision-making practices in the Council of Ministers.

H10: Individuals living in countries with less decision-making power will be more likely to trust EU institutions.

Demographics and predisposing characteristics

The above sections outlined our main theoretical expectations to capture the determinants of trust in the EU institutions. In addition to our main predictors, we also consider the potential influence of standard demographic characteristics such as age and gender. Gender, in particular, has been hypothesized to affect support for European integration, with women holding more negative

evaluations of the EU. Nelsen and Guth (2000) provide evidence for the existence of a small, but statistically significant, gender gap in evaluations of the European Union. Hence, we include these demographic factors in our study, in addition to a more psychological predisposing determinant of attitude formation – an individual’s subjective well-being. Life satisfaction can provide the first step towards incorporating the largely ignored influence of subjective psychological orientations on support for the EU and its institutions. Recent studies in political science have charted a novel and promising research agenda linking psychological traits such as subjective well-being and personality traits to citizens’ political attitudes and behavior (Mondak and Halperin, 2008; Bjornskov, Dreher and Fischer, 2010; Gerber, Huber, Doherty and Dowling, 2010; Mondak, Hibbing, Damarys, Seligson and Anderson, 2010). Little of this research, however, has been tested in the European context. The complex governance structure of the European Union may increase the likelihood that psychological orientations will condition one’s attitudes towards European institutions. Levels of life satisfaction are, of course, partly driven by external circumstances in the life of an individual; however, underlying psychological predispositions also condition how individuals perceive adverse circumstances in their lives. While we are agnostic about the expected presence and direction of the relationships between the above three factors and EU institutional trust, we believe that a comprehensive analysis needs to take them into consideration.

All hypotheses of this study will be tested using both survey and aggregate data. The next sections discuss the research design in more detail and present the results of the statistical analysis. We conclude with a summary of our findings, their implications and possible avenues for future research.

2. Data and method

In our analyses we use Eurobarometer data for the years 2005-2010.³ These public opinion surveys are particularly useful since they offer universal coverage of all EU member states. These surveys use identical phrasing of questions and answer categories across time and cases. The time

³ For our analysis we use the following EBs: 63.4, 64.2, 65.2, 66.1, 67.2, 68.1, 69.2, 70.1, 71.1, 71.3, and 73.4, downloaded from the GESIS archive (ZACAT). The overall cross-time item-response rates for all EU institutions trust items rates were satisfying. Eighty percent or more of our respondents provided valid answers to the EP and EU commission trust items in all years but 2006, when it dropped to 40%. In the same year, this was the item response rate for all trust in EU items. Trust in ECB, ECJ and Council followed similar trends, with seventy percent or more of the respondents providing valid answers in these items. One irregularity was noted with the trust in Council of Ministers and European Court of Justice trust items for 2009. The data for these items had some irregularities, and considering the costs and benefits of including it in our analyses, we maintained that to avoid biases in our estimates, these data for this year should be dropped.

period covered in this paper allows us to compare the levels of trust across member states, accounting for differences such as length of membership in the EU, national social spending, decision-making power in the Council of Ministers and average perceived corruption at the aggregate level.

The analysis will be conducted in four stages. Initially, we will regress the level of trust in five EU institutions using individual level data for the years 2005-2010. These analyses will serve two purposes: one will be a replication of baseline results reported in the literature; the other will be an assessment of the consistency of associations between the individual predictors and different degrees of trust in the institutions. To achieve this, we will employ multivariate logit models and regress trust in institutions as a binary political result, for 58,658 respondents within the same time period. Next we will assess the scalability of these various items, and follow up with an OLS model aimed at examining the associations of this trust scale with the individual level predictors. Once the scalability of these items has been established, we replicate the analysis reported in the first stage, to assess the relations between these factors and the level of trust. Finally, we employ a multi-level OLS model, accounting for the contextual effects discussed earlier. This analysis will help us to determine the extent to which the variance in the level of trust is a result of individual level characteristics and contextual factors.⁴ Additionally, it will help us calibrate our understanding of the associations between the individual level and the country level of trust.

2.1. Trust in EU institutions and support for the EU

Regarding trust in institutions of the European Union, respondents are asked about their trust in the European Parliament, European Commission, Council, European Central Bank, and the European Court of Justice.⁵ As we have mentioned above, most analysis of EU approval do not employ trust-in-institutions items, but rather general support for EU membership.⁶ Since the current analysis aims at scrutinizing the differences in people's attitudes towards the EU, we find the former a better proxy of these sentiments, as it holds greater variance than the items measuring attitudes towards integration. These constructs, although conceptually independent,

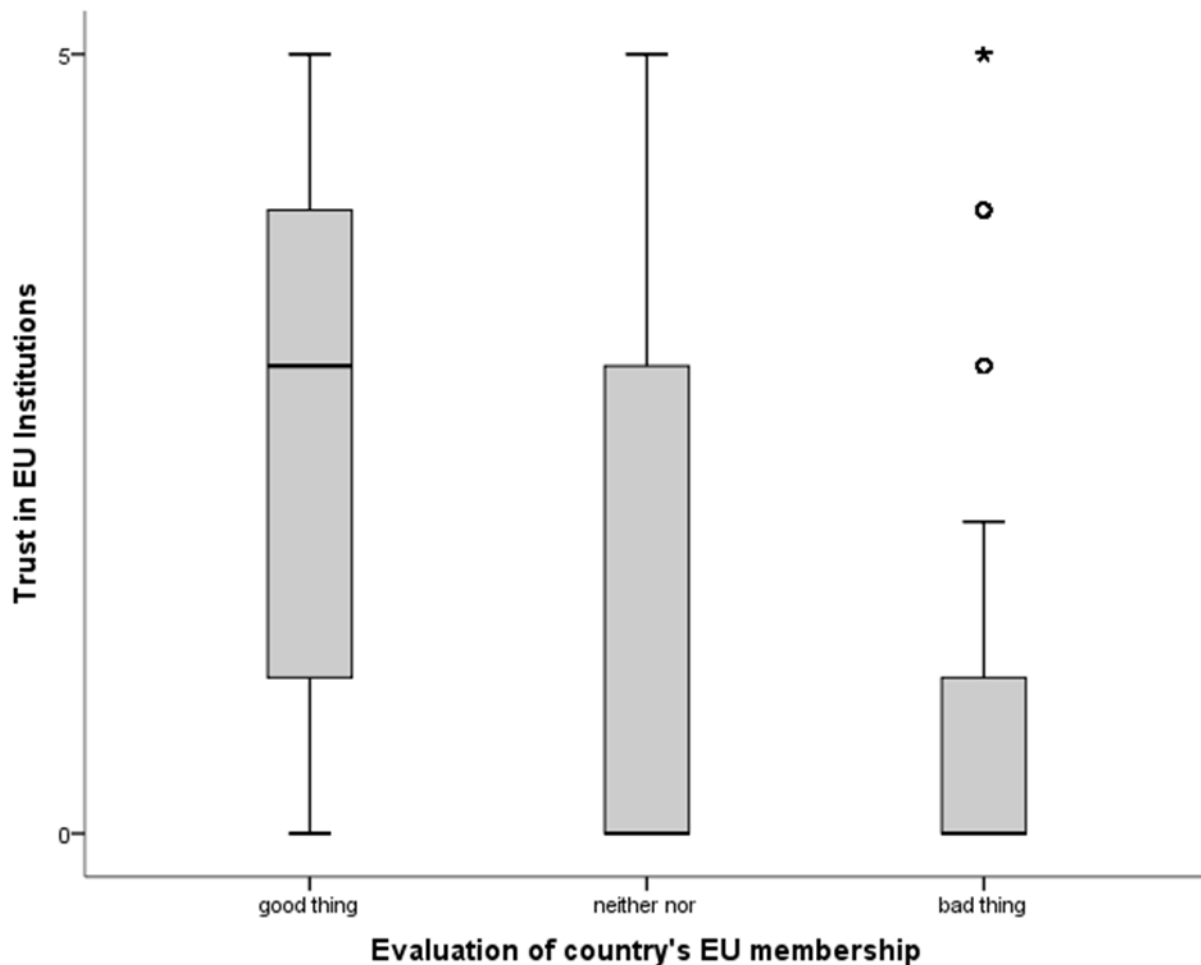
⁴ In this analysis we included data on 36,762 respondents, for the years 2005 and 2007 only. The cross-country variance for these years was sufficiently high to allow a multi-level model, while response rates for these items in 2006 had less than a satisfying item response rate in the EB data.

⁵ For a more intuitive interpretation, coding directions of trust variables are reversed, with 1= tend not to trust and 2 = tend to trust.

⁶ Here respondents are asked the following question: "Generally speaking, do you think that [your country's] membership of the European Union is...". Possible answers were: "a good thing", "neither Good nor bad", "a bad thing" or "don't know".

are strongly associated with one another, as shown in Figure 1. The differences in the average levels of trusts in EU institutions along the lines of general EU approval are striking, suggesting high level of affinity. Looking at Figure 1 we note that while the median trust in EU institutions for citizens asserting their country's membership in the EU is positive was 3, the median for individuals asserting it is negative or neutral was 0. Different levels of variance were also noted across EU membership approval. The high variance of over 3 for citizens perceiving membership as positive or neutral was matched with a lower variance of 2 for citizens perceiving it as negative. This low variance suggests greater homogeneity for members of this group. Consequently, high levels of trust in EU institutions, is an outlier of the general trend.

Figure 1: Trust in EU institutions across approval of EU membership.



On average four in every ten respondents had no trust at all in EU institutions. Breaking these by EU approval, we note that only two out of ten respondents who approved their country's membership did not trust the institutions of the Union, compared to seven out of ten amongst the respondents who considered their membership negative. A similar trend can be seen in the other direction - while on average 14 percent of the respondents expressed maximum trust in EU institutions (i.e. stated they trust each of the five institutions discussed in this paper), some 20 percent of those approving of the EU reported this level of trust in its institutions - but only 4 percent of those who did not approve their country's membership trusted the institutions that strongly. These associations suggest to us that these metrics share certain communalities. This finding in itself does not constitute interchangeability between these two traits. Nevertheless, its existence does indeed support our decision to model trust in EU institutions employing the explanatory factors saliently predicting approval of EU membership.

2.2. Trust in EU institutions influenced by trust in national institutions

Regarding trust in national institutions, the respondents in the EB surveys are asked to specify their level of trust in national parliaments, governments, political parties and courts. These institutions arguably constitute the backbone of modern democracy. The stability and performance of a democracy have empirically been demonstrated to be dependent on the willingness of the citizens to support their political system. Political institutions and representatives require a minimum of trust from the citizens to whom they are accountable. We have also ascertained that trust in the EU institutions is sufficiently distinct in the minds of respondents from trust in the national institutions. The results of a confirmatory factor analysis for two batteries of trust items (national and EU) reaffirms that they indeed load into two discrete components: one for the EU and one for the national. For a more intuitive interpretation, coding directions of trust variables are reversed, with 1= tend not to trust and 2 = tend to trust.

2.3. Further predictors of trust in EU institutions

We modeled trust in EU institutions as a function of factors from several realms: 1) trust in domestic institutions, 2) the level of political corruption, 3) political capital, 4) ideology, and 5) demographics and pre-disposing characteristics. Furthermore, since cross-country differences and institutional contexts have been hypothesized to be salient predictors of trust in the EU institutions and the changes in the level of trust, we control for country-level covariates, namely national welfare spending, decision-making power in the Council of Ministers and aggregate corruption levels as estimated by elite assessments and opinion surveys.

Within the category that we have labeled “political capital”, we included cognitive mobilization, satisfaction with domestic democracy and perceived benefits from EU membership. One’s cognitive mobilization is often measured through interest in politics, education and occupational status. Our interest-in-politics variable is formed on the basis of frequency of engaging in political discussion and attempting to persuade others: “When you hold a strong opinion, do you ever find yourself persuading your friends, relatives or fellow workers to share your views? Does this happen: 1) Often, 2) From time to time, 3) Rarely, or 4) Never”. The variable has been recoded to make the higher values correspond with greater frequency of persuasion. In addition, we include years of education and occupational status as possible indicators of higher cognitive mobilization⁷.

The variable measuring satisfaction with national democracy captures generalized attitudes towards the quality of the democratic process. This 4-category measure was created in response to the following question: “On the whole, are you *very* satisfied, fairly satisfied, not *very* satisfied or not at *all* satisfied with the way democracy works (in your country)?” Coding has again been reversed and higher values indicated a greater satisfaction with national democracy. Regarding the perceived benefits from EU membership, we measure utilitarian considerations by responses to the following question: “Taking everything into account, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?” The variable is coded 1 for “benefited” and 0 for “not benefited”.

Our next conceptual category aimed to capture the effects of ideological stances on trusting EU institutions. This variable is operationalized through a self-reported left-right placement, consisting of 10 categories where a score of 10 suggests a placement on the most right-wing ideology. Finally, we controlled for the respondents’ remaining demographic characteristics such as age and gender; as well as for satisfaction with one’s life. We controlled for the third variable since it can make individuals more likely to give positive evaluations of any institution, but an even more important question is whether respondents with low life satisfaction tend to attribute some of the blame for their perceived misfortunes to the EU and its institutions. It is measured using the question “On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the life you lead?” For the purposes of the analysis, higher values are indicative of greater satisfaction with one’s life.

⁷ Rather than use each one of the occupational categories separately, this variable has been recoded where 1 = high occupational status and 0 all other occupations. High occupational status includes professional, business owner and supervisor.

Attempting to understand people's political views and behavior one cannot ignore the political and social context individuals are part of. We employed three country-level variables in our model to account for these differences. First, we include a measure of the scope of the welfare state. This is measured as the average expenditure on social protection per country as reported by Eurostat for the time period examined. Secondly, to account for the country's decision-making power in EU level institutions we also include a second-level predictor consisting of the number of votes an EU member state has in the Council of Ministers. Finally, another key country-level factor that we hypothesize would affect institutional trust is the level of corruption in the country. This variable is measured using Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index which ranks countries in terms of the pervasiveness of corruption. Estimates are derived by using expert assessments and opinion surveys.⁸ Higher score on this index indicates that a country has less corruption. Furthermore, since we are controlling for the level of trust in national institutions, we also account for the joint effects of individuals' trust in these institutions and the average level of perceived corruption. With these interactions we can capture such cross-level associations, and account for the net differences between respondents across different contextual circumstances.

We commence our investigation by regressing trust in five central European institutions in an attempt to replicate previous findings and compare the relations each of these trust measures has with the explanatory variables. The institutions we assess trust for are the European Parliament, Commission, Council of Ministers, Court of Justice European, and Central Bank. Each of these models may be specified as⁹:

$$\text{Logit}(\text{Trust_EU_Institution}_{ki}) = \beta_{0k} + \beta_{1k}\text{Trust_MS}_i + \beta_{2k}\text{Political_capital}_i + \beta_{3k}\text{Ideology}_i + \beta_{4k}\text{Predisposing_characteristics}_i + u_i$$

Next we establish the scalability of the trust in these multiple trust in EU institutions items on a unidimensional index. We next regress this scale with the same explanatory variables employed in the logit model. Here we regress the trust scale using an OLS regression. Since our objective for this analysis is to replicate the salient findings in the literature, we only use individual-level predictors in this model. Ultimately, we will follow-up with a proper multilevel model, as specified in equation [2]¹⁰:

⁸ For more information on Transparency International's data gathering methodologies, please see:

http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi.

⁹ For EU Institutions 1 through k, β_0 represents the model intercept, u_i represents the model error term, and the model predictors are organized in categories of variables. The exponentiations of the β values will give us the odds ratios. The betas are calculated in terms of the expected probabilities of individuals to trust EU institutions.

¹⁰ Where β_{0j} represents the model constant, u_{ij} represents the model error term, and the model predictors are organized in categories of variables.

$$Trust_EU_Institutions_{ij} = \beta_0j + \beta_1Trust_MS_{ij} + \beta_2Political_capital_{ij} + \beta_3Ideology_{ij} + \beta_4Predisposing_characteristics_{ij} + \beta_5Corruption_j + \beta_6Decision-making_power_j + \beta_7Welfare_j + \beta_8Corruption_j*Trust_MS_{ij} + u_{ij}$$

3. Results

We start our analysis by first assessing the extent to which context plays an important role in understanding the dynamics of trust in EU institutions. To demonstrate these differences we examine the average levels of trust in old and new member states, groups of countries frequently referred to in the literature. This comparison will help assess whether or not significant differences exist across groups of countries. Since the majority of Central and East European countries joined in 2004, and Romania and Bulgaria followed in 2007, our dataset contains information on the first years of EU membership for the new member states. By comparing the average levels of trust in each of the groups, we will have an evaluation of the magnitude of differences between the groups and examine the extent to which these differences are robust. Substantial differences will signal the need for modeling the data in a multi-level structure.

Table 1 shows the different levels of trust in the EU and national institutions. We note that each of the institutions enjoys a fairly high level of trust in both the old and the new member states. Looking at the first half of the table, namely trust in the EU institutions, we note that the European Court of Justice and the Central Bank achieved similar levels of trust in both groups of countries (3:10 and 4:10 respectively). Conversely, the level of trust for the Council of Ministers was slightly higher in the new member states. Also for the EP and the Commission, the levels of trust were higher in the new member states than they were in the old ones. These differences are statistically significant as observed in the F-scores in Table 1.

Table 1: Trust in European and national institutions, percentages

| | OLD MS | | NEW MS | | Total | | F |
|-----------------|--------|-------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|
| | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | Mean | S.D. | |
| EU | | | | | | | |
| EP | 48.57 | 49.98 | 52.06 | 49.96 | 50.03 | 50.00 | 351.15* |
| Commission | 45.10 | 49.76 | 48.46 | 49.98 | 46.51 | 49.88 | 324.57* |
| Council | 31.57 | 46.48 | 36.89 | 48.25 | 33.80 | 47.30 | 906.82* |
| Court | 30.44 | 46.02 | 27.10 | 44.45 | 29.04 | 45.40 | 388.09* |
| Central Bank | 42.57 | 49.45 | 39.42 | 48.87 | 41.25 | 49.23 | 293.83* |
| | | | | | | | |
| National | | | | | | | |
| Parties | 20.82 | 40.60 | 11.35 | 31.72 | 16.84 | 37.42 | 4660.67* |
| Parliament | 45.91 | 49.83 | 26.28 | 44.02 | 37.67 | 48.46 | 12245.98* |
| Government | 42.95 | 49.50 | 33.15 | 47.08 | 38.84 | 48.74 | 2925.50* |
| Judiciary | 40.04 | 49.00 | 26.05 | 43.89 | 34.16 | 47.43 | 6360.68* |

Turning to the question of trust in national institutions, on the whole we see that respondents in the new member states display considerably lower levels of trust in their national institutions than respondents from the old member states. The most striking difference is with regard to trust in the party system, parliament, and justice system. Respondents in the old member states were almost twice as likely to trust these national institutions compared to respondents from new member states. Over 20 percent of respondents in the old member states trusted their parties and around 40 percent trusted their national parliament and the same percentage of respondents trusted the justice system, compared to roughly 11 percent in the new member states who trusted their parties, 26 who trusted their parliament and 26 percent who trusted their justice system. Trust in government was also lower in the new member states by about 10 percent with slightly more than 30 percent expressing their trust in this institution. Considering these observations, this suggests that the cross-country differences account for a substantial share of the trust in national institutions. Similar to the findings for trust in the EU institutions, we find that the levels of trust in national institutions are significantly different across both groups of countries, and these differences are also far larger in magnitude. These findings suggest a substantial country effect on the level of trust people have. As illustrated in this Table, respondents from old member states differed in their level of trust from respondents of the new member states.

Looking at Table 1 we further note that by and large, there were similar trends in levels of trust across institutions. These similarities suggest that the various trust items may in fact share a common latent

structure. To test this possibility, we extended our analysis by examining the scalability of the trust items across countries and years. Utilizing a confirmatory factor analysis, we assessed whether or not citizens' responses to the trust items were unidimensional. The results indicate all five items scale unidimensionally across the same latent structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.66 to 0.89. This scale had an Eigenvalue of 3.2 and it accounted for slightly less than two-thirds of the variance, with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is 0.82, well over the 0.5 minimum requirement.

The next stage of our investigation is aimed at understanding the correlates of trust in each of the aforementioned EU institutions. As we mentioned earlier, this analysis is intended at both replicating salient findings reported in the literature, and determining whether or not people's expressed level of trust is institution-specific. In concrete terms, we model the level of trust in five European institutions (the European Parliament, Commission, Council of Ministers, Court of Justice European, and Central Bank). The results from our logit models are reported in Table 2. Looking at the table, three main findings appear. First, the five trust items were associated with various predictors in varying levels of consistency. While some predictors, namely, interest in politics, satisfaction with democracy, left-right self-placement, the level of education and the demographic variables had similar effects across the various trust items, other predictors displayed less consistency. Striking differences were noted in the associations between trust in national and EU institutions. People's levels of trust in national parties and governments were significantly associated with all EU trust items, but trust in the European Parliament. Although the associations were significant, these people's probabilities to support EU institutions were only marginally different than the one of the respondents in the reference category. In concrete terms, the probabilities of the former were 0.1 to 0.3 greater than the latter's. The differences between people who trust and who do not trust their national institutions were slightly more noticeable for the other items. People who trusted their national parliament were 1.6 times as likely to trust the EP, and were 1.5 times as likely to trust the ECJ and ECB. Similar differences were noticed between people who trusted their national judicial system and those who did not. Members of the former group were 1.5 times as likely to support the ECB and over 1.7 times more likely to support the ECJ.

Table 2: Determinants of Trust in the European Institutions, logistic regression results

| | European Parliament | | | | European Commission | | | | European Council of Ministers | | | |
|--|---------------------|------|------|-------------|---------------------|------|--------|-------------|-------------------------------|------|--------|-------------|
| | B | S.E. | O.R. | 95% C.I. | B | S.E. | Exp(B) | 95% C.I. | B | S.E. | Exp(B) | 95% C.I. |
| Trust in National Institutions: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Parties | 0.13 | 0.03 | 1.14 | (1.07-1.20) | 0.21 | 0.03 | 1.23 | (1.16-1.30) | 0.22 | 0.03 | 1.24 | (1.18-1.31) |
| Parliament | 0.48 | 0.03 | 1.62 | (1.52-1.71) | 0.33 | 0.03 | 1.39 | (1.31-1.47) | 0.32 | 0.03 | 1.37 | (1.30-1.45) |
| Government | 0.25 | 0.03 | 1.28 | (1.21-1.36) | 0.30 | 0.03 | 1.35 | (1.27-1.43) | 0.28 | 0.03 | 1.32 | (1.25-1.40) |
| Judicial System | 0.28 | 0.02 | 1.32 | (1.26-1.38) | 0.26 | 0.02 | 1.30 | (1.24-1.36) | 0.20 | 0.02 | 1.23 | (1.17-1.28) |
| Benefits | 1.51 | 0.02 | 4.52 | (4.31-4.74) | 1.44 | 0.02 | 4.24 | (4.04-4.44) | 1.32 | 0.02 | 3.75 | (3.58-3.93) |
| Interest in Politics | 0.12 | 0.01 | 1.12 | (1.10-1.15) | 0.11 | 0.01 | 1.11 | (1.09-1.14) | 0.12 | 0.01 | 1.13 | (1.10-1.15) |
| Sat w/Democracy | 0.18 | 0.02 | 1.20 | (1.17-1.24) | 0.16 | 0.02 | 1.17 | (1.14-1.21) | 0.10 | 0.02 | 1.11 | (1.07-1.14) |
| Sat w/Life | 0.08 | 0.02 | 1.08 | (1.05-1.11) | 0.11 | 0.02 | 1.11 | (1.08-1.15) | 0.07 | 0.02 | 1.08 | (1.05-1.11) |
| L-R | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1.00 | (1.00-1.00) | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1.00 | (1.00-1.00) | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1.00 | (1.00-1.00) |
| Age | -0.02 | 0.00 | 0.98 | (0.98-0.98) | -0.02 | 0.00 | 0.98 | (0.98-0.98) | -0.02 | 0.00 | 0.98 | (0.98-0.98) |
| Sex | -0.02 | 0.02 | 0.98 | (0.94-1.02) | -0.03 | 0.02 | 0.97 | (0.93-1.01) | -0.05 | 0.02 | 0.96 | (0.92-0.99) |
| Education | -0.24 | 0.00 | 0.79 | (0.79-0.79) | -0.22 | 0.00 | 0.80 | (0.80-0.81) | -0.20 | 0.00 | 0.82 | (0.82-0.82) |
| Occupation Status | 0.29 | 0.03 | 1.33 | (1.27-1.41) | 0.33 | 0.03 | 1.39 | (1.32-1.47) | 0.27 | 0.03 | 1.30 | (1.24-1.37) |
| Intercept | -1.36 | 0.08 | 0.26 | | -1.58 | 0.08 | 0.21 | | -1.51 | 0.08 | 0.22 | |
| Nagelkerke R- sq | 0.453 | | | | 0.418 | | | | 0.362 | | | |

Table 2 continued

| | European Court of Justice | | | | European Central Bank | | | |
|--|---------------------------|------|------|-------------|-----------------------|------|--------|-------------|
| | B | S.E. | O.R. | 95% C.I. | B | S.E. | Exp(B) | 95% C.I. |
| Trust in National Institutions: | | | | | | | | |
| Parties | 0.06 | 0.03 | 1.06 | (1.00-1.12) | 0.09 | 0.03 | 1.09 | (1.03-1.15) |
| Parliament | 0.39 | 0.03 | 1.48 | (1.40-1.57) | 0.40 | 0.03 | 1.48 | (1.40-1.57) |
| Government | 0.05 | 0.03 | 1.05 | (1.00-1.11) | 0.17 | 0.03 | 1.18 | (1.12-1.25) |
| Judicial System | 0.55 | 0.02 | 1.73 | (1.66-1.81) | 0.38 | 0.02 | 1.47 | (1.40-1.53) |
| Benefits | 0.97 | 0.02 | 2.63 | (2.52-2.76) | 0.97 | 0.02 | 2.63 | (2.51-2.75) |
| Interest in Politics | 0.15 | 0.01 | 1.17 | (1.14-1.19) | 0.12 | 0.01 | 1.12 | (1.10-1.15) |
| Sat w/Democracy | 0.17 | 0.01 | 1.19 | (1.15-1.22) | 0.18 | 0.01 | 1.20 | (1.16-1.23) |
| Sat w/Life | 0.23 | 0.02 | 1.26 | (1.22-1.30) | 0.28 | 0.02 | 1.33 | (1.29-1.36) |
| L-R | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1.00 | (1.00-1.00) | 0.00 | 0.00 | 1.00 | (1.00-1.00) |
| Age | -0.01 | 0.00 | 0.99 | (0.99-0.99) | -0.02 | 0.00 | 0.99 | (0.98-0.99) |
| Sex | -0.16 | 0.02 | 0.85 | (0.82-0.89) | -0.24 | 0.02 | 0.79 | (0.76-0.82) |
| Education | -0.21 | 0.00 | 0.81 | (0.81-0.81) | -0.21 | 0.00 | 0.81 | (0.81-0.82) |
| Occupation Status | 0.48 | 0.03 | 1.62 | (1.54-1.70) | 0.47 | 0.03 | 1.60 | (1.52-1.68) |
| Intercept | -1.27 | 0.08 | 0.28 | | -1.30 | 0.08 | 0.27 | |
| Nagelkerke R- sq | 0.394 | | | | 0.382 | | | |

We find stronger associations between trust in national parties and governments with trust in the Commission and Council of Ministers. These associations were stronger than with any other EU institution. Similarly, the level of trust in the national judicial system was more strongly correlated with the level of trust in the European Parliament and the Commission than with other institutions. Comparing the odds ratios we note that accounting for the levels of trust in the national institutions increased the odds of trusting the EU institutions by 10-70 percent. For instance, people reporting trust in the judicial system were 1.7 more likely to trust the Court of Justice. Similarly, respondents who trusted their national parliaments were 1.6 times as likely to trust the European Parliament, holding everything else equal.

Turning to political capital we notice that all the items were significantly associated with trust in all EU institutions. Benefits from EU membership, however, had substantially stronger associations with trust in EU institutions. People who considered the membership of their country beneficial were 2.6 times more likely to trust the ECJ and ECB, and 4 times or more as likely trust the Council, the Commission or EP.

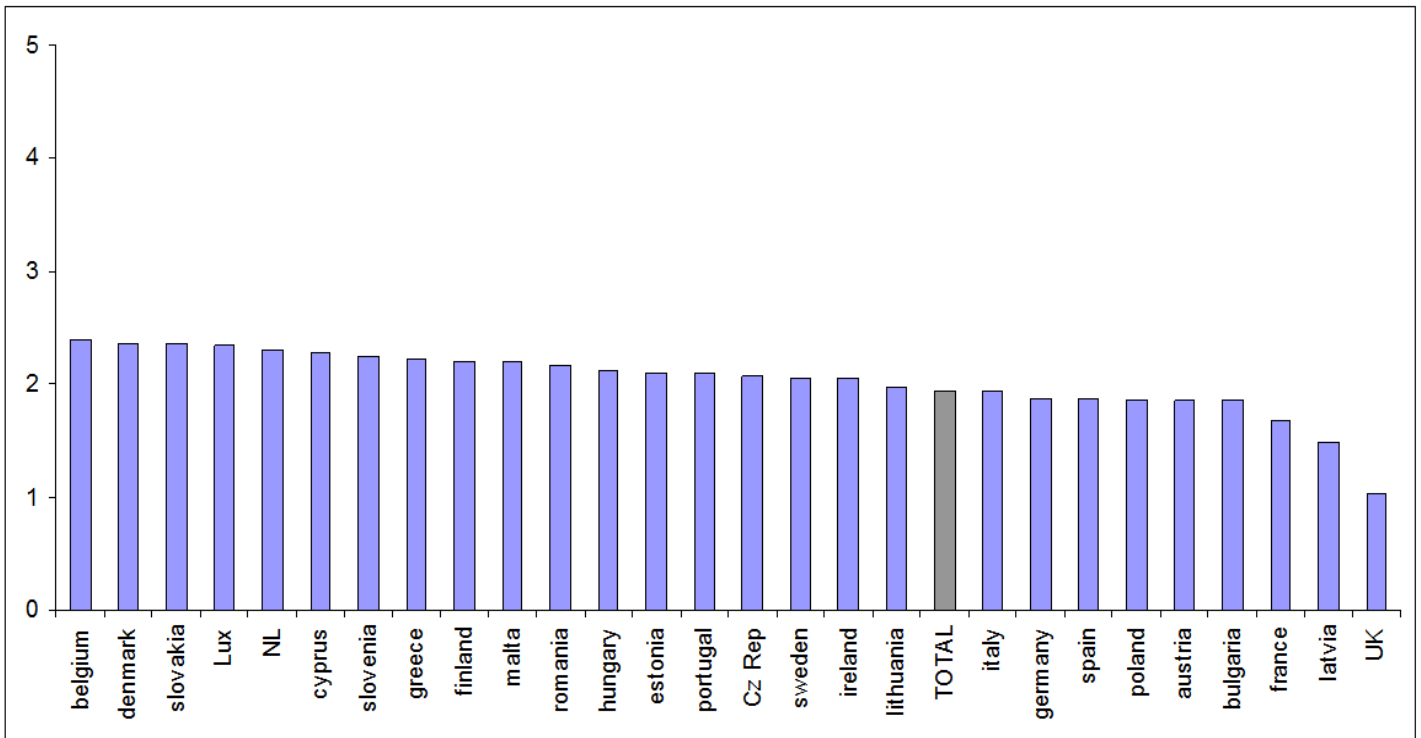
The findings of these models may appear to partially confirm our H1 (congruence of trust in institutions at both levels) and lead to the rejection of H2 (trust in institutions at one level compensates the lack of trust in them at the other). However, since these models are all limited to the individual level final call on these hypotheses will be made after the multilevel associations are estimated.

When we examine the remaining variables, we note several interesting findings. Gender was significantly associated with trusting all the institutions, but the European Parliament and Commission. This indicates that women trusted these institutions to a lesser extent than men, controlling for everything else. Left-right self-placement and occupational status were positively associated with high levels of trust in the EU institutions. However, contrary to our expectations the level of education was negatively associated with this outcome, controlling for everything else. This means the higher the level of education of a respondent, the more likely it is that this individual will distrust the EU institutions. One interpretation of this finding may be that, as suggested in the theoretical section, the rise of Euroskeptic political actors has increased citizens' awareness of the shortcomings of the European institutional structure. Thus, more educated citizens could be evaluating EU institutions against a higher reference point of what a truly democratic and representative governance system should be. Moreover, education increases ambivalence in opinion formation, and possibly contributes to the likelihood of supporting the idea of European integration while at the same time believing supranational institutions need a comprehensive reform.

These findings also indicate that citizens appear to view the different institutions of the EU similarly, and thus scaling those items together would give us a metric of citizens' overall trust in

the EU institutions. Given these findings, we created an EU institutions trust scale. This new scale was computed as a summary of the five separate items measuring trust in EU institutions and ranged between 0, for no trust at all, to 5, for trust in all institutions. The country averages of this scale are shown in Figure 2. Looking at the results it is clear that for most countries there is very little variance across this scale. Notably, Latvian and British citizens expressed substantially lower trust in EU institutions compared to the average of 1.94.

Figure 2: Average aggregated level of trust in EU institutions



After establishing the scalability of the trust in EU institutions items as a unidimensional index, we next regress this scale with the same explanatory variables employed in previous analysis. The findings of this new model are presented in Table 3. Here we regressed the trust scale using an OLS regression. Since our objective for this analysis is to replicate the salient findings in the literature, we only use individual-level predictors in this model.

Table 3: Single level OLS regression predicting trust in EU institutions

| | B | Std. Error | Beta | Sig. |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Trust in National Parliaments | 0.103 | 0.021 | 0.020 | 0.000 |
| Trust in National Governments | 0.467 | 0.025 | 0.108 | 0.000 |
| Trust in National Political Parties | 0.159 | 0.026 | 0.036 | 0.000 |
| Trust in National Justice System | 0.314 | 0.017 | 0.073 | 0.000 |
| Benefits | 0.972 | 0.017 | 0.212 | 0.000 |
| Interest in Politics | 0.105 | 0.008 | 0.047 | 0.000 |
| Sat w/ Democracy | 0.183 | 0.013 | 0.070 | 0.000 |
| Sat w/ Life | 0.161 | 0.011 | 0.055 | 0.000 |
| L-R | 0.018 | 0.003 | 0.018 | 0.000 |
| Age | -0.011 | 0.000 | -0.088 | 0.000 |
| Sex | -0.083 | 0.015 | -0.019 | 0.000 |
| Education | -0.161 | 0.001 | -0.526 | 0.000 |
| Occupation Status | 0.297 | 0.019 | 0.055 | 0.000 |
| CPI*National Parliament | -0.236 | 0.044 | -0.033 | 0.000 |
| CPI*National Government | -0.121 | 0.043 | -0.018 | 0.005 |
| CPI*Sat w/ Democracy | -0.031 | 0.021 | -0.018 | 0.134 |
| year | -0.048 | 0.009 | -0.019 | 0.000 |
| New_MS | 0.588 | 0.051 | 0.131 | 0.000 |
| R ² | 0.361 | | | |

All four items of trust in national institutions were significantly associated with the outcome variable, with trust in national governments having the strongest association. Political capital items were also significantly associated with the trust index, with membership benefits having the strongest association with the outcome. Left-right self-placement was positively associated with the outcome, while age and education were negatively associated. Just as before, this model confirms that women and older people were less likely to trust EU institutions, while people with high occupational status were more likely to. Additionally, we controlled for three cross-level interaction terms, in order to assess the need for a hierarchical model. These variables were employed assuming the country-level information to have a fixed effect on this outcome. Two interaction terms reached statistical significance. Residents of old member states who trusted national parliaments and national governments were found to be significantly more likely to trust EU institutions as well. The new member state dummy we controlled for in this analysis remained significantly associated with the outcome variable. This suggests the need for a multilevel model. This need is enhanced by the sub-optimal power of prediction offered by this model, only accounting for one quarter of the variance.

In our final analysis, we added country-level information, and employed a multi-level OLS regression to account for the context individuals were living in, and to assess the degree to which this systematically changes their levels of trust in EU institutions. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4. In this model we used individual level variables only and did not include any country-level information, although we did account for random effects at both the individual and country levels.

Table 4: Multilevel OLS regression predicting trust in EU institutions

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
|--|----------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | B | S.E. | B | S.E. |
| Individual level (i) | | | | |
| Trust in National Parliaments | 0.261 | 0.026 | 0.062 | 0.109 |
| Trust in National Governments | 0.459 | 0.026 | 0.190 | 0.107 |
| Trust in National Political Parties | 0.197 | 0.026 | 0.150 | 0.102 |
| Trust in National Justice System | 0.402 | 0.021 | 0.409 | 0.083 |
| Benefits from Membership | 1.253 | 0.022 | 1.246 | 0.022 |
| Interest in Politics | 0.090 | 0.010 | 0.090 | 0.010 |
| Satisfaction with Life | 0.260 | 0.013 | 0.261 | 0.013 |
| Ideology | 0.026 | 0.004 | 0.025 | 0.004 |
| Satisfaction with Democracy | 0.126 | 0.014 | 0.132 | 0.014 |
| Age | 0.000 | 0.001 | 0.000 | 0.001 |
| Women | -0.125 | 0.018 | -0.124 | 0.018 |
| Education | 0.032 | 0.003 | 0.031 | 0.003 |
| High Occupational Status | 0.156 | 0.023 | 0.153 | 0.023 |
| Country level (j) | | | | |
| CPI | - | - | -0.240 | 0.028 |
| Decision-Making Power | - | - | -0.019 | 0.005 |
| Social Spending | - | - | 0.032 | 0.009 |
| Interaction terms | | | | |
| CPI * Trust in National Parties | - | - | 0.027 | 0.015 |
| CPI * Trust in National Parliament | - | - | 0.039 | 0.015 |
| CPI * Trust in National Government | - | - | 0.007 | 0.014 |
| CPI * Trust in National Justice System | - | - | 0.000 | 0.012 |
| Year | - | - | -0.019 | 0.071 |
| Constant | -0.006 | 0.077 | 1.058 | 0.170 |
| σ^2_{u0} | 0.159 | 0.036 | 0.070 | 0.014 |
| σ^2_e | 2.964 | 0.022 | 2.961 | 0.022 |
| -2*Log Likelihood | 144474.78 | | 144397.36 | |
| VPC | 0.051 | | 0.023 | |
| N | 36,762 | | 36,762 | |

The findings suggest that a marginal share of the overall variance, little over 5%, is a result of country- rather than individual-level differences. Since the data are measured at the individual level, it should be expected that the variance component at this level represents the largest share of variance in the dependent variable¹¹. This country-level variance, although responsible for a small share of the total variance, was nevertheless significant. Accounting for country-level random effects did not change the main findings reported in the earlier stage of the analyses, thus confirming H5, H6 and H7. All variables remained statistically significant predictors of the outcome variable, although in most cases their coefficients changed considerably. The individual-level variance which was over 4 in the baseline model¹², dropped to 3 after including the individual-level predictors, but still remained high and significant. This finding suggests that the predictors suggested in the literature and employed in this analysis are sub-optimal in explaining the differences in the level of trust in EU institutions exhibited by citizens of the various Member States.

In Model 2 we added country-level data and cross-level interaction terms, as specified in equation [2]. To make sure the findings are not limited to any given point in time, we also controlled for sampling year in this model. The share of variance attributable to this level dropped to slightly above 2%, but remained nevertheless significant. Looking at the coefficients, we note that the relations between most explanatory variables and the level of trust in EU institutions did not change, suggesting that the country effect over these associations was by and large fixed, and was not affected by cross country differences.

Conversely, the results tell a different story about the link between trust in national and EU institutions. All national institutions trust items except one, namely trust in the national justice system, lost their statistical significance in predicting trust in EU institutions in the random effects (multilevel) model. This finding suggests that the associations found in previous analyses differentiating EU approval dynamics of people with low and high levels of trust in their national institutions, are principally a function of the context these people live in. These findings lead us to reject H1 and H2, both hypothesizing direct associations between trust in institutions at both levels.

Once establishing the importance of context in terms of country-of-residence, we can replace the country nominal label with substantial country-level information. All three country-level variables -- the countries' average perception of corruption, their decision-making power and

¹¹ For a methodological discussion of this feature of multi-level models, see Steenbergen and Jones (2002).

¹² The baseline model had no explanatory variables. Following equation [1], the specification for this baseline model would be $\text{Trust}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + e_{ij}$, where $\beta_{0j} = \beta_0 + u_{0j}$.

their welfare spending – were significantly associated with their residents' level of trust in EU institutions, thus suggesting the null hypothesis should be rejected for H3, H8, H9, and H10. The perceived level of corruption was the strongest contextual predictor of this outcome, and it remained statistically significant even after controlling for the cross-level interaction-terms.

These interactions combined with the information on the country-average level of corruption and individuals' level of trust in the national institutions were all significantly associated with the outcome variable. Recalling that the latter items lost statistical significance in this model, another interesting finding was that the interaction between the level of corruption and the level of trust in the national parliament was significantly associated with the level of trust in EU institutions, thus confirming H4. The direction of associations is very important, as it reveals that the effect trust in national institutions has on trust in EU institutions was a function of the level of corruption. While in countries with political systems perceived as corrupt, people who trusted their national parliament (and with a borderline statistical significance, their national parties as well) were more likely to trust the EU institutions, residents of less corrupt countries were less likely to, considering all other factors.

Further observations can be made in Table 4. We did not find a significant time effect on people's levels of trust in the EU institutions. This suggests that the associations reported in this analysis are not prone to changes over time. Therefore, there is no evident need to model these associations in a three level model (where individuals would be nested within countries, which in turn would be nested within sampling year). It appears that length of membership in the European Union does not systematically affect trust in its institutions. Citizens from new and old member states form their evaluations based upon similar predictors. A second observation is the change noted in the constant after accounting for the country-level information and cross-level interactions. While the constant in model 1 was zero (the lowest level of trust), in model 2 it went up to 1. Lastly, we note that there is still a considerable individual level variance left after loading all independent variables. This suggests there is a need to identify additional predictors, for a better understanding of the determinants of people's trust in EU institutions.

4. Discussion and conclusions

These analyses aimed to provide a better understanding of the dynamics of trust in EU institutions, to examine its determinants and to confirm its validity as a measure of support for European integration. The results reveal that on the whole, the primary individual-level predictors of trust in these institutions were the utilities people perceive to gain from membership in the EU, their ideological stance, their general satisfaction with life, and political satisfaction with the way democracy functions. Additionally, we found that people's socio-economic status is correlated with the level of trust they have for the EU institutions, and that women were less

prone to trust these institutions, compared to men. We also found that differences between countries directly affect peoples' levels of trust. Thus, people living in countries with low levels of corruption, low public expenses on welfare and high decision-making power in the European Union are less likely to trust EU institutions than people living in countries with high levels of corruption, high expenses on social spending and low decision making power.

Our results mirror some of the findings in previous models, but extend and complement others. First, our goal was to reconcile the debate over the relationship between the domestic and EU political context by answering the question of how trust in national political institutions is related to trust in EU institutions. Results from the baseline analysis confirmed the congruence hypothesis developed in the literature by showing that trust in domestic institutions fosters trust in the institutions of the European Union. However, once accounting for country-level characteristics, this relationship lost its significance and it became evident that aggregate corruption levels were the missing link in connecting domestic and EU institutional trust.

Although not central to our research question, we followed up on the associations between the level of corruption and citizens' trust in their national and EU institutions. To achieve that, we recoded the corruption scores into three categories, differentiating between countries with high medium and low levels of corruption (corresponding with CPI scores lower than 4, ranging between 4 and 8, and greater than 8). Our findings, reported in Table 5, suggest that the level of corruption is predicting trust in both national and EU institutions, although not in the same direction and magnitude. Looking at the top part of this Table, we note that, on average, the higher the level of corruption, the lower the trust in the national institutions. Looking at the bottom part of this Table shows that for three EU institutions – the Parliament, the Commission and the Council of Ministers, high level of perceived national corruption lead to greater trust in these institutions. Conversely, the non-political institutions – the Court of Justice and the Central Bank were trusted more by people living in countries with lower levels of corruption. The difference in direction of associations within the EU institutions is also noticeable when observing the t-scores, which were positive for the first three institutions and negative for the other two, similarly to the scores for national institutions. These results are provisional, and as we have already pointed out, were not central for these analyses. However, we recommend analysts to look at these complex relations in assessing the dynamics of trust in political institutions in general, and in the EU ones in particular.

Table 5: Mean differences in individuals' trust in National and EU institutions by the level of perceived corruption in their country of residence (independent t-test results)

| | Level of corruption | Mean | S.D. | t | Mean differences 95% C.I. |
|------------------------------|---------------------|------|------|----------|---------------------------|
| National institutions | | | | | |
| Parties | High | 0.11 | 0.31 | -89.11* | (-0.16 - -0.15) |
| | Low | 0.26 | 0.44 | | |
| Parliament | High | 0.24 | 0.43 | -145.17* | (-0.32 - -0.31) |
| | Low | 0.56 | 0.50 | | |
| Government | High | 0.30 | 0.46 | -92.01* | (-0.21 - -0.20) |
| | Low | 0.51 | 0.50 | | |
| Judicial system | High | 0.25 | 0.43 | -99.33* | (-0.22 - -0.21) |
| | Low | 0.47 | 0.50 | | |
| EU institutions | | | | | |
| European Parliament | High | 0.52 | 0.50 | 23.19* | (0.05 - 0.06) |
| | Low | 0.46 | 0.50 | | |
| European Commission | High | 0.47 | 0.50 | 18.67* | (0.04 - 0.05) |
| | Low | 0.43 | 0.50 | | |
| Council of Ministers | High | 0.36 | 0.48 | 35.79* | (0.08 - 0.08) |
| | Low | 0.28 | 0.45 | | |
| Court of Justice | High | 0.26 | 0.44 | -27.74* | (-0.06 - -0.06) |
| | Low | 0.32 | 0.47 | | |
| Central Bank | High | 0.38 | 0.49 | -32.12* | (-0.08 - -0.07) |
| | Low | 0.46 | 0.50 | | |

Note: The reported t-scores are calculated assuming equal variance, as accounted for by Levene's test of equality of variance, not reported here. All F-scores were statistically significant, suggesting that the variance in each of these trust items was equal.

Thus, this study strongly suggests that corruption needs to be more frequently incorporated in models of support for the European Union and its institutions. Corruption erodes trust in the national political system, lowers the perceived costs of ceding sovereignty to supranational bodies and increases citizens' willingness to turn to the EU for alternatives. The compensation effect of domestic corruption complements findings by Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) and Munoz, Torcal and Bonet (2011) while at the same time uncovering a stronger relationship than previously hypothesized. Rather than only changing the direction of the relationship between trust in domestic and EU institutions, the addition of aggregate corruption eliminates the existence of a systematic relationship.

Secondly, our findings at the individual level confirmed some of the evidence uncovered in models of general EU support, while pointing to certain novel developments. As expected, utilitarian satisfaction with both national democracy and EU membership generate more trust in the EU institutions. Results are more mixed when it comes to the cognitive mobilization hypothesis. We find that while interest in politics and higher occupational status tend to make citizens more supportive of the EU institutions – thus confirming the validity of the original theory (Inglehart, Rabier and Reif, 1991) – education had the opposite effect. Higher levels of education decreased trust at the individual level. We believe that the increasingly politicized nature of European integration is affecting the relationship between knowledge and trust. Higher education may lead to awareness of the shortcomings of the European institutions and make citizens more hesitant, or even unwilling, to trust those. The conflicting findings when it comes to political interest on one hand and education on the other, suggest that either interest and knowledge are not indicators of the same underlying concept of cognitive mobilization, or that the pre-existing patterns of these relationships are changing across Europe and preventing consistent conclusions. Moreover, once the country level was taken into account, the relationship between education and EU institutional trust became positive, thus indicating that context matters not only when it comes to trust in domestic institutions, but also as far as basic socio-economic characteristics are concerned. The findings strongly suggest that future studies would benefit from examining in more detail the changing and complex patterns of association between citizens' knowledge, political interest and institutional trust.

Thirdly, our study examined whether there are differences in the way citizens evaluate specific institutions. As every EU scholar is aware, each of the five main European Union institutions has a different structure and functions. Some of these, such as the European Parliament (EP) and the European Court of Justice (ECJ) have functions that are overall equivalent to their domestic counterparts. Others, such as the European Commission, do not have immediate domestic parallel. Thus, it is possible to conclude that institutions which have clear domestic counterparts will be easier for citizens to form opinions about. Additionally, there do exist differences in terms of the politicization of various institutions in national and supranational debates. Our models, therefore, considered the possibility that citizens form separate evaluations of some or

all of these institutions. A further examination of the underlying dimensions of trust, however, clearly demonstrated that at present EU institutional trust is funneled through a single attitude dimension.

This leads to our fourth point – namely the value added of studying trust in EU institutions rather than general support for membership and further integration. Strong correlates of institutional trust such as utilitarian considerations exhibited similar dynamics as in the majority of studies of generalized support for European integration. Thus, institutional trust can be used as a proxy for overall attitudes towards the EU when it comes to classic predictors. At the same time, we found some interesting divergences such as the effect of the welfare state. Contrary to the dominant theoretical expectations and empirical findings from research on EU support, citizens from more extensive welfare states were more likely to trust the institutions of the European Union, possibly because of an already developed propensity to trust institutional bodies to provide them with satisfactory outputs. Our study also found a small but significant effect of decision-making power in the Council on cross-country differences in trust levels, but this factor needs to be more thoroughly incorporated in studies of generalized EU support before comparisons can be drawn.

Finally, we acknowledge the shortcomings of our model in terms of the remaining proportion of unexplained variance. Additional predictors of EU institutional trust should be incorporated into future analyses – such as, for example, indicators of the increasingly identity-based, cultural type of opposition to the European Union (McLaren, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2009). As European integration is becoming an increasingly contested issue in the national political arena, it becomes imperative to understand the determinants of institutional trust. This study contributes to our knowledge by developing a multi-level model of trust in all five major institutions of the EU governance structure. Trust in the governing bodies of the EU helps build legitimacy for the process of European integration and decreases concerns about a deficit of democracy. Our findings provide a framework for studying public perceptions of the EU institutions and open avenues for further research into how individual-level attitudes and country characteristics interact in Europe's complex governance system to form the resulting patterns of support or opposition to the European Union.

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