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Government Responsiveness in the European Union: Evidence from Council Voting

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Abstract*

Are governments responsive to public preferences when legislating in international organizations? This paper demonstrates that governments respond to domestic public opinion even when acting at the international level. Specifically, we examine conflict in the European Union's primary legislative body, the Council of the European Union (EU). We argue that domestic electoral incentives compel governments to react to public opinion. Analyzing a unique dataset on all legislative decisions adopted in the Council since 1999, we show that governments are more likely to oppose legislative proposals that extend the level and scope of EU authority when their domestic electorates are skeptical about the EU. We also find that governments are more responsive when the issue of European integration is salient in domestic party politics. Our findings demonstrate that governments can use the international stage to signal their responsiveness to public concerns and that such signals resonate in the domestic political debate.

Key words: responsiveness, legislative behavior, Council, public opinion, European Union

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Government responsiveness to public opinion is central to democratic representation. It implies that elected representatives are listening to and acting upon the wishes and views of the represented (see e.g. Mansbridge 2003; Soroka and Wlezien 2010). Various studies have shown that policy agendas, government spending and legislative voting follow the changing policy preferences of citizens (Page and Shapiro 1983; 1992; Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson, 1995; Wlezien 1995; Lax and Philips 2012). The fear of electoral sanctioning is a primary incentive for governments to act responsively. Not surprisingly, studies have therefore found that in systems of low clarity of responsibility and limited information, where it is difficult for voters to identify policy shirking, elected representatives are also less responsive to public preferences (see Besley and Burgess 2002; Carey 2008; Snyder and Strömberg 2008; Wlezien and Soroka 2012). On the one hand, we may expect governments to be less concerned about responding to public preferences when legislating in international organizations (IOs) where clarity of responsibility is blurred by multilevel structures and public scrutiny is generally less pronounced.[1] On the other hand, increased transparency and scrutiny of decision-making in some international organizations may give governments greater incentives to use this arena to signal that they are aligned with the public's views and preferences.

Yet, little evidence exists with regards to whether governments are in fact responsive to domestic public opinion pressures when acting in international organizations. While public opinion is generally seen as an important factor explaining government behavior in the domestic context, the empirical literature on the role of public opinion in IOs is still sparse (see Stasavage 2004). Instead, studies of government behavior in IOs have mainly focused on other drivers,

[1] For discussions of transparency in international organizations see e.g. Keohane (2002), Risse (2000), Stasavage (2004).

such as geopolitics, military and economic resources, and special interest preferences (see e.g. Bailey et al 2015; Dreher and Sturm 2012; Bailer, Mattila and Schneider 2014). The contribution of this study is to focus on the role of public opinion in shaping government behavior in the European Union (EU) to understand if and when governments use the international arena to signal to their domestic electorates. We argue that domestic electoral incentives can compel governments to signal that they are responsive to public opinion even when acting internationally.

Our empirical investigation focuses on decision-making in the EU). The EU is arguably the world's most advanced IO, presiding over a level of economic and political integration unmatched in global politics. We examine government behavior in its primary decision-making body, the Council of the European Union (henceforward, the Council), where national ministers negotiate and adopt legislative proposals. Legislative bargaining in the Council used to take place behind closed doors, however since 1999 an increasing amount of information on policy decisions and government positions has become available (Naurin and Wallace 2008). In this paper, we analyze a unique dataset covering all legislative acts since 1999 and investigate to what extent government opposition in the Council is a response to popular opposition to European integration. Government opposition in the Council is still a rare event, but one that carries considerable significance (Mattila 2009; Novak 2013). Our argument is that when domestic electorates hold unfavorable views on European integration, governments can strategically oppose EU acts that are concerned with further transfers of authority to the EU to demonstrate that their position is aligned with their public's preferences. Hence, in contrast to the extant wisdom that governments are shielded from public opinion when legislating internationally, we argue that popular Euroskepticism incentivizes them to voice opposition in

the Council. While this is not "policy responsiveness" in the classic sense of changing the overall policy direction of the Council, we conceptualize it as "signal responsiveness" that serves to communicate governments' positions to their domestic electorate.

Our findings demonstrate that governments' opposition to legislative proposals is indeed shaped by public opinion on European integration wherever these proposals extend the level and scope of European integration. We also find that governments are more likely to signal their positions in the Council when the issue gains importance in domestic party competition and that these signals resonate in the national public sphere. Our findings thus contribute not only to our understanding of policy-making in the EU, but may also have broader significance as IOs increasingly face pressures to deepen cooperation and increase transparency and accountability to domestic audiences. Moreover, our study enhances our understanding of democratic responsiveness by highlighting that governments use the international stage to signal to voters at home that they care about their views.

Government Responsiveness in International Organizations

The relationship between public preferences and government policy is at the heart of theories of democratic representation. There is a rich literature on government responsiveness; if, when and how government policies respond to changes in public opinion (see e.g. Wlezien 1995; Erikson et al. 2002; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Soroka and Wlezien 2010).[2] Despite the scholarly

[2] The relationship between public opinion and government policy is, however, complex. Studies have stressed governments' ability to manipulate opinion (e.g. Jacobs and Shapiro 2000), raised questions on who comprises the relevant 'public' (e.g. Gilens 2012), and highlighted the complex relationship between responsiveness and congruence (e.g. Lax and Philips 2012).

focus on how public opinion shapes government positions and policies when they act domestically,[3] far less attention has been paid to how public opinion influences government behavior in IOs. Overwhelmingly, the literature on government positions and legislative behavior in IOs, such as the EU, the World Trade Organization, and the United Nations, has focused on military and economic considerations, and special interests as drivers of government behavior (see e.g. Hug and Lukcas 2013; Dreher and Sturm 2012; Bailey et al. 2014). This is also true of the literature on government behavior in the Council more specifically.

Numerous studies have in recent years examined decision-making in the Council, not least due to improved public access to information. Yet, none of these have provided a rigorous study of how public opinion may shape government behavior. Instead, the literature has centered on economic interests and government ideology as drivers of behavior. A recent example is Bailer, Mattila and Schneider's (2014) study of voting behavior in the Council, who demonstrate that government opposition can largely be attributed to economic explanations, notably domestic specialized interests. Others have found that a North-South divide exists between the member states in their voting patterns (Mattila 2009; Thomson et al. 2006) or that the left-right ideology of governments matters to their behavior in the Council (Hagemann 2008; Hagemann and Høyland 2008; Mattila 2009). The general assumption in this work is that as governments are largely insulated from electoral pressures when they legislate in the Council, constituency demands do not play a significant role. As Bailer et al. (2014: 8-9) note:

> [E]lectorates are usually not well informed about the Council deliberations because these negotiations are conducted mostly away from the public scrutiny behind the

[3] Some studies have also examined the impact of public opinion on politicians' foreign policy positions, see e.g. Milner and Tingley (2011) and Jacobs and Page (2005).

> "closed doors" (…) Therefore, negative votes and abstentions in the Council protocol will be a signal to which mainly domestic interest groups pay some attention.

Public opinion is not entirely absent from the literature on EU policy-making, however. Some studies have examined "systemic responsiveness" by analyzing whether the amount of legislation passed reflects public demands for further integration, showing a relationship between EU support and the amount of legislation (see Toshkov 2011; De Vries and Arnold 2011; Arnold, Franklin and Wlezien 2013). While this work is valuable for studying responsiveness at the system level, it provides limited insights into when and why we would expect individual politicians to act responsively in the EU. Moreover, it is based on the strong assumption that more legislative acts necessarily imply more integration.

In contrast to extant work on systemic responsiveness, we examine the micro-foundations of responsiveness by analyzing government behavior in the Council. If there is any relationship between public opinion and government behavior in IOs, we would expect to find it in the EU, as arguably the world's most advanced IO with high levels of political and economic integration and increasing salience in domestic public spheres (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Hence, we cannot easily generalize from the EU to other IOs. Yet, as a 'most likely case' the EU is an important starting point for the exploration of democratic responsiveness in the international arena.

The Council is the EU's primary legislative chamber,[4] and we focus on government opposition to legislative acts. While the majority of acts adopted by the Council are supported by

[4] Legally speaking the Council is one entity, but in practice it is divided into 10 configurations (Competitiveness; Economic & Financial Affairs; etc.) and each Council has to adopt legislation according to a set of rules depending on the legal basis of the policy proposal in question.

all member states, opposition in the Council has increased during the past 10-15 years, with more legislation now adopted with either a single or a number of governments explicitly recording their disagreement (Naurin and Wallace 2008). Today, "vote intentions" are publicly available ahead of Council meetings, and minutes and final legislative records from the meetings include information about votes and policy positions by the member states. Council votes are also reported more widely by national media (see below). In contrast to the prevailing wisdom, this study develops and tests the argument that public opinion can play a role in shaping governments' behavior in the Council.

Responsive Opposition in the Council

How would responsiveness to public opinion manifest itself in governments' voting behavior in the Council? We argue that governments can use opposition votes in the Council as public signals of their position on EU integration. This *signal responsiveness* is different from substantive responsiveness in that governments cannot directly change the policy substance with their opposition (since all acts put to a vote eventually pass), but they can use it as a communication tool to credibly signal their position on transfers of authority (closer European integration) to a wider audience. However, governments' motivations to signal their position are similar to when they change policies in line with public opinion during the legislative term: in both cases it is a form of "anticipatory representation" as they focus on what they think voters will reward in the next election rather than what they promised during the campaign of the previous election (Mansbridge 2003; see also Stimson, MacKuen and Erikson, 1995; Erikson et al. 2002). Crucially, however, the EU makes it more difficult for a single government to shift

actual policy in line with domestic preferences. Yet, by voting in line with public preferences they are still able to send the signal that they are not out of step with the public mood.

Recent studies have shown that citizens care about government responsiveness (see X 2015; XXX 2015), and the issue of European integration has become increasingly salient to voters. Since the early 1990s, Europe has witnessed a shift away from a "permissive consensus" in favor of elite-led European integration towards more vocal and skeptical public attitudes towards the integration project, so-called Euroskepticism (see e.g. see De Vries 2007; Hooghe and Marks 2009; De Vries and Hobolt 2014). The electoral consequences of Euroskepticism have been acutely felt by Europe's mainstream parties as they suffered loss of support due to the rise of Euroskeptic parties, mainly on the far right and the far left, both in national and European Parliament elections (see De Vries 2007; Hobolt and Spoon 2012). Hence, given the increasing salience of voters' concerns on European integration in deciding electoral contests, political elites have been looking for ways of adjusting their position on the issue.

We argue that Council voting serves as a signaling tool that governments may adopt to communicate their positions on a given proposal, and on European integration more generally, to a domestic audience. Given the strong consensus culture in the Council, opposition sends a clear, and generally unwelcome, message to negotiation partners that may be costly in terms of reputation and related future negotiation success (see Naurin and Wallace 2008; Novak 2013; UK House of Commons 2013). Opposition can also have immediate consequences as it may lead to dismissal of the opposing government's preferences when drafting the final policy text. Hence, as there are few benefits (the policy will be passed by the majority in any case) and several costs, it is not surprising that opposition is still relative rare, accounting for less than 2 percent of votes during the 1999-2011 period we investigate here. This means, however, that as a

public signalling tool opposition votes can be seen as more credible as they involve "observable costly effort" (see Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

However, in order to serve as a public signal of the government's position on integration, an opposition vote must be *interpretable* as a stance against European integration. Most of the legislative proposals in the Council, however, do not relate to transfers of authority to the EU level. Some policy areas, such as Agriculture, deal primarily with rather technical amendments or issues in the remit of already established EU competences, whereas other policy areas are concerned with extending the *scope* of authority by establishing EU legislation or programs in previously unaffected areas as well as its *level* by delegating new decisional powers to supranational bodies or agencies (Schmitter 1970; Boerzel 2005). Our expectation is therefore that opposition that is aimed at appeasing public concerns about European integration will primarily relate to votes in policy areas concerned with extending the level or scope of EU authority. This leads to our first hypothesis concerning government responsiveness in the Council:

H1: Governments are more likely to oppose legislative proposals that affect the authority of the EU when domestic public opinion is negatively disposed towards the EU than when public opinion is positively disposed towards the EU.

The extent to which governments wish to use opposition votes as a signal to their publics is also shaped by domestic political competition. We expect that governments' responsiveness is higher when the issue of European integration is salient in the domestic context. Since signal responsiveness aims at communicating positions (and shifts in positions) to the public, it

becomes largely obsolete in situations when conflicts about integration are not politicized in the domestic political arena. Political elites play a crucial role in mobilizing a new issue in the domestic public sphere, including in the media, and thus making it relevant to voters' choices (see Carmines and Stimson 1986, 1989; Hooghe and Marks 2009). The abstract nature of European integration and multilevel governance issues makes the actions of political elites all the more important, since such issues typically lack inherent news value (Soroka 2002). Instead, it is political elites' communication activities on these issues that render them newsworthy in the first place (Adam 2007; Boomgaarden et al. 2013). In turn, increased levels of (media) information on EU integration render the issue more important for electoral competition as they facilitate "EU issue voting", that is they increase the impact of EU attitudes on vote choice (Tillman 2004; De Vries 2007; De Vries, Edwards and Tillman 2011). Research has shown that in party systems where there is more partisan conflict and media debate on European integration dimensions, EU issue voting is more likely (Hobolt, Spoon and Tilley 2009; De Vries et al. 2011). When political parties politicize the issue of European integration domestically, there are also greater incentives for governing parties to demonstrate that they adjust their position on European integration in line with public opinion. Hence, we expect that wherever political party elites increase the salience of integration, governments will be particularly prone to signal responsiveness.

H2: Governments are more responsive to public opinion when the European integration issue gains salience in domestic party competition.

The next sections discuss how we test these hypotheses empirically.

Data and Sample Selection

To test our propositions we draw on a unique dataset of governments' votes in the Council between January 1999 and October 2011.[5] We define opposition as governments' 'No' or 'Abstain' votes, since abstentions always mean a deviation from the majority consensus and effectively count as a negative position when mobilizing majorities to meet the required qualified majority threshold. Our dependent variable is therefore binary with 1 indicating opposition of governments to a legislative act.

As our main independent variable from hypothesis H1 we measure public opinion on EU integration with the Eurobarometer survey question on EU membership, which asks respondents whether their countries' membership in the EU is "a good thing", "a bad thing", or "neither good nor bad". This question has been widely used to measure dynamic preferences for EU integration. We operationalize public opinion by assigning -1 to all respondents who think EU membership is a bad thing, 1 to it is a good thing, and 0 to all who are undecided. Our measure of opinion is the survey-weighted mean of all valid responses by country, and runs from about 0 (when supporters and opponents of integration are neck and neck) to about 0.8 (when there is overwhelming support for EU membership).[6] In all models we use a 6 month lag of opinion from the voting date to represent the causal ordering between opinion and government behavior, in which governments react to public opinion.[7]

[5] We use this time frame for the estimation of our voting models that is restricted by the European Commission's decision to discontinue the question on EU membership in the Eurobarometer from 2011 onwards. Our extended dataset comprises all votes up to 31st of December 2013. We use this extended dataset for both quantitative text models we use in the paper (Wordscores and Latent Dirichlet Allocation).

[6] We use linear interpolation to cover time points between surveys (see also Soroka and Wlezien 2010).

[7] In the web appendix, we demonstrate that we obtain the same results with a 1-year lag of public opinion.

In order to test our hypothesis H2, we construct a measure of dynamic party salience of integration from the Comparative Manifesto Project's (CMP) coding of party manifestos (Volkens 2013). We capture changes in party emphasis by first calculating the average of the logged percentage of quasi-sentences parliamentary parties devote to European integration and linearly interpolate this measure between elections over time. Our measure of change in salience is the emphasis at the date of the Council vote minus the emphasis two years prior to this date.[8]

As signal responsiveness is about "anticipatory representation" rather than a government fulfilling its electoral mandate, we have to rule out the possibility that the relationship between opinion and opposition votes is entirely driven by changes in government composition – i.e. that when parties with a more Euroskeptic profile enter office, they also oppose EU legislation more often. We therefore control for the seat-weighted positions on EU integration as well as left-right of all government parties that were represented in the cabinet on the very day of the Council vote.[9] We measure both concepts with the CMP coding from the preceding elections and operationalize parties' position on EU integration as the difference in the percentages of positive and negative quasi-sentences on the EU as well as their left-right position captured by the CMP's summative RILE measure. We employ a logit transformation on all CMP measures (Lowe et al. 2011). Furthermore, we control for several factors that have been shown to influence voting in the Council in previous studies. In particular, we control for economic explanations of governments' voting behavior (see Bailer et al. 2014) by including measures of annual unemployment, inflation rates and countries' per capita net balance from the EU budget. Lastly,

[8] In the web appendix, we provide a graphical example of this measure over time for France.

[9] Clearly, we expect that more Eurosceptic governments will more often oppose votes in the Council. With regard to ideology, we expect center-right governments to oppose EU decisions less often since the center-right has not only formed a majority in the Council but also in the agenda-setting Commission during the period under investigation (cf. Hagemann and Høyland 2008).

we include dummy variables for whether the legislative act was filed under the co-decision procedure, whether the country voting held the presidency of the Council as well as whether the voting took place before or after Eastern enlargement. These differences in institutional and political circumstances could influence the level of opposition.[10]

Importantly, we only expect to find signal responsiveness on acts that have implications for the scope and level of EU authority. If acts establish EU activities in new areas, set up new supranational agencies, or enforce the harmonization of rules, opposing such acts can be interpreted by the public as a general stance against 'more integration' or more 'authority' of the supranational institutions. Our expectation is that such legislative acts are strongly clustered in particular policy areas. Specifically, policy domains like agriculture and fisheries or internal market have been areas of (exclusive) community competence for decades and supranational authority in these areas is well-established (see Börzel 2005; Hix 2005; Hix and Hoyland 2011). In contrast, in areas where EU competences are not as well-established such as civil liberties, justice and home affairs, or foreign policy, the boundaries of authority continue to shift. In order to rigorously determine which policy areas are characterized by changes within the boundaries of existing competencies as opposed to areas in which legislative activity pushes these boundaries, we set up a text scaling model based on the well-known Wordscores approach (Laver, Benoit, and Garry 2003).[11] For this purpose, we collected text summaries of the legislative acts in our dataset from the European Parliament's Legislative Observatory (OEIL) website. These summaries of the European Commission's legislative proposal describe the background, content

[10] More details on all variables, their sources and operationalizations are provided in the web appendix.

[11] Further information on the Wordscores model is provided in the web appendix.

as well as implications of the relevant act voted on in the Council. In total, we are able to obtain this textual information for 1,793 out of 2,314 acts in our extended dataset.[12]

The Wordscores approach takes a starting point in a set of manually chosen reference texts that represent the extremes of the substantive dimension of interest. The relative frequency of a particular word in each of the reference texts then provides naive Bayes probabilities for whether a virgin text is from one or the other reference category. These probabilities are multiplied with chosen values for the reference texts in order to 'score' each virgin text on the dimension of interest. The procedure is applied to each word in a text and the average word-score of a text provides a document score. We create two long reference texts from our sample with negative scores representing acts operating on the basis of established competences and positive numbers representing texts that extend EU authority. Table 1 displays average rescaled scores of acts per policy area and shows that acts extending EU authority are clearly overrepresented in Employment, Education, Culture & Social Affairs as well as Budget, Foreign & Security Policy, Transport and Telecommunication and Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs. Importantly, the analysis shows that three policy areas are evidently much more concerned with established EU competences rather than authority extension, namely Agriculture & Fisheries, Economic & Financial Affairs and Internal Market. This classification broadly corresponds with the expert judgments provided by Börzel (2005), Hix (2005), and Hix and Hoyland (2011) on EU authority across policy areas (see web appendix). In the following we therefore exclude these areas from our analysis.

[Table 1 about here]

[12] Where summaries were not available, this was mainly the case for acts related to specific adjustments of existing policies (e.g. extending certain derogations of particular member states) *and* the EP was not involved procedurally.

Analysis and Results

To analyze these data, we use mixed effects logistic regression models with fixed effects for countries and a random effect for each legislative act voted on in the Council, based on the assumption that our large sample of acts can be thought of as a random draw from an imagined population of Council acts.[13]

[Table 2 about here]

The main results are reported in Table 2. First, we only include public opinion and the control variables in Model 1. The results show that public opinion has a significant effect on government's opposition in the Council in the policy areas included. The probability of an opposition vote decreases as the fraction of the population that supports EU membership of their country increases. Model 2 adds the governing parties' seat-weighted position on left-right and pro-anti integration to ascertain whether part of the opinion effect is due to changes in the government composition. The inclusion of these terms leaves the results virtually unchanged, which demonstrates that responsiveness of governments in the Council is first and foremost a result of anticipatory dynamics as government parties' positions at the last elections only explain a marginal part of the relationship between opinion and voting in the Council. Hence, in contrast to the existing literature on decision-making in the Council that claims that public opinion is of

[13] We implement fixed effects for countries with dummy variables and hence report a constant. We face some missing data related to party positions from the CMP. While we use listwise deletion here, the web appendix demonstrates that our results are robust to using multiple imputation for these positions. We also present a series of further robustness checks in the appendix, including different random and fixed effects specifications, alternative operationalizations of opposition votes as well as party salience, different lag lengths of opinion, sensitivity analyses with regard to excluding/including policy areas from the sample, and Jackknife resampling at the country level.

little significance, we find that if we focus on acts in policy areas that extend the scope and degree of EU authority, government opposition is clearly a reflection of domestic Euroskepticism. This supports our argument that governments use Council voting to signal responsiveness, adjusting their position during the legislative term in anticipation of electoral sanctions.

Model 3 investigates our hypothesis 2 that party salience of EU integration moderates the opinion effect on opposition. For this purpose, we include an interaction term between public opinion and the increase in party salience of integration during the last two years. The results show that when parties have increased the salience of European integration in their manifestos, governments are more responsive to different levels of opinion than in situations with decreased party salience of integration. The moderation term is highly significant and provides evidence for our conjecture that signaling activities of the government are conditioned by domestic party competition.

The results on the control variables support our expectations. We find that governments oppose more often if unemployment is high and if the act was filed under codecision (when preference realization is impeded by another veto player, the European Parliament). In contrast, the agreement of governments can be 'bought' with attributions from the EU budget (see Bailer et al. 2014). Also, unsurprisingly national delegations holding the presidency are less likely to oppose acts they have negotiated. In Model 3, we also find clear evidence that right-wing governments opposed less often during the period under investigation, and that governments that present themselves as Euroskeptic in elections oppose more often.

Figure 1 demonstrates the substantive magnitude of these results by plotting the conditional marginal effect of a unit change in opinion (in terms of changes in predicted

probabilities) depending on whether party salience of EU integration has increased or decreased. These marginal effects range from essentially 0 up to -1.4 percentage points for a unit change in opinion. Assuming that party salience of integration is increasing, typical movements in opinion within a country (e.g. one or two standard deviations) translate into changes of the predicted probability of opposition votes of about +/- 0.1% to 0.3% percentage points. While this may appear small at first sight, it must be compared to the overall low frequency of opposition votes that is just 1.33% in our sample. In this context, the leverage of public opinion is indeed very substantial.

[Figure 1 about here]

Government Signals

We have now established that government opposition in the Council is more likely when the domestic electorate is more skeptical about the EU, especially when the issue is also gaining salience among political parties. The next step is to look at the *nature* of this opposition and whether the government's signal resonates in the domestic public sphere.

Starting with the nature of the public signal, we seek to investigate the kind of issues on which governments signal their opposition. For this purpose, we use a topic model that allows us to identify the type of acts on which public opinion matters to government opposition. We apply a latent Dirichlet allocation (LDA) model (Blei et al. 2003; Quinn et al. 2010; Grimmer 2010) to the legislative summaries of the 1,793 acts where these summaries were available. LDA is a hierarchical Bayesian model that builds on the idea that each document consists of a mixture of topics that can be inferred from the co-occurrence of words. The proportions dedicated to each of

k topics are assumed to be drawn from a common Dirichlet prior. The word generating process within each document is then modeled by firstly drawing the topic, and then conditional on the topic, the respective word from a multinomial distribution (see Grimmer and Stewart 2013). Testing different numbers of topics and starting values we arrive at a model with k = 45 topics that creates a good substantive delineation of topics and is indicative of key results we obtain across a variety of models.[14]

[Table 3 about here]

Table 3 shows the results from the LDA model with 45 topics and each act allocated to its most likely topic. It should be noted that these findings are meant to be exploratory, providing greater insight into when and why governments choose to oppose, rather than a strict confirmatory test. The final column in the table indicates the effect of public opinion on government opposition for legislative acts in that category. It displays the difference in the percentages of opposition votes given by countries with opinion below versus above the country mean. A high positive value shows that a Euroskeptic electorate makes government opposition in the Council more frequent, a negative value indicates the opposite (this is only significant in the instance of legislation on financial institutions [35]).

The findings are very much in line with our expectations that signal responsiveness is found when legislation is concerned with extending the level and/or scope of European integration, rather than in areas of established EU competence. Table 3 shows that public opinion has the greatest influence on government opposition on acts concerned with further integration in the field of environment, border cooperation and migration, data sharing and harmonization of

[14] More details on the LDA model can be found in the web appendix.

statistical surveys, as well as in the area of EU funding for member states. In contrast, government opposition in the areas of agriculture, fisheries and the internal market is not related to public opinion (see the last column, "Difference by opinion"). Hence while we find relatively high levels of opposition on acts about agriculture and budget matters, quite possibly related to special economic interests (see Bailer et al. 2014), "signal responsiveness" is only apparent when national government can use their opposition as a signal that they are standing up for national interests by opposing shifts towards further delegation of powers to the EU. The topic model also implies that governments use opposition as a signal to domestic audiences mainly in areas that are likely to be of greater interest to the general electorate (e.g. border control and environment) rather than specialized interests (e.g. agriculture and fisheries).

This leads us to the question of whether such "signals" are visible in the domestic public spheres. Our argument concerning signal responsiveness rests on the assumption that governments have a reasonable expectation that opposition in the Council may come to the attention of domestic electorates. If decisions made in the Council are taken entirely "away from public scrutiny behind 'closed doors'", as Bailer et al. (2014:8-9) argue, then it would be less plausible that opposition in the Council is driven by governments' incentive to improve their standing with domestic electorates. Hence, to substantiate our argument, we investigate media coverage and subsequent public debate in a number of EU member states to show that Council politics is indeed visible to domestic electorates.

For this purpose, we use data provided by Reh et al. (2013), who collected information on the number of news stories in Italian-, German-, French- and English-speaking print media that dealt with EU legislative acts adopted under the EU's codecision procedure from mid-1999 to mid-2009 (i.e. for the fifth and sixth European Parliaments). These data cover newspapers from

seven different EU countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and the UK). To test whether aggregate opposition in the Council is related to higher levels of media coverage, we regress the logged average number of newspaper stories regarding an act on the total number[15] of governmental opposition votes submitted by the seven countries covered in Reh et al.'s data using OLS. Since the last section has shown that opposition votes are more common on certain topics, we include fixed effects for the 45 topics identified in the LDA model. We find a highly significant relationship between the number of opposition votes and media coverage. Figure 2 demonstrates the substantive consequences: With no opposition vote an average of 0.4 newspaper articles cover the act, this number rises to 1 article with two opposition votes, and 1.4 articles with three governments opposing. Hence, there are observable consequences of government responsiveness: opposition is related to higher media coverage of EU legislation, even when comparing between acts within the same 45 different topic categories.[16]

[Figure 2 in here]

To provide a more in-depth look into the public attention to signal responsiveness, we have examined the media coverage of cases where a government opposed legislation in the Council at a time where the domestic population was particularly critical (with a public opinion score below the country mean) and which falls under the topics identified in Table 3. Our investigation reveals a number of cases where popular national news outlets report on Council

[15] If there was more than one vote occasion, we sum opposition votes across occasions.

[16] Unfortunately the available media data do not allow us to conduct a test of the relationship between government opposition and media attention in the entire EU, however, this analysis is indicative that government opposition in the Council resonates in national media.

agreements and on their government's opposition on the matter. One example is a media case relating to a vote on Environment and Transport (Topic 11). In September 2011, Spain opposed a majority in the Council when it voted against an EU directive to substantially increase road tolls for heavy vehicles on European motorways.[17] Spain - together with the Italian government - argued that the new directive would place a disproportionate burden on the EU's peripheral countries, since it would result in a subsequent rise in the costs of export and import of goods. The Spanish media reported extensively on the topic, and explicitly mentioned the Spanish government's opposition in the Council.[18] The government's opposition was later also mentioned when the national media reported on discussions to extend increased toll taxes to all vehicles crossing borders between EU member states.[19]

This example illustrates how government opposition in the Council can be picked up by a broader public audience beyond the political insiders and narrow organized interest groups with a particular incentive to monitor EU legislative activities. Of course, many votes in the various Council configurations go largely unnoticed by the general public. Yet, national media pay attention to the Council agenda and now seek information on their national governments' positions on individual policies of particular national or regional interest.[20] Overall, this evidence suggests that opposition in the Council may be as much a political signal to domestic audiences as a policy stance vis-à-vis negotiation partners at the European level.

Conclusion

[17] Council and European Parliament Directive 2008/0147/COD.

[18] e.g. La Vanguardia 14/09/2011: "Los camiones pagaran los peajas mas caros".

[19] E.g. RTV 16/09/2011:"Cobrar peaje autovias para turismos, un modelo polemico aplicado solo en Portugal".

[20] See the Council's press service: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/. See also European Parliament 2013 and www.votewatch.eu/media.

The literature on responsiveness has mostly focused on how governments react to public opinion in the domestic context, whereas the literature on government behavior in IOs pays little attention to the role of national public opinion. The latter generally assumes that governments act in isolation from domestic electoral pressures when they cooperate at the international level. However, this paper has shown that governments do use the international stage to signal their responsiveness to domestic public opinion, and that when they do so, this resonates in the domestic public debate. Focusing on the EU's primary legislative body, the Council of the European Union, this paper demonstrates that government opposition to legislative proposals is shaped by public opinion on European integration. When the domestic electorate is negatively disposed towards the EU, governments are more likely to oppose proposals that aim to extend the powers of the EU further. By focusing on legislation that transfers authority to a supranational organization - the delegation of power to the EU - we are able to demonstrate the effect of public opinion, which has generally been overlooked in analyses that do not make distinctions between policy areas or the nature and types of legislation.

It is important to note that the focus of this study has not been the traditional form of *policy* responsiveness, where governments change policy in response to changing public opinion. Instead, we show that governments use the international organizations to *signal* that they are listening to domestic public opinion. We refer to this form of government responsiveness as "signal responsiveness" and suggest that it is caused by governments' incentives to convey their policy actions at the EU level to domestic audiences. This distinction is important, because unlike policy responsiveness, signal responsiveness has no direct short-term consequences for policy output. Hence, while the presence of signal responsiveness indicates that citizens' views are heard, it does not guarantee that they are represented.

We also show that government responsiveness is conditioned by domestic party competition. When political parties in the domestic arena compete on the issue of European integration, governments are more likely to signal their opposition in the Council in response to public opinion. Moreover, such actions are seen to *shape* the public debate: our analysis of media coverage shows that when governments oppose in the Council there is also greater coverage in the national media. Although this part of the analysis is limited to a subset of EU member states, the findings are compelling, and further research should provide a more comprehensive analysis of how the domestic public debate and public opinion react to government behavior in the Council.

This study provides an important starting point for understanding the link between citizens and their governments in the EU by going beyond the received wisdom that EU negotiations are conducted behind closed doors. Our findings point to an electoral connection between government ministers and national public opinion in European affairs when it comes to decisions on the scope and extent of supranational competences. This may well be relevant to other international contexts too. Our expectation was that if we are to find evidence of government responsiveness to public opinion in any IO it would be most evident in the EU Council. The fact that we find such compelling evidence that governments use their behavior in the Council to signal to domestic electorates opens the door to future research into the connection between governments and citizens in other international bodies. As incentives increase for international cooperation in many spheres of political life, and international organizations gain competences to effectively manage such trans-border cooperation, domestic electorates are likely to form more explicit opinions and preferences over such international engagements. This is accompanied by growing pressures for accountable and transparent

decision-making at the international level. Taken together, governments may therefore increasingly see an opportunity to signal their responsiveness to domestic constituencies when acting in the international arena.

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1: Wordscores results by policy area

Policy area	Extension of authority vs. established competences
Agriculture and fisheries	-.65
Budget	.68
Civil liberties, justice and home affairs	.15
Constitutional affairs and administration	.14
Development and international trade	.12
Economic and financial affairs	-.11
Employment, education, culture and social	.94
Environment and energy	.22
Foreign and security policy	.46
Internal market and consumer affairs	-.03
Transport and telecommunications	.34
Number of acts	1,793

Table 2: Mixed effects logistic regression of opposition votes

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Public opinion	-2.611	-2.527	-2.818
	(1.082)**	(1.091)**	(1.102)**
Inflation rate	0.060	0.075	0.062
	(0.067)	(0.067)	(0.067)
Unemployment rate	0.097	0.096	0.105
	(0.038)**	(0.038)**	(0.039)***
Net balance EU budget	-0.003	-0.002	-0.003
	(0.001)**	(0.001)*	(0.001)**

Co-decision	0.788 (0.293)***	0.786 (0.293)***	0.786 (0.293)***
Post-enlargement	0.369 (0.316)	0.300 (0.319)	0.171 (0.320)
Rotating presidency	-1.034 (0.539)*	-1.068 (0.540)**	-1.380 (0.549)**
Government EU position		-0.190 (0.149)	-0.366 (0.170)**
Government left-right position		-0.376 (0.221)*	-0.440 (0.227)*
Party salience			4.416 (1.267)***
Party salience * Public opinion			-11.971 (3.059)***
Constant	-6.996 (0.966)****	-6.808 (0.997)****	-6.852 (1.002)****
Random effect (legislative act)	2.255 (0.215)***	2.257 (0.215)***	2.253 (0.214)***
Fixed effects (countries)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of observations	17,176	17,176	17,176

Standard errors in parentheses; * $p<0.1$; ** $p<0.05$; *** $p<0.01$

Table 3: Topic model of Council acts

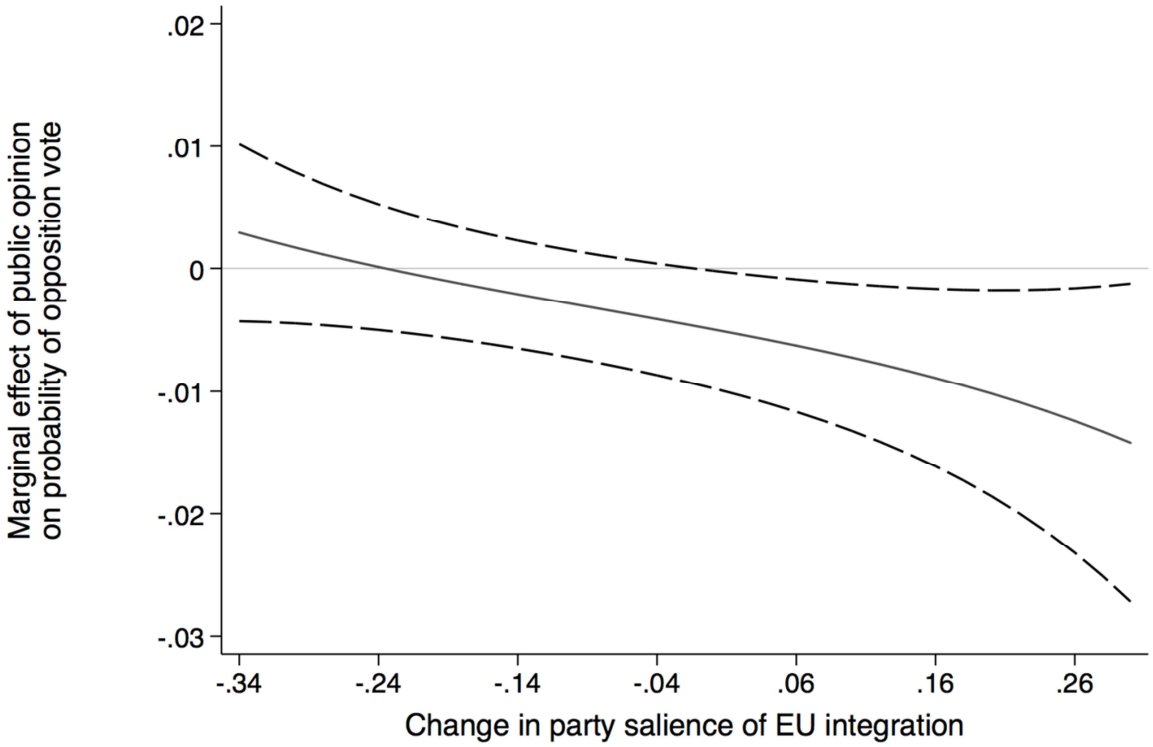
	Description	Key words	Obs. (%)	Opposition votes (%)	Difference by opinion (%)
1	*Budgetary surveillance of member states*	Economics, Budgetary, Surveillance, Stability, Imbalances, Deficit, Euro	0.99	0.24	+1.3
2	*Passenger rights and EU funding for disasters*	Transport, Passenger, Damage, Disaster, Fund, Solidarity	0.88	5.30	+3.0
3	*Regulation on food products*	Food, Regulation, Label, Consumers, Additives, Product	2.91	4.58	-1.1

4	*Communications and research*	Programme, Communications, Information	4.12	2.22	+0.8
5	*Crime and justice*	Criminal, Offence, Judiciary, Crime, Law	3.63	0.35	+0.0
6	*Maritime*	Ship, Maritime, Law, Regulation	1.87	1.32	-0.0
7	*Instruments and programmes to financially support non-EU countries*	Instrument, Financial, Assistance, Support, Finance, Region	1.81	1.00	+1.3
8	*Agriculture*	Agriculture, Product, Market, Local, Organic, Trade, Forest	2.25	4.15	-1.1
9	*Companies and financial industry*	Companies, Payment, Financial, Transfer, Business, Money	2.09	2.25	+0.9
10	*Energy and environment*	Energy, Efficiency, Emission, Gas, Greenhouse, Renewable, Fuel	1.43	0.96	-0.4
11	***Environment and transport***	**Emission, Vehicle, Limit, Air, Road, Engine, Reduction, Pollution, Noise**	2.80	**2.80**	**+3.2*** **
12	*Environment*	Substance, Environment, Waste, Pollution, Recycling, Water	2.86	2.17	+0.3
13	*Common market in food products*	Market, Aid, Price, Regulation, Year, Sugar, Product, Quota	4.56	5.46	-1.1
14	*Health, risk management, culture*	Health, Protect, Threat, Emergency, Disease, Risk, Culture	1.04	1.45	+0.1
15	*EU financial assistance*	Assistance, Guarantee, Loan, Financial, Fund, European Investment Bank	1.48	0	0
16	*Employment and social policy*	Employment, Social, Education, Labour, Training, Work	1.76	1.04	-0.9
17	*Transportation and public works contracts*	Public, Contract, Air, Carrier, Airport, Transport	1.92	1.16	+0.0
18	*Accession of new member states and asylum matters*	Accession, Asylum, Application	2.25	1.06	+0.9
19	*Regulation on external trade relations*	Regulation, Treaties, Trade	3.85	0.74	-0.8
20	*Consumer protection and legal enforcement*	Consumer, Protection, Rights, Courts, Law, Justice, Legal	1.48	3.07	-0.2
21	*Taxation and internal market*	VAT, Rate, Tax, Goods, Fraud	2.09	0.24	-0.0
22	*Common Agricultural Policy and rural development*	Agriculture, Rural, Payment, Fund, CAP, Regional	1.37	1.35	-1.4
23	*Internal market in energy*	Market, Network, Gas, Transmissions, Electricity, Energy	0.82	0.29	-0.6
24	*EU budget*	Budget, Million, Payment, Expenditure, Commitment, Amount, Financing, Resources	1.54	4.07	+0.2
25	*Animal welfare and disease*	Animals, Control, Health, Disease, Veterinary, Import	2.97	3.69	+1.7
26	*Customs union*	Customs Union, Duties, Import, Tax, Rate, Product, Tariff, Excise	1.48	0.63	-1.2

27	***Establishment of agencies and networks on border control, security and migration***	**Agency, Network, Establishment, Security, Exchange, Border**	2.69	0.81	**+1.4*** **
28	*Common Agricultural Policy*	Farmer, Milk, Payment, Wine, Product, Quota, Market, Crop	1.21	6.38	-2.9
29	*Medicine, chemicals and research*	Medicine, Substance, Safety, Nuclear, Risk, Chemicals	1.76	2.64	+1.9
30	*Single Market*	Directives, Amendments, Requirements, Limits, Standards	2.86	0.90	+0.0
31	*Implementation*	Implementation, Procedure, Instruments, Regulatory	2.91	0.07	-0.1
32	*Codification*	Codification, Act, Directive, Incorporation, Formal, Law	5.77	0.15	-0.0
33	*Fisheries*	Fisheries, Vessel, Stock, Conservation, Sea, Catch	4.40	1.44	-0.5
34	*Single currency*	Euro, Counterfeit, Currency, Adopt, Circulate, Derogation	2.09	0.37	-0.2
35	*Research and technology*	Research, Technology, Project, Contribution, Financing	1.37	3.02	+0.1
36	***Financial contributions to member state expenditure and to EU funds***	**Financial, Fund, Support, Assistance, Contribution**	2.03	2.98	**+2.6***
37	*Import and export of goods*	Export, Import, Product, Market, Regulation, Rules, Standards	2.31	2.01	-1.5
38	*Financial institutions*	Credit, Rate, Risk, Capital, Financial, Institutions, Banks	1.10	1.60	-3.5***
39	*Communications*	Communications, Mobile, Satellite, Providers	1.15	3.18	+2.1
40	*EU financing in innovation and infrastructure*	Fund, Innovation, Investment, Financing, Infrastructure	1.87	1.54	-1.1
41	*Financial supervision*	Financial, Supervision, Authority, Bank, ESA	0.66	0	0
42	***Statistical surveys and data sharing***	**Data, Statistics, Regulation, Quality**	3.35	1.16	**+1.1****
43	*Transport safety and communications*	Safety, Railway, Rail, Network, Communications	1.04	4.72	+0.6
44	*Schengen and border control*	Schengen, Visa, Border, Travel, SIS	3.08	1.34	+0.5
45	*Social security and employment*	Social security, Citizens, Rights, Profession	2.09	4.43	+1.6

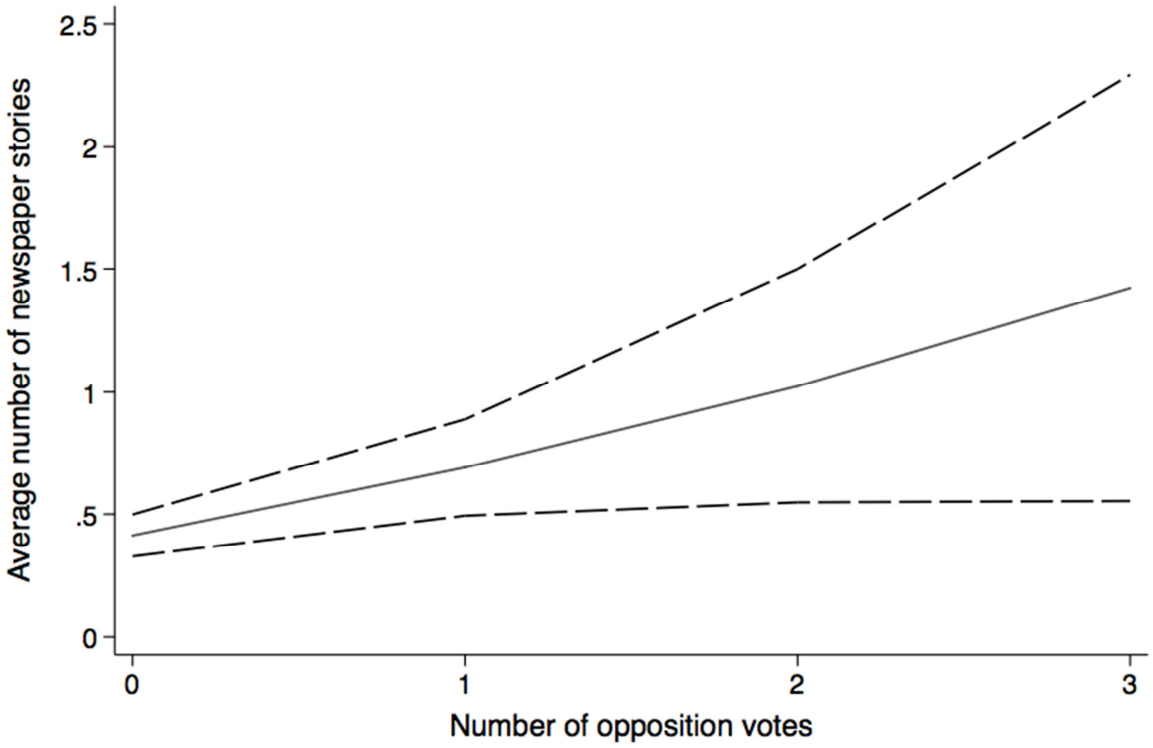
Note: Column 'Obs (%)' shows the fraction of observations allocated to the topic as a percentage of all observations; column 'Opposition votes (%)' shows the fraction of opposition votes as a percentage of the observations in the topic; column 'Difference by opinion' shows difference in the proportions of opposition votes cast with opinion below vs. above the country mean; * $p<0.1$; ** $p<0.05$; *** $p<0.01$

Figure 1: Party salience and public opinion



Note: Change in salience is plotted from the 5th to 95th percentile; 95% confidence intervals as dashed lines.

Figure 2: Newspaper stories and opposition votes



Note: 95% confidence intervals as dashed lines.