

# Viral Solidarity? EU Solidarity and Risk-Sharing in the COVID-19 Crisis\*

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## Abstract

Fiscal integration has long been regarded as a necessary condition to ensure the long-term stability of the euro. In the aftermath of the euro crisis, concerns about a populist backlash of Eurosceptic voters constrained national governments in their ability to pursue such integration. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, national leaders were able to agree to the Next Generation EU, a pandemic recovery fund of over 750 billion euro establishing an unprecedented, far-reaching, albeit temporary, fiscal stabilization capacity. Still, we know very little about citizens' preferences towards the pandemic recovery fund? To answer this question, we conducted an original survey experiment on public support for different designs of a European pandemic recovery fund. We fielded the survey in five European countries (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain) in July 2020, at the time that national leaders agreed on the recovery fund. Our results show that there is surprisingly high support for a joint European fiscal instrument and that citizens react to different elements of the pandemic recovery fund. They prefer a broad program that is directed at countries in need, but they are skeptical about common debt. Yet, citizens' skepticism towards common debt is not important enough for them to negatively evaluate the program as a whole. Overall, the pandemic recovery fund agreed under 'Next Generation EU' is a well-tailored instrument to generate widespread political support across European member states.

## Keywords

Fiscal integration; risk sharing; solidarity; European Union; pandemic recovery fund; public opinion; conjoint experiment

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## Introduction

The global COVID-19 pandemic has posed a major challenge to international solidarity and cooperation in the European Union (EU). Countries like Italy and Spain, who were most severely hit by the first wave of the pandemic, asked for medical and economic support from the other member states, and many European leaders, most notably Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron, and Ursula von der Leyen repeatedly called for European solidarity to tackle this unprecedented public health and ensuing economic crisis. In turn, the governments of other member states, especially the ‘frugal four’ – Austria, Denmark, Finland, and the Netherlands, were reluctant to provide support to their southern neighbors. This opposition led to acrimonious intergovernmental debates over the size, form, and conditions of economic support.

This conflict has exacerbated the historical North-South divide that has plagued European politics since the beginning of the euro crisis in 2010. It had already been preceded by a long struggle to make significant progress with fiscal integration, which many scholars and policy-makers see as a necessary condition for ensuring the long-term stability of the euro area (De Grauwe 2018; Copelovitch, Frieden and Walter, 2016; Jones et al., 2016). Indeed, policymakers faced the same dilemma in response to the pandemic as they had done in response to the euro crisis: while a joint European strategy to tackle the crisis and its dramatic and unequal economic consequences was sorely needed, national leaders feared that other member states would take advantage of their solidarity and were wary of a populist and Eurosceptic backlash among their voters. Existing research shows that European governments were subject to a ‘constraining consensus’ (Hooghe and Marks, 2009) or a ‘democratic constraint’ (Beramendi and Stegmueller, 2020) in the past because voters in northern countries like Germany were said to oppose any fiscal risk-sharing that involves substantial cross-border redistribution (Bechtel et al. 2014; Walter et al. 2020; Degner and Leufen, 2020; Howarth and Schild, 2021).

Many observers were, therefore, surprised that the EU was able to agree on a pandemic recovery fund, Next Generation EU, establishing a far-reaching, albeit temporary, fiscal stabilization capacity in July 2020, only a few months after the pandemic had begun. The recovery instrument involves unprecedented borrowing by the European Commission on the financial markets up to € 750bn, € 390bn of which will be distributed in the form of grants, to support member states during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en) (accessed 2 March 2021).

To what extent are policy makers' concerns about a Eurosceptic backlash against fiscal integration in the pandemic recovery fund warranted? We actually know little about whether European citizens support European reforms to tackle this crisis, and under which conditions such joint responses are politically viable and perceived as legitimate. In particular, the different proposals for a European recovery fund that were discussed by political leaders in summer 2020 raise the question of what citizens across European countries think of different elements of such a program. Which factors drive support for tackling the unequal economic and health care consequences of the crisis at the European level? In addition, how does this support for the recovery fund differ across countries and individuals?

To answer these questions, we use a novel conjoint experiment to assess public support for European solidarity and risk-sharing in the fight against the coronavirus. A conjoint experiment is suitable to test public support for alternative policy options that were on the negotiation table in July 2020 because it allows us to gauge both the role that specific policy dimensions play in driving support for a European recovery fund as well as the overall level of support for different options. Rather than measuring public preferences for fiscal integration in the abstract or post-hoc, our study measures individuals' specific policy preferences along the different dimensions of a specific fiscal instrument, the pandemic recovery fund, at a moment of high public salience.

The various policy dimensions in the conjoint experiment were derived from the EU-level negotiations on the European recovery fund as well as previous research on public support for risk-sharing and solidarity in the EU (i.e., Bechtel et al., 2017, Kuhn et al., 2020). The survey experiment was then fielded in a two-week window in July during which European leaders negotiated the fund at the decisive European Council summit. We estimate public support for European solidarity and risk-sharing based on nationally representative samples in five EU member states: France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Spain. These five countries were key players in the European Council negotiations and they also represent relevant variation in the negotiation positions on the recovery fund, and fiscal integration more generally.

Our results show that the policy design of the pandemic recovery fund affects citizen support and that this varies across countries and individuals. The findings indicate that there is considerable overall support for the pandemic recovery fund agreed under 'Next Generation EU' and that a plurality of citizens believe a European pandemic recovery fund to have a positive impact.

## Contested Fiscal Integration and Solidarity in the European Union

Fiscal integration is often said to be a prerequisite for the survival and thriving of the EU, and the European Monetary Union (EMU) in particular (e.g. Mundell, 1961; De Grauwe, 2018). Yet, both the need for and approach to fiscal integration is highly contested across the European Union. Crucially, this political contestation over fiscal integration occurs in a critical moment of European integration. The EU no longer enjoys the silent public support that characterized earlier phases of integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2009). Even more so than other international organizations, the EU has become increasingly subjected to widespread politicization in domestic politics (Hutter et al., 2016; De Wilde and Zürn, 2012). The widening and deepening of the EU is now subject to democratic constraints as widespread public support is needed for substantial steps forward in integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Beramendi and Stegmueller, 2020). The fragmented nature of the European polity makes it difficult to forge viable political agreements.

On matters of fiscal integration, voters in northern Europe are typically opposed to risk-sharing and cross-border redistribution in the EU (Bechtel et al., 2014; Walter et al., 2020; Beramendi and Stegmueller, 2020; Degner and Leufen, 2020; Howarth and Schild, 2021). Voters in southern Europe are increasingly prone to blame their countries' economic woes on the shortcomings of the EMU design, as the prolonged eurozone crisis substantially increased dissatisfaction with the EU (Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales 2016; Hobolt and de Vries 2016; de Vries 2018). In the North and the South alike, Eurosceptic forces have thus gained ground. Eurosceptic challenger parties have secured sizeable parliamentary representation (de Vries & Hobolt, 2020) and mainstream parties have toned down their support for European integration in response to Eurosceptic parties (Meijers, 2017) and public opinion (Hagemann et al. 2017; Spoon and Williams, 2015). As national governments respond to public opinion in intergovernmental bargaining (Schneider, 2018), these developments have significantly narrowed member states' opportunities for political compromise on EU fiscal integration.

Despite the increasing success of Eurosceptic forces, there is some degree of public support for risk-sharing and solidarity among Europeans. Even though Europeans are more inclined to show solidarity towards co-nationals than towards citizens of other member states (Lahusen and Grasso, 2018, Kuhn and Kamm, 2019), there is in principle widespread support for some form of international and European solidarity (Gerhards et al. 2019; Ferrera and Burrelli 2019; Vasilopoulou and Talving, 2020). Yet public support for European solidarity is not unconditional. It is higher if solidarity and risk-sharing are linked to clear conditions of coverage (Vandenbroucke

et al., 2018), it varies across policy areas, and it is higher in case of temporary and exogenous shocks, such as natural disasters or a pandemic (Bremer, Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs, 2020; Cicchi, Genschel, Hemerijk, and Nasr, 2020). As a result, initial evidence suggests that European solidarity in the COVID-19 crisis is high across the EU, including crucial member states such as Germany (Dennison and Zerka, 2020; Leuffen and Koos, 2020). In principle, respondents in northern countries still oppose fiscal integration through eurobonds or ‘coronabonds’, but this opposition wanes when joint borrowing averts the breakdown of the eurozone (Baccaro, Bremer, and Neimanns, 2020).

## **The Multidimensionality of Public Opinion on the Pandemic Recovery Fund**

In sum, research on public opinion towards European solidarity and fiscal integration comes to quite opposite conclusions. On the one hand, there is mounting empirical evidence that citizens are reluctant to support cross-national risk-sharing (Bechtel et al., 2014; Beramendi and Stegmueller, 2020). On the other hand, a large body of research shows that there is lingering potential for public support for EU solidarity, especially in times of crisis (Gerhards et al. 2019; Kuhn and Kamm, 2018; Vasilopoulou and Talving, 2020). How can we make sense of these inconclusive findings in support of risk-sharing and solidarity in the EU?

We argue that European fiscal integration is multidimensional and public support depends on specific features of the policy instrument and the political context at play. In a nutshell, Europeans are ready to help citizens of other member states in need, but they are fiscally conservative and oppose making (joint) debt. Existing research shows that support for European bailouts (Bechtel et al., 2017), European unemployment insurance (Vandenbroucke et al., 2018), euro membership (Franchino and Segatti, 2019), and fiscal integration (Beetsma et al., 2020) depend on the specific design of these policies. As a form of fiscal integration *par excellence*, we expect public opinion on the pandemic recovery fund to similarly hinge on the specific policy features of the recovery fund. The recovery fund is a complex and highly politicized program, which is constituted by several policy dimensions that cannot be easily reduced to broad matters of principle. In this context, we investigate public preferences on the specific policy dimensions of this unique and unprecedented EU policy initiative as they were debated in the EU-level negotiations in the summer of 2020. We explore which specific features of the European pandemic recovery fund matter to citizens, and which combinations of policy dimensions find overall political support. We distinguish three aspects that were pivotal in the intergovernmental negotiations, and that reflect theoretically salient

aspects of public opinion on EU politics: the *scope* of the recovery program, the degree of *risk-sharing*, and the *governance* mechanism of the program (see also Bénassy-Quéré et al., 2020).<sup>2</sup>

### **Scope**

First, the *scope* of the pandemic recovery fund relates to the purpose and the duration of the program. Both reflect key divisions in public opinion as well as divisions between member states during the negotiations in July 2020. In terms of purpose, previous research on fiscal integration shows that while support for EU spending on healthcare is high in all countries, divisions in public support emerge when we look beyond healthcare, for instance on education or economic support (Beetsma et al., 2020). These divisions likely reflect pre-existing differences in public perceptions on policy priorities. Public opinion data from a 2018 Eurobarometer survey shows that important divergences exist among European publics regarding the most important issues on the table, with Germany and the Netherlands prioritizing the environment, and France, Italy, and Spain highlighting concerns about unemployment and the broader economic situation (European Commission, 2019). While some governments favored a narrow program that would be solely used to support member states' healthcare systems, others wanted the recovery fund to address broader economic and political challenges. The latter supported an expansive instrument that would not only focus on support for countries' health care challenges but also provide support for member states' economic recovery from the pandemic. Others also supported linking the pandemic recovery fund with the European Green Deal, the EU's flagship program to support a green turn in the economy which had been agreed upon just before the beginning of the pandemic in 2019.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the duration of the program is a salient characteristic of the recovery fund (Gocaj & Meunier, 2013). The question of whether to install a temporary or permanent recovery instrument is likely important for citizens, as it could entail a significant deepening of integration in times of crisis. The issue was also hotly debated in the negotiations. Some member states argued in favor of establishing a permanent facility that could be reactivated in future crises, while others, such as the Netherlands, insisted that the program be temporary, limited to the COVID-19 pandemic (Howarth & Schild, 2021). This division mirrored discussions from the Eurozone crisis when policy-makers disagreed over whether permanent institutions would be required to ensure the

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<sup>2</sup> While we pre-registered expectations about the country- and individual-level variation in support for certain policy attributes, we did not pre-register expectations about the average support for policy attributes across the five countries.

<sup>3</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en) (accessed online 17 March 2021)

stability of the Eurozone (De Grauwe 2018). Early proposals, for instance by Carnot et al. (2017), Beblavy et al. (2017), and Lenarčič and Korhonen (2018) attempted to find a middle ground by proposing ‘rainy-day’ funds. These funds, inspired by the US fiscal capacity designs, are permanent collective insurance institutions that force member states to save in good times and remain ‘dormant’ until an economic downturn activates a trigger, after which the collective insurance begins disbursements. Several of the original schemes proposed by Beblavy et al. (2017) allow for the emission of joint debt, therefore a representing hybrid model whereby a debt-emitting institution is kept on standby to deal with future crises.

Overall, we expect that voters are more likely to support a more expansive recovery program rather than a recovery fund with a narrowly defined purpose. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a large, exogenous, and symmetrical shock causing an unprecedented economic crisis in all European democracies. In this context, it is likely that citizens support a broad program, as a narrowly defined program likely would provide little overall stabilization and would overlook challenges related to economic recovery and combating climate change (Nicoli, 2019). In addition, benchmarking theory suggests that citizens’ preferences for EU integration are benchmarked against possible alternative states (De Vries, 2018; 2020). Arguably, the Eurozone crisis provided an example of how hesitant and reluctant fiscal decision-making harmed member states (Guzman et al. 2016), against which citizens evaluate the recovery fund.

For similar reasons, we also expect that citizens favor a permanent solution to the problem of economic stabilization in the EU (and especially in the EMU). In part, citizens may prefer to reduce the future political and economic uncertainty associated with new negotiations in future crises should the solution be not permanent (see Thygesen et al. 2020). Some citizens may also be aware of the weakness of a monetary union without mechanisms of internal stabilization, not last through the experience of the euro crisis.

### ***Risk-Sharing***

Second, the extent of *risk-sharing* through fiscal integration is a salient question to both citizens and policymakers. Citizens in different European countries differ in their preferences for EU risk-sharing, with citizens from northern countries more likely to be more opposed to cross-country risk-sharing than their southern counterparts given the substantial distributive implications. In the EU Council meetings in the summer of 2020, questions of risk-sharing and redistribution were central to the negotiations and reproduced long-standing divisions between the member states – pitting the ‘North’ against the ‘South’.

Broadly speaking, the extent of risk-sharing is a function of three dimensions: (i) how the program is financed; (ii) how the funds are distributed; and (iii) how the money is repaid. In terms of financing, the pivotal question is whether existing funds from other areas of EU expenditure are to be repurposed, or whether the recovery fund is endowed with additional resources financed by joint borrowing. With respect to distribution, the fund could support all countries equally, based on population size, or it could primarily support countries in need. Finally, risk-sharing is also a function of how the money is repaid. This was in fact the most contested issue in recovery fund negotiations: Do countries repay exactly what they received or do countries repay together, i.e., do more affluent countries repay relatively more than what they received and less affluent countries less? This discussion has been commonly referred to as a debate of loans vs. grants. Arguably, only the latter option would constitute far-reaching fiscal integration, but the former would also facilitate counter-cyclical stabilization given that repayment happens in the future and given that it allows countries to access funds more easily compared to a national solution due to better borrowing conditions.

We expect the issue of risk-sharing to be contentious, and we expect little agreement among European citizens. Yet, on average, we expect citizens to support some form of risk-sharing, but not others. Government debt, and especially joint European debt, is often considered unpopular (Peltzman 1992). We, therefore, expect that support for a European recovery program is higher when it is financed by existing resources, such as the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) rather than financing it through additional debt.

The extent to which citizens support redistribution of these funds from high-income to low-income countries depends to a large extent on the strength of European solidarity. Given EU citizens' tendency to support European solidarity, especially in times of crisis and to avert worse consequences (Cicchi et al. 2020; Baccaro et al, 2020), we expect that voters prefer distribution as a function of need, increasing the likelihood to support a recovery fund that assists countries hit hardest by the pandemic, rather than a distribution that reflects population size.

The joint liability and repayment of these funds are expected to be unpopular, on average. The hotly contested debate about loans vs. grants was influenced by questions of moral hazard that surfaced during the Eurozone crisis (Rathbun et al, 2019; Warren, 2018). In a nutshell, people fear that net beneficiaries do not have enough incentives to responsibly manage the funds if they do not have to pay them back. Based on notions of deservingness and reciprocity which influence



public opinion preferences (Baute et al. 2021),<sup>4</sup> we expect that voters prefer funds to be paid out in the form of loans rather than grants, i.e. that each country repays exactly what it receives from the program.

### ***Governance***

Finally, a third key polarizing issue concerned the question of *governance*, i.e., who takes decisions about the pandemic recovery fund. Public opinion is often divided on the extent to which different national and European institutions are trusted (De Wilde, 2021; Talving and Vasilopoulou, 2021), and the role that European or national policy-makers should play in the governance of the European economic institutions is a debated issue (Vandenbroucke et al., 2018; Beetsma et al., 2020). Which institution holds decisional power ultimately impacts who is able to control, monitor, and eventually suspend the recovery program in case of non-compliance.

The question of governance is, therefore, one of the most critical aspects of fiscal integration, touching on the very core of moral hazard, conditionality, and national sovereignty. The different logics of decision-making – supranational, intergovernmental, or national – each have their advantages and disadvantages, and the issue played a key role in the pandemic recovery fund negotiations. On the one hand, delegating powers to the European institutions affect perceptions of national sovereignty democratic legitimacy, which are particularly salient when it comes to fiscal integration (Schmidt, 2005; Majone, 2014; Nicoli, 2017). On the other hand, national veto-players in intergovernmental decision-making might paralyze the system and prevent effective and timely use of the instrument, as has been documented in the case of the ESM (Kreilinger, 2019). A third option would be to give full autonomy to individual national governments, but this comes with the risk of moral hazard deemed highly problematic in northern European countries.

We expect that citizens are unlikely to support a unilateral national governance structure. Not only do voters in northern countries worry about moral hazard (Rathbun et al. 2019), but citizens in countries that experience a lower quality of government are also more likely to reject sole national governance of the fund as they benchmark the EU against their national government's performance (De Vries 2018, 55). In contrast, supranational decision-making by the European Commission may suffer from a lack of legitimacy and trust (Schafheitle et al, 2020). Hence, we expect that the intergovernmental option is likely to be the least controversial option, given that it

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<sup>4</sup> According to Baute et al. (2021) public support for social policy in multilevel polities tend to be higher when both benefits and responsibility increase hand-in-hand (reciprocity) and when recipients are seen as deserving, i.e. in need of support for reasons that are outside their control.

retains some form of national control while reflecting the desirability for joint decision-making of European programs.

## **Variation Across Countries and Individuals**

Public opinion is likely to vary by country, and differences across countries may cancel each other out. In particular, national sociotropic considerations vis-à-vis the recovery fund may play a role. Sociotropic evaluations pertain to people's perceptions of how the country as a whole is affected by certain policy decisions (Mutz 1992; Mansfield & Mutz, 2009). As not all countries are equally likely to directly benefit from the recovery fund, such assessments of collective self-interest are therefore prone to vary across our selection of five countries. Public opinion in northern member states is expected to reflect that they are more likely to be net contributors to the recovery fund than southern or eastern member states. In addition, given the distinct advantages of joint borrowing for southern member states, it is likely that public opinion in these countries is more accepting of joint European debt instruments. We, therefore, expect that public support for a recovery package with a broader purpose, a permanent structure, debt-based financing, joint repayment, and redistribution is on average higher among respondents from Italy, France, and Spain than among respondents from the Netherlands and Germany.<sup>5</sup>

We also anticipate individual-level differences to affect support for a pandemic recovery fund. We expect differences between citizens to emerge due to differences in ideological attitudes and because of evaluations of personal economic self-interest. Following the literature on the dimensionality of the European political competition (Hooghe et al. 2003; Kriesi et al. 2008; Hutter et al. 2016), we postulate that ideological preferences for the recovery fund are structured on two dimensions: the pro-EU/anti-EU dimension and the left-right dimension. The extant literature highlights the importance of non-material preferences and cultural dispositions for European solidarity and risk-sharing. Individuals who identify as European, who hold cosmopolitan world views, and who are more open towards immigration tend to be more supportive of European solidarity (Bechtel et al 2014, Verhaegen 2018, Kuhn et al. 2018, Bauhr and Charron 2020, Nicoli et al. 2020). Support for a European recovery fund should therefore be strongly guided by individual attitudes toward the EU. More specifically, we expect respondents with more pro-European orientations to be more supportive of a recovery fund that is permanent and serves a

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<sup>5</sup> The country-level and individual-level expectations were pre-registered as hypotheses in the pre-analysis plan: <https://osf.io/hc3tr>

broader purpose. Pro-EU respondents are also expected to support risk-sharing more than their anti-EU counterparts – displaying higher levels of support for debt-based financing, distribution by need (i.e. redistribution), and joint repayment (i.e. grants). In addition, pro-EU respondents are more likely to support supranational governance of the fund by the Commission.

Left-right orientations of citizens also likely affect their preferences for the recovery fund. Citizens with a left-wing orientation are generally more supportive of redistribution and government intervention in the economy. Existing research also shows that citizens' left-right orientations influence support for fiscal integration. Bechtel et al. (2017) find that left-wing Germans are more supportive of EMU rescue packages than right-wing respondents. Kuhn et al. (2020) find that left-wing supporters are most likely to prefer generous EU-level unemployment benefits featuring strong cross-country redistribution. We, therefore, expect respondents with a left-wing orientation to be more supportive of a recovery fund with a more ambitious scope (i.e. broader purpose and permanent structure) and more risk-sharing (i.e. debt-based financing, redistribution, and joint repayment).

Finally, support for the pandemic recovery fund can stem from egotropic evaluations of personal economic self-interest (see Singer & Carlin, 2013). Although the exogenous shock of the pandemic affected the lives of virtually all European citizens, it had uneven consequences. The personal economic situation of some people was more negatively affected by the pandemic than others (Adams-Prassl et al., 2020). Exposure to the pandemic's adverse economic consequences likely affects people's preferences for the recovery fund. We anticipate that people whose personal economic situation is more affected by the crisis to be more supportive of a broad European response to address these consequences. We, therefore, postulate that people who are more exposed to the economic risks of the COVID-19 pandemic are more supportive of a recovery fund that entails a broad scope (i.e. broader purpose and permanent structure) and a high degree of risk-sharing (i.e. debt-based financing, redistribution, and joint repayment) than respondents who are less exposed.

## **Overall Support for the Pandemic Recovery Fund**

Establishing which policy characteristics increase and reduce support for the pandemic recovery fund is important to determine the *effects* of policy design on policy package favorability. However, it tells us little about citizens' *overall support* for the recovery fund and the extent to which they

believe the recovery fund to have a *positive impact* on themselves and society as a whole. The key to successful steps of fiscal integration is that there is sufficient public support across member states for the compromise struck in intergovernmental negotiations. In a descriptive analysis, we thus explore how the individual-level preferences for different policy characteristics of the recovery fund aggregate to overall support for different scenarios of the recovery fund, including the compromise struck by governments on July 21, 2020. How much overall support is there for the recovery fund, and how does this vary across countries? Furthermore, we examine whether respondents believe that a European pandemic recovery fund has a positive impact on their household, region, country, and the EU as a whole, and how this varies across respondents.

## **Data and Methods**

We fielded our survey experiment in July 2020 (10 July to 28 July). During the fieldwork, EU governments agreed on the European pandemic recovery plan on 21 July 2020. In the period immediately preceding our fieldwork, public debate about a supranational European response to the crisis induced by the COVID-19 pandemic was highly salient. As such, we fielded our survey experiment at a crucial juncture of the public discussions about a pandemic recovery fund.

### ***Country Selection***

We surveyed respondents in five European countries: France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Spain. This selection of countries includes the most important countries involved in the negotiations for the European pandemic recovery fund. Moreover, these countries have been selected to ensure sufficient variation on country-level variables such as the likely net recipient/contributor position from the recovery fund and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Italy and the Netherlands arguably represent the two opposing poles in the European negotiations, where Italy represents the ‘southern bloc’ demanding pan-European solidarity, while the Netherlands represents the ‘northern bloc (and more specifically the ‘frugal four’) that is reluctant to engage in cross-border transfers. Germany and Spain also belong to the northern and southern camps, respectively, but have taken more moderate negotiation positions – showing a willingness to compromise. Finally, France is often a mediator between the northern and southern bloc.

### ***Sampling***

In each of the five countries, we recruited 1,500 respondents, leading to a sample of 7500 respondents. The sample was drawn from a large online panel provided by the survey company

IPSOS. Sampling quotas were used to ensure that each country sample is nationally representative of the following categories: age, gender, education level, and region of residence (NUTS1).<sup>6</sup> The survey was conducted in the countries' main languages; in the Spanish region of Catalonia, respondents could choose between taking the survey in Spanish or Catalan.

### ***Design of the Survey Experiment***

We use a conjoint experiment to study citizens' preferences for different designs of a pandemic recovery fund. Policy preferences have traditionally been measured with simple survey questions. Yet, legislative proposals are usually constituted by multiple policy dimensions, which unidimensional survey questions cannot capture appropriately. Moreover, citizens' policy preferences are highly contingent on the trade-offs that accompany each policy. In other words, measures of policy preferences that do not vary across key policy components suffer from omitted variable bias (Baccaro et al. 2020). For these reasons, conjoint experiments are increasingly used to elicit respondents' preferences on multi-dimensional issues (Hainmueller et al., 2014). They allow researchers to study multiple treatment components simultaneously, enabling researchers to study the relative influence of multiple theoretical components of interest in the same design (Bechtel et al. 2017; Fesenfeld et al., 2020).

Before the experiment, respondents read a short introduction about the recovery fund negotiations (see appendix A.1). We then asked respondents to evaluate three pairs of randomly assigned policy packages. Each package consisted of the six policy dimensions related to *scope*, *risk-sharing*, and *governance* laid out in the theory section with two or three levels each (Table 1)<sup>7</sup> The six attributes with two or three levels produce a conjoint design of 144 possible profiles ( $3*2*2*2*2*3$ ).<sup>8</sup> After each iteration of the experiment, respondents were asked three questions.<sup>9</sup> A forced-choice question asked respondents which of the two proposals they prefer, resulting in a dichotomous *proposal choice* variable. This binary proposal choice variable is our main dependent variable. Second, respondents were asked to which degree they support the first and second proposal, with five

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<sup>6</sup> The quotas for the demographic categories are derived from Eurostat statistics. The quotas used and data on their successful implementation is reported in the Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> Appendix A provides a detailed explanation of the six policy dimensions.

<sup>8</sup> We randomly select six profiles to be shown. There are no excluded combinations, i.e., we use a fully randomized set-up except for the following restrictions. The same profile is not allowed to be shown twice on a screen, and the same comparison will not be shown twice, independent of the order. Respondents get all levels of all attributes in more or less the same proportion (i.e., if an attribute has three levels (A, B, C), the respondent will receive each A, B, and C two times). On 60 percent of all profiles, there is a random change of one level on one attribute, making a small adjustment to the profile. This is to ensure there will be no dependency in the data when analysing interaction effects of attributes. It should be noted that the order of the attributes is fixed for each respondent so that the order in which the attributes are shown to a particular respondent does not change across the three iterations of the experiment.

<sup>9</sup> Figure A.1 in the appendix shows a screenshot of the conjoint experiment (in English) and the response questions, which we introduce below.

answer categories ranging from ‘strongly oppose’ to ‘strongly support,’ resulting in a *proposal rating* variable. We use respondents’ scores on the rating variable as an alternative dependent variable to test the robustness of our results and to assess overall levels of support for specific recovery fund scenarios. The policy package levels form the key explanatory variables. The levels are measured as dummy variables – resulting in 14 dichotomous variables indicating the presence (absence) of in any given policy package (see Table 1). After respondents had completed the three iterations of the conjoint experiment, we also asked them a few follow-up questions. Specifically, we asked them to abstract from the details and tell us how a European pandemic recovery fund would, in their opinion, overall ‘affect the situation of’ themselves, their region, their country, and Europe as a whole.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 1.** Overview of conjoint experiment dimensions and characteristics.

	<b>Policy Dimension</b>	<b>Attribute Description</b>	<b>Policy features</b>
<b>Scope</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<i>What is the purpose of this program?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Support for healthcare only</li> <li>2. Support for healthcare and the economy</li> <li>3. Support for healthcare and measures against climate change</li> </ol>
	<b>Duration</b>	<i>How long does the program last?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. The program is fully terminated once the coronavirus crisis is over</li> <li>5. The program is maintained, ready to be used in future crises</li> </ol>
<b>Risk-sharing</b>	<b>Financing</b>	<i>How is the program financed?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Existing money is taken from European resources such as the EU budget</li> <li>7. Additional money is borrowed by the EU on the financial markets</li> </ol>
	<b>Repayment</b>	<i>How is the money repaid?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Each country repays exactly what it receives</li> <li>9. All countries repay together, i.e., rich countries pay more and poor countries pay less</li> </ol>
	<b>Distribution</b>	<i>How is the money distributed?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Every country receives the same per inhabitant</li> <li>11. Countries hit harder by the coronavirus crisis receive more</li> </ol>
<b>Governance</b>	<b>Governance</b>	<i>Who decides how the money is spent?</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. The European Commission</li> <li>13. Finance ministers of the member states together</li> <li>14. Finance ministers of the member states individually</li> </ol>

<sup>10</sup> The question was asked in the following way: ‘You have seen many alternatives for a EU support program. You might have supported some and opposed others. Overall, could you tell us how a European support program would, in your opinion, affect the situation of: <yourself personally> , <your region>, <your country>, <Europe as a whole>’.

The empirical section proceeds as follows. First, we test our expectations on the average effects of six policy features on recovery fund support across all five countries. We then estimate the heterogeneous treatment effects testing our expectations regarding country-level differences as well as individual-level variation. Subsequently, we explore overall levels of support for a selection of recovery fund scenarios, and we probe citizens' assessment of the impact of a pandemic recovery fund and variation therein.

### **Average Effects of Variations in Policy Features on Support**

To assess the impact of policy characteristics on support for the pandemic recovery fund, we estimate the average marginal component effects (AMCEs) of the policy levels (Hainmueller et al., 2014). The AMCEs measure the average impact of a difference of policy level on the probability to support a policy package. The three iterations of the experimental task result in six policy package decisions per respondent. We stack our data so that the policy package  $k$  of choice task  $j$  to respondent  $i$  represents a unique observation. For our 7501 respondents, this results in 45006 distinct observations. We use OLS regression analysis to predict the dependent variable on the dummy variables representing the policy levels, with a value of 1 representing the presence of the policy level in question. As such, the models assessing average main effects take the following form:

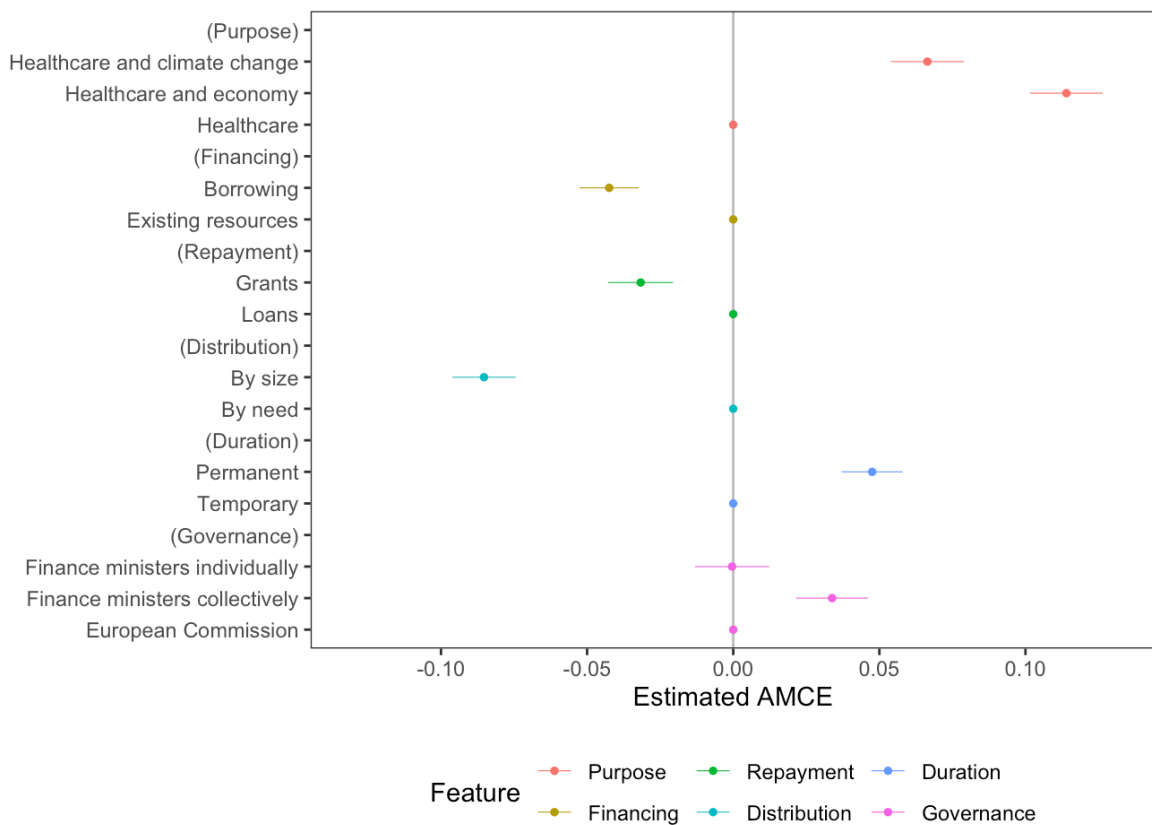
$$Y_{ijk} = X_{ijk}\beta + e_{ijk}$$

where the dependent variable  $Y_{ijk}$  refers to policy package choice for any given respondent  $i$  presented with policy package  $k$  in choice task  $j$ ;  $X_{ijk}$  represents a vector with the attributes of the policy package presented to the respondent, and  $e_{ijk}$  denotes the error term. As respondents' cast a judgment on six policy packages, we cluster our standard errors by respondents.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In all of our models, we consider p-values of 0.05 to be the threshold of statistical significance. We use two-tailed tests for all hypotheses.

**Figure 1.** Estimate AMCEs from the conjoint survey experiment



Note: The figure shows the average component-specific marginal effect (ACME) of a change in the value of one of the six dimensions on the probability that the respondent choose the European support package. Responses from the full sample are included and 95-percent confidence intervals are shown.

Figure 1 shows the marginal effects of the different policy levels vis-à-vis the baseline categories for each policy dimension in a pooled analysis across the five countries included with 95 percent confidence intervals. Overall, we see that almost all levels of the various policy dimensions have a statistically significant, and rather sizeable, effect on policy package support. This strongly suggests that respondents’ policy preferences on the recovery fund are indeed multidimensional and that policy design impacts public support, suggesting that a conjoint design is suitable for assessing respondents’ preferences on the recovery fund.

First, we turn to the *scope* of the recovery fund and examine preferences for the fund’s purpose and duration. In line with our theoretical expectations, we find that respondents, on average, favor a recovery fund with a purpose that is more expansive in scope than when the policy scope is less ambitious. Specifically, the probability to support a policy package increases by 11.4 percentage points if the purpose of the fund is to offer support for both healthcare and the economy compared to support for healthcare only. Policy packages that offer support for healthcare and



climate change policy find higher support than packages with a sole focus on health care, but less so than healthcare and economic support. Also in line with our expectations, the probability to support the policy package increases by 4.75 percentage points when the recovery fund is maintained to be used in future crises than when the program is fully terminated once the COVID-19 crisis is over.

Second, policy features related to *risk-sharing* also steer public support. In terms of *financing* of the recovery fund, the probability to support a policy package is reduced by 4.24 percentage points when the EU borrows additional money on the financial markets as opposed to redeploying existing EU resources. This is in line with our expectations. In terms of the distribution of the funds, we find that the probability to support a policy package drops by 8.53 percentage points when the funds are distributed by size, i.e. when all countries receive the same per capita as opposed to a distribution by need. As expected, respondents thus tend to prefer a recovery fund that distributes the money to those countries that have been hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. In line with our expectation, respondents from the five countries, on average, show support for a recovery fund in which each country repays exactly what it receives – rejecting mutualization or fiscal transfer between EU countries. The probability of supporting a policy package drops by 3.17 percentage points when it includes grants.

Third, with respect to the *governance* of the fund, we find that respondents' average probability to support a package increases by 3.38 percentage points when the fund is administered by the finance ministers of the EU member states compared to a fund overseen by the European Commission. This is for instance possible in the framework of the ECOFIN. By contrast, no statistically significant difference between unilateral member-state spending and Commission oversight is found.

All in all, these results provide strong evidence that citizen preferences on the recovery fund are, indeed, multidimensional. On average, the preferences of citizens in some policy dimensions point to support for further European integration. Citizens prefer a recovery fund that is broader in scope in terms of purpose and duration, and in which the distribution of funds is determined by financial need. At the same time, the average results still show that there is some reluctance for deeper fiscal integration within the framework of the recovery fund as loans are preferred over grants and joint borrowing on the financial markets is supported less than repurposing existing resources. Citizens' preference for the intergovernmental administering of the funds is equally indicative of the nuanced nature of public opinion on the recovery fund – as both the national and the supranational options are eschewed.

## Heterogeneous Treatment Effects Across Countries and Individuals

Public opinion on European integration and its future is not uniform across EU member states (De Vries, 2018) or social groups. Therefore, we estimate heterogeneous treatment effects (HTEs) across countries. Previous studies have also relied on AMCEs to assess HTEs in subgroup analyses. Yet, Leeper et al. (2020) argue that the use of AMCEs for subgroup analyses can be problematic as the estimates of AMCEs are always relative to the baseline category for each subgroup. To assess the different levels of favorability for policy levels across countries and individuals, we thus estimate Marginal Means (MMs) which denote the predicted probability of support for a package if it contains the level in question – irrespective of all other levels (Leeper et al., 2020).

### *Variation Across Countries*

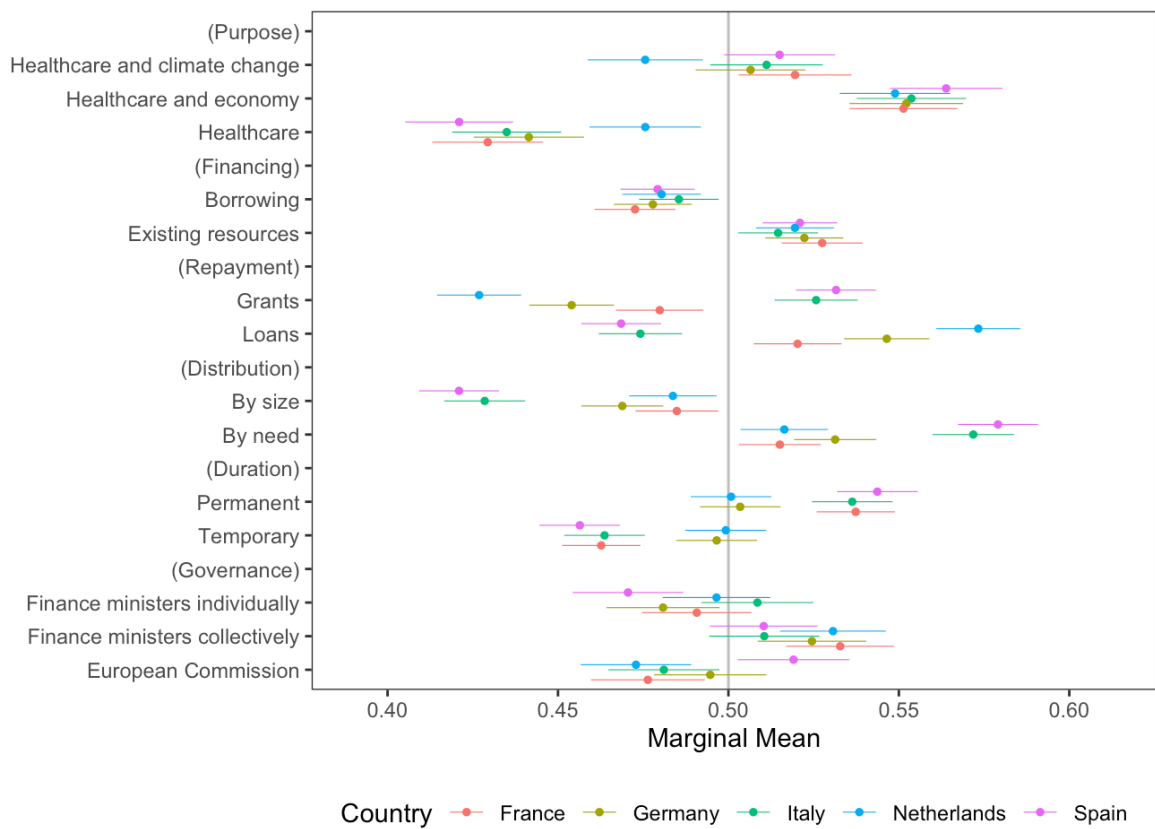
Especially when it comes to preferences regarding risk-sharing and fiscal transfers, public preferences on EU policy strongly diverge across the EU (Vasilopoulou & Talving, 2020). Hence, the average results in Figure 1 likely mask important country-level variation. Juxtaposing Dutch and German citizens against French, Italian, and Spanish citizens, we formulated the expectation that the latter prefer policy packages with a wider scope and long-term duration (*scope*) as well as debt-based financing, joint repayment, and redistribution (*risk-sharing*) vis-à-vis the former.

Figure 2 shows the marginal means by country. For three out of six policy dimensions, the estimates, indeed, show significant variation across countries. Contrary to our hypotheses, however, the preferences of respondents from France, Italy, and Spain do not form a cohesive cluster. Instead, French respondents join Dutch and German respondents in their preferences for some policy features and coalesce with Italian and Spanish respondents for others. This resonates with narratives of France being both a ‘northern’ and a ‘southern’ member-state.

The policy dimension in which sociotropic evaluations of collective self-interest come to the fore most markedly is ‘repayment’. While Italian and Spanish respondents are supportive of a fund constituted by grants, respondents from the remaining three countries tend to reject grants. Especially respondents from the Netherlands show strong opposition to grants. In terms of distribution, respondents from all five countries support a need-based. Yet, the level of support for a fund in which the money is distributed to countries hardest hit by the pandemic is statistically significantly higher in Italy and Spain. Whereas the permanency of the program did not significantly affect support among German and Dutch citizens, respondents in France, Italy, and Spain are positively disposed to a recovery fund that can be reactivated in possible future crises.

To our surprise, respondents from all five countries prefer the repurposing of existing funds over the EU borrowing additional money on the financial markets. Contrary to the expectation that policy packages in which the EU collectively borrows on the financial markets find more support in ‘southern’ member states, respondents tend to support policy packages relying on existing resources to a greater degree. Lastly, with respect to the purpose of the program, it is worth noting that Dutch respondents are statistically significantly more likely to support programs with a more limited ‘health care only’ scope than their counterparts, including Germany.

**Figure 2.** Estimated marginal means from the conjoint survey experiment by country



Note: The figure shows the conditional marginal means and 95-percent confidence intervals for all levels of the attributes by country. The marginal means measure how favorable respondents are to a given feature of the European support package.

### ***Variation Across Individuals***

Citizens' preferences for EU-level policy proposals are not formed in a vacuum. Instead, their ideological orientation on the EU dimension and the left-right dimension likely affect processes of preference formation. Specifically, we postulated that respondents with pro-EU orientations are more supportive of packages including a wider scope and long-term duration (*scope*) as well as debt-based financing, joint repayment, and redistribution (*risk-sharing*), and supranational *governance*. In order to assess the conditioning effect of respondents' preferences for EU integration on policy level preferences, we employ a standard measure asking: 'Generally speaking do you think [country's] membership is...' with the answer categories 'a good thing', 'a bad thing', 'neither a good thing nor a bad thing'.<sup>12</sup> Figure 3 shows the marginal means for subgroups of respondents who believe their country's EU membership is a 'good thing', a 'bad thing', or 'neither good nor bad'.

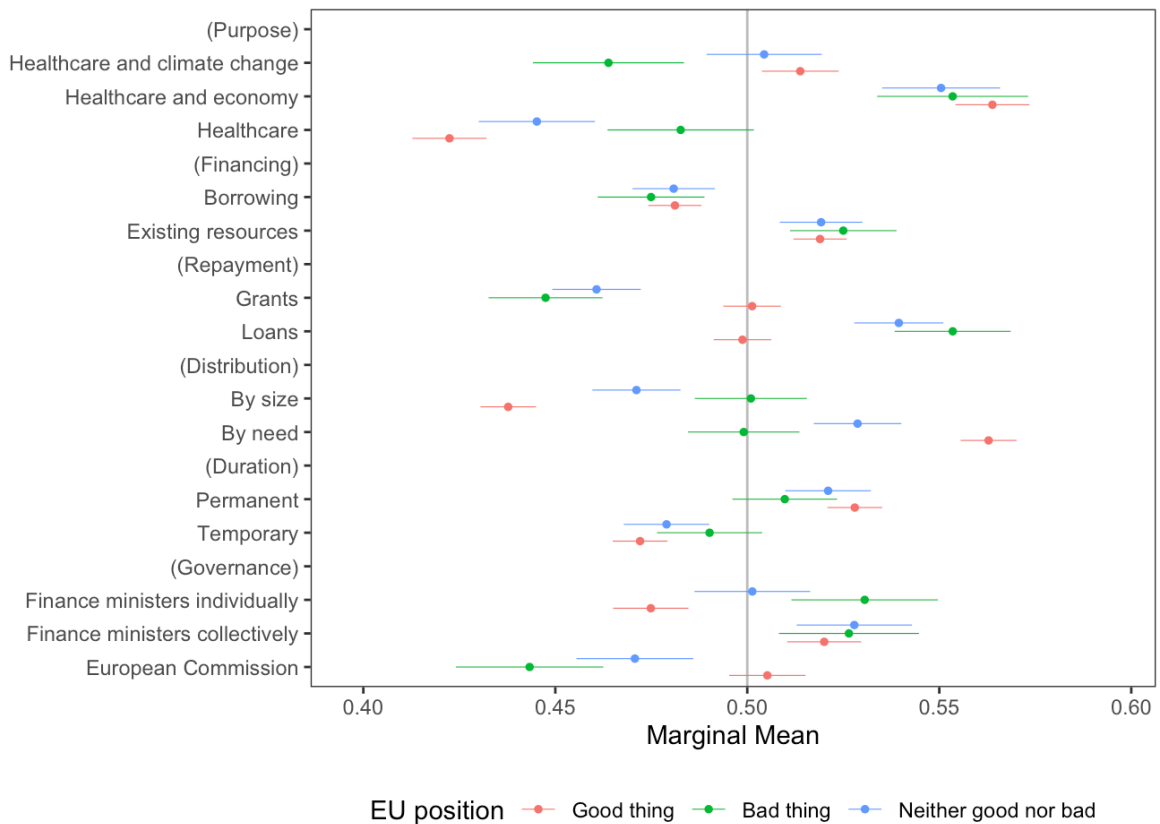
In line with our expectations, pro-EU respondents show greater support for a recovery fund with a broader purpose (i.e. support for 'healthcare and the economy' or 'healthcare and climate policy') than in comparison to anti-EU respondents. Also in line with our expectations, respondents with pro-European dispositions are more likely to support a recovery fund in which the funds are distributed by need, issued as grants, and which takes a permanent character. In addition, as expected, anti-EU respondents are less likely to support packages in which the European Commission takes control of the spending decisions. Contrary to our expectation, however, there is no significant difference between the preference for EU borrowing among pro- and anti-European respondents. This suggests that respondents' wariness of borrowing additional funds on the financial markets takes precedence over risk-sharing opportunities at the European level.

We also expected that respondents with more left-wing economic orientations are more supportive of packages that serve a broader purpose and include long-term duration (*scope*) as well as debt-based financing, joint repayment, and redistribution (*risk-sharing*) than respondents with more right-wing economic orientations. To estimate the heterogeneous treatment effects of economic left-right ideology we measure respondents' economic left-right self-placement on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 to 10. To examine the HTEs in subgroup analyses we recode this variable into a categorical variable with three categories: left (from 0 to 3), center (4 to 6), and right (7 to 10). Figure 4 shows marginal means for these three subgroups.

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<sup>12</sup> We recode the answer categories 'I don't know', and 'I prefer not to answer' as missing values.

**Figure 3:** Estimated marginal means from the conjoint survey experiment by support for European integration

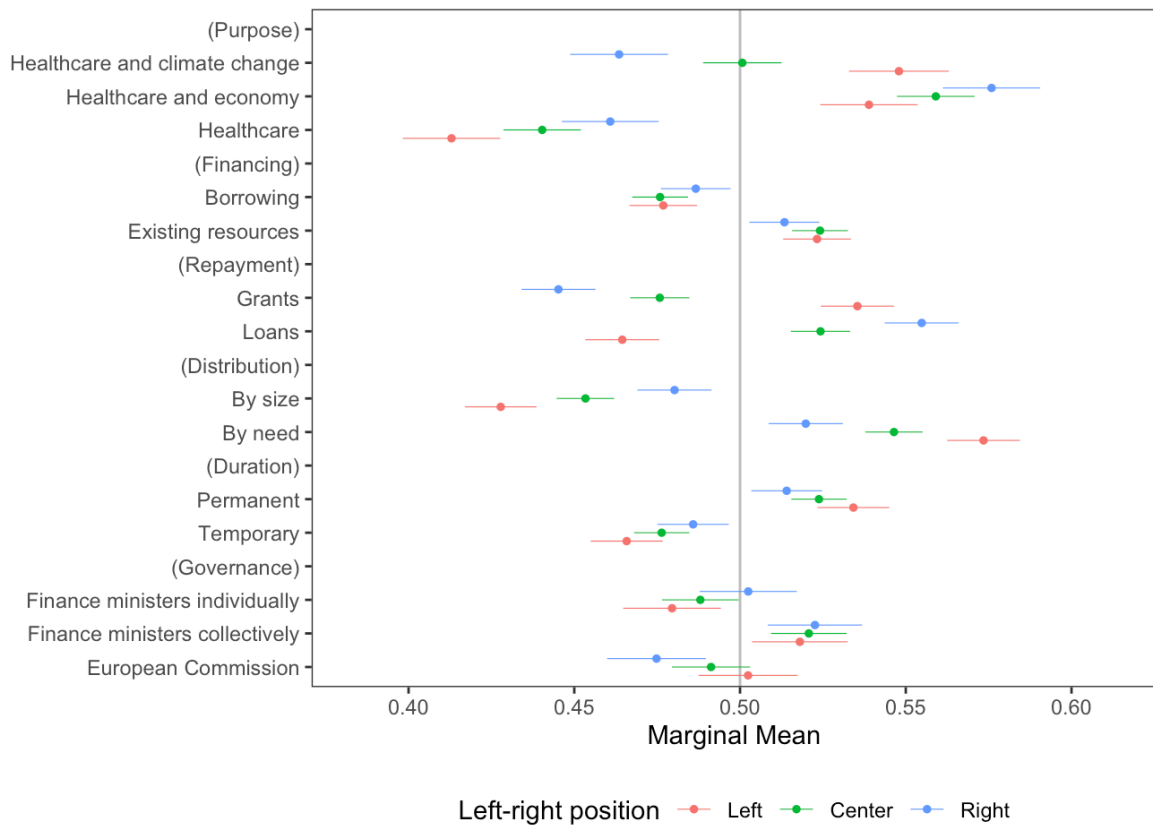


Note: The figure shows the conditional marginal means and 95-percent confidence intervals for all levels of the attributes by support for European integration. The marginal means measure how favorable respondents are to a given feature of the European support package.

We find support for the expectation that left-wing respondents, compared to right-wing respondents, prefer policy packages in which the funds are distributed according to need; in which the funds are issued as grants to the receiving countries; and in which the program is maintained for future crises. We find partial support for the hypothesis that left-wing respondents display greater support for policy packages that are wider in scope: in line with our expectations, right-wing respondents are statistically significantly more likely than left-wing respondents to support policy packages aiming to support member states’ health care systems only. Left-wing respondents are more likely than right-wing respondents to support policy packages that aim to assist member states’ health care systems and climate policy measures. Yet, contrary to our expectation, right-wing respondents are more likely to support packages that address health care as well as the economy. Hence, the more expansive the policy scope, the higher political support seems to be among left-wing respondents. Right-wing respondents have a clear preference for a program that

supports both the health care system and the economy. Contrary to our expectations, we do not find support for the supposition that left-wing respondents favor packages that include borrowing additional funds. This suggests that left-wing respondents are also reluctant to accept new European debt.

**Figure 4.** Estimated marginal means from the conjoint survey experiment by left-right position



Note: The figure shows the conditional marginal means and 95-percent confidence intervals for all levels of the attributes by left-right position. The marginal means measure how favorable respondents are to a given feature of the European support package.

Given that citizens are differently exposed to the economic risks and health risks associated with the COVID-19 crisis, we posited that egotrophic evaluations of their personal economic situation and their health situation may affect their preferences for the recovery fund. Economic risk is measured with a question on how concerned respondents were about the financial impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their household. Specifically, we asked the following question: ‘How

concerned are you about the effects that the coronavirus might have on the financial situation of your household?’<sup>13</sup>

The marginal means plot in Figure A.3 in the appendix shows the subgroup analysis for respondents who are concerned about the impact of the pandemic on the financial situation of their household, and those who express no concern. While we see small significant effects of individual economic risk exposure on support, economic risk exposure does not change the direction of the effects. We find, for instance, that those concerned about their economic situation are more inclined to support borrowing additional resources at the EU level. Respondents concerned about their financial situation are also more likely to support the issuance of grants rather than loans compared to those not concerned. In addition, those concerned about their financial well-being are more supportive of a permanent program than a temporary program. Contrary to our expectations, we find no statistically significant differences among those concerned about their finances and those not expressing concern regarding the purpose of the recovery fund and the method of distribution.

## **Overall Support for the Pandemic Recovery Fund**

Establishing which policy characteristics increase and reduce support for the pandemic recovery fund is important to determine the *effects* of policy design on policy package favorability. However, these findings tell us little about citizens’ *overall support* for the recovery fund and the extent to which they believe the recovery fund to have a *positive impact* on themselves and society as a whole.

### ***Support for Selected Packages***

To assess citizens’ support for the recovery fund as a whole we examine the degree of support for selected scenarios of the recovery fund. Specifically, we calculate the support for three scenarios: the least-supported scenario, the most-supported scenario, and the ‘Next Generation EU’ scenario. The least- and most-supported packages were determined by the lowest/highest relative average support for each policy level. The ‘Next Generation EU’ package closely resembles the agreement struck between EU government leaders on July 21, 2020, titled Next Generation EU.

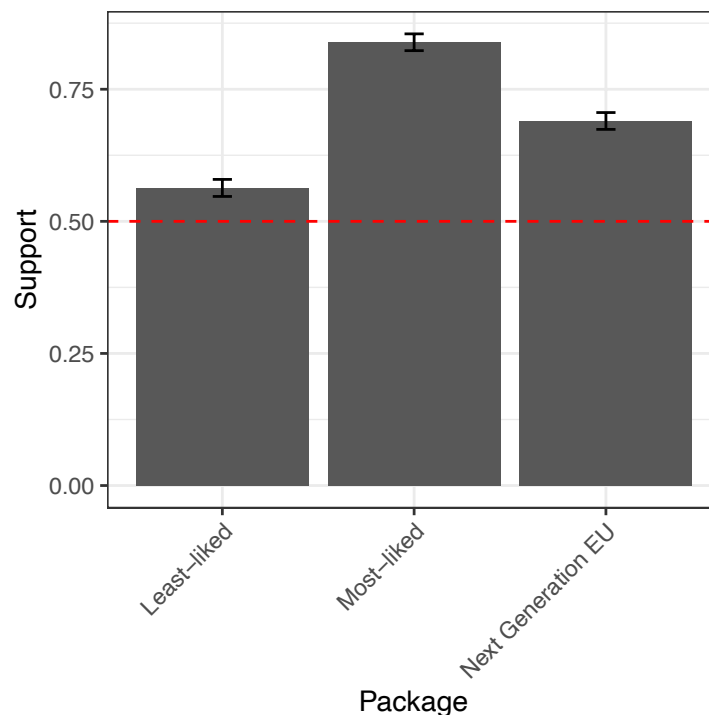
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<sup>13</sup> Respondents answered on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (‘Not at all concerned’) to 10 (‘Extremely concerned’), or ‘I prefer not to answer’. To conduct subgroup analyses, this variable is coded to a dichotomous variable distinguishing those ‘Not concerned’ (from 0 to 5) from those ‘Concerned’ (from 6 to 10).

Relying on unprecedented borrowing by the EU on the financial markets, it concerns a temporary €750bn fund largely administered by the European Commission which primarily aims to assist the health care systems and the economy of those EU member states in financial distress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. €390bn of the fund are distributed as grants as opposed to loans. The operationalization of the three policy packages is shown in Table A.1 in the appendix.

Respondents were asked to indicate their support for each package on a 5-point Likert scale, which we recode to a dichotomous variable of support.<sup>14</sup> Figure 5 shows the estimated level of support for the three selected scenarios. We see that for all three scenarios, including the least-liked variant, more respondents express overall support than opposition. The scenario that mirrors the European Council agreement of July 2020 finds overall support with 69 percent respondents expressing support.

**Figure 5.** Estimated levels of support for selected recovery fund scenarios

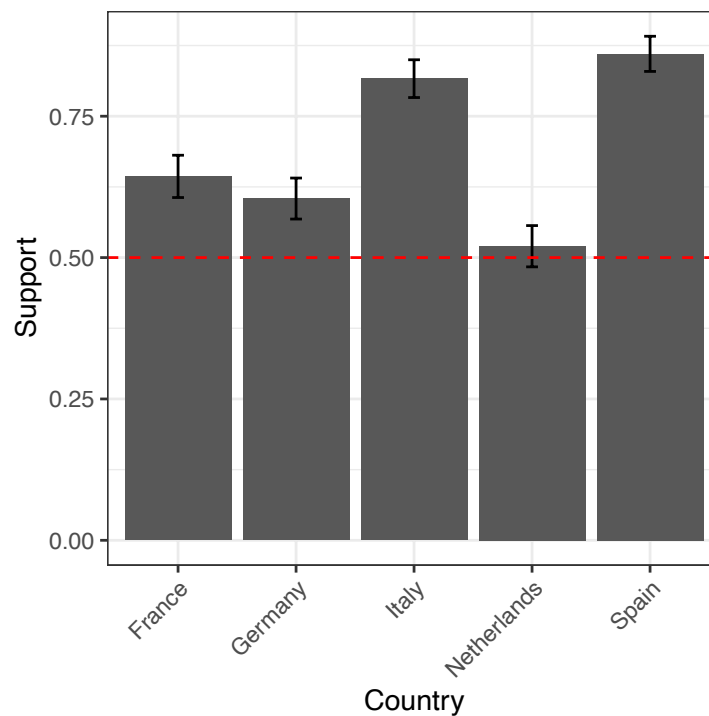


Note: The figure shows the predicted share of supporters for three selected packages (as shown in Table A.1) when respondents that express neutral judgments are dropped. 95-percent confidence levels are shown.

<sup>14</sup> Ratings below 3 are coded as opposition ('0'), rating above 3 are coded support ('1'). Neutral ratings of '3' are excluded from this analysis. An alternative operationalization of support in Figure A.4 and A.5 in the appendix show a more conservative estimate where neutral ratings are coded as opposition.



**Figure 6.** Estimated levels of support for Next Generation EU per country



Note: The figure shows the predicted share of supporters for the Next Generation EU package when respondents that express neutral judgments are dropped. 95-percent confidence levels are shown.

Given the importance of intergovernmental decision-making in the EU, it is important to consider whether the Next Generation EU compromise is supported by respondents in all five countries in our sample. Figure 6 repeats the procedure for estimating overall support displaying the predicted levels of overall support for the Next Generation EU per country. The Next Generation EU is appreciated in most European countries in our sample. While support for the recovery fund in the Netherlands is significantly lower than in the four other countries, on par respondents tend to support the Next Generation EU compromise. This suggests that even though the Next Generation EU agreement falls short of the most-preferred recovery fund scenario, it can garner a majority of support in all five countries under study.

### ***Expected Impact of the Recovery Fund***

Support for a European recovery fund seems to be relatively high in the five countries. Yet, how can we explain these levels of support? One reason may be that respondents expect the recovery fund to have a beneficial impact on themselves and their surroundings. We, therefore, explore how respondents evaluate the impact of a possible pandemic recovery fund. After the three iterations of the conjoint experiment, we asked respondents to indicate on a 5-point scale how the recovery fund affects the situation of their household, region, country, and Europe as a whole. Most respondents give a neutral assessment of the recovery fund on their household and region, i.e. a

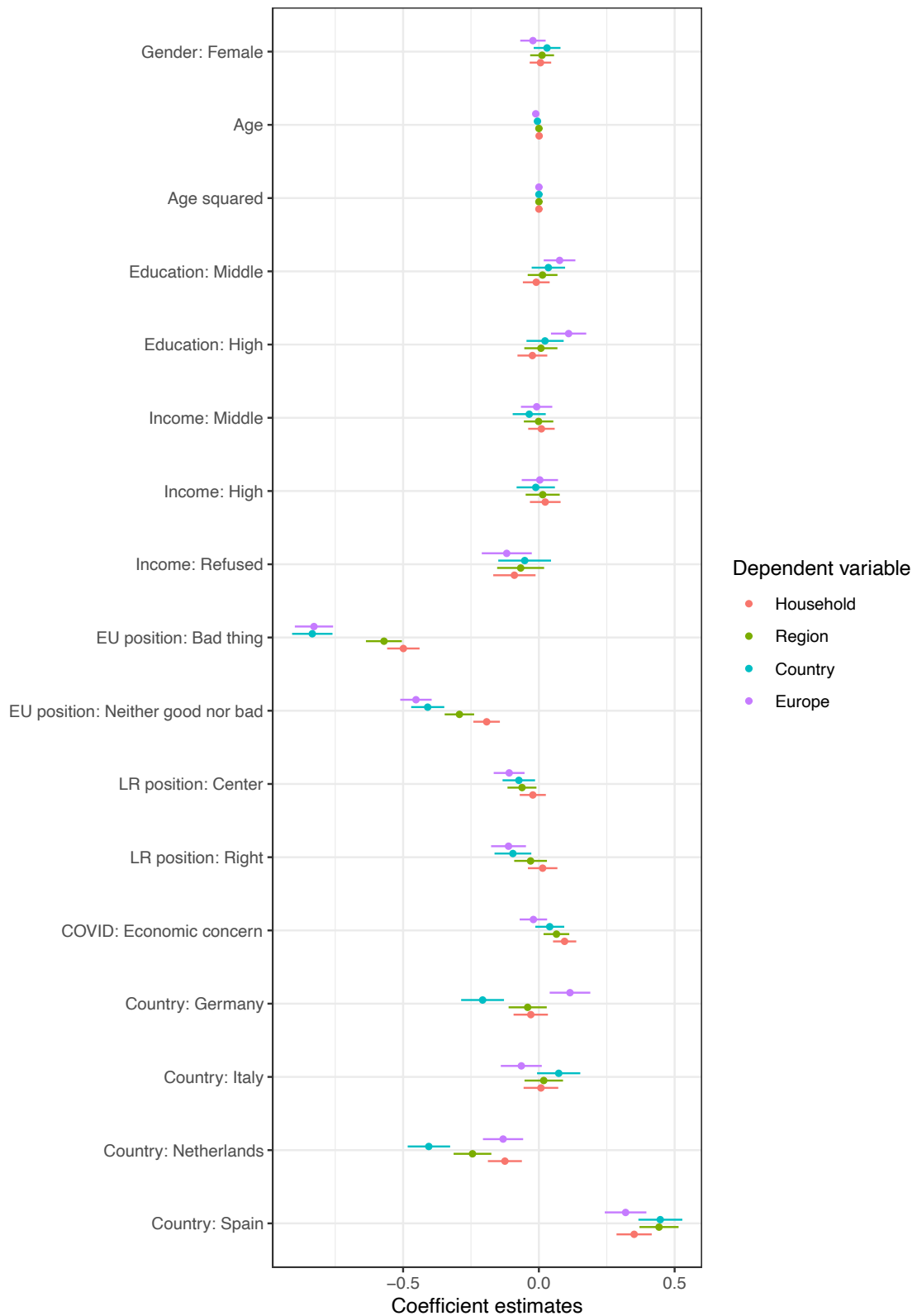
score of 3 (see the violin plot in Figure A.5 in the appendix). Nevertheless, a plurality of 44.8 percent and 48.8 percent of the respondents believe the recovery fund positively affects their country and Europe as a whole, respectively. At the same time, those who believe the recovery fund to have a negative impact on their surroundings remain below 25 percent across all categories.

What are the individual-level determinants of the perceptions on the impact of the recovery fund? Figure 7 shows the results from four OLS regression models with the respondents' evaluation of the impact of the fund on each category of surroundings as the dependent variable: household (Model 1), region (Model 2), country (Model 3), and Europe (Model 4). In addition to individuals' country (baseline: France), EU orientations (baseline: pro-EU), left-right positions (baseline: left-wing), and economic risk perception (baseline: not concerned), we include independent variables measuring gender (baseline: male), education in three categories (baseline: low), and income in three categories (baseline: low).

We highlight a number of important findings from the four models. Compared to French respondents, respondents in Spain believe the recovery to have a more positive effect on all categories, while those in the Netherlands are more likely to believe it to have a more negative impact. German and French respondents also differ in their impact assessments. Compared to respondents from France, those in Germany are more positive about the recovery fund's impact on Europe, but more negative about the impact on their own country. These country effects suggest some sociotropic evaluations of net-payer/net-receiver effects, with Dutch and German respondents being concerned about north-south financial transfers. In terms of ideology, those with neutral and anti-EU positions believe the fund to have a negative effect compared to their pro-EU counterparts in all four models. Left-right orientations only seem to matter for respondents' country-level and EU-level impact assessments, in which centrist and right-wing respondents evaluate the funds' impact more negatively than left-wing respondents. With respect to socio-demographic determinants, higher educated respondents are likely to evaluate the fund's impact on Europe more positively.

Strikingly, those concerned about the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their financial situation are more likely to perceive the fund to have a positive impact on their household and their region. Hence, while left-right orientations and educational level affect respondents' impact assessment about the recovery fund at the politically more salient country- and supranational-level, personal economic concerns drive positive evaluations of the fund's impact closer to home.

**Figure 7.** Individual-level determinants of the evaluation of the impact of the program on different levels



Note: The figure shows a coefficient plot for four OLS regression models with different dependent variables. All dependent variables are measured on a five-point scale, where higher values imply a more positive assessment. The full regression table is included in Appendix B.

## **Robustness Tests**

We conduct several robustness checks. First, we replicate our analyses using the continuous variable with which respondents indicate their level of support for each policy package on a 5-point Likert scale. These analyses yield the same substantive results (see Figure A.8 and A.9 in the appendix). Second, we find that excluding respondents who failed an attention check does not affect our results (see Figure A.10-12). Moreover, an analysis of survey dropout will be conducted to examine whether respondent characteristics are related to survey completion and whether dropout occurs at specific points in the survey. Moreover, we find no carry-over effects, i.e. respondents did not evaluate packages differently in the first, second, or third tasks (see Figure A.13), and profile ordering did not affect our estimates (see Figure A.14). In addition, there are no differences between people who took more or less time to complete the survey (see Table/Figure A.15).

## **Conclusion**

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc in the EU's member states. To address the public health and economic challenges of the pandemic, the European Council agreed in July 2020 on the ambitious €750bn recovery package 'Next Generation EU'. Financed by unprecedented borrowing by the European Commission and involving significant redistribution across member states, the recovery fund is a significant step in the fiscal integration of the EU. Given widespread public skepticism for fiscal integration in some member states (Bechtel et al. 2014; Beramendi and Stegmueller 2020; Walter, Ray and Redeker 2020; Howarth and Schild 2021), this is rather surprising. Our study examines how European citizens think about an EU pandemic recovery fund.

Employing a conjoint experiment fielded in France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, and Spain during a key stage of the recovery fund negotiations in July 2020, we find that citizens' support for a pandemic recovery fund is driven by the design of recovery fund. On the one hand, our results indicate that there is an appetite for European solidarity as citizens, on average, support a permanent recovery fund with a broad purpose aimed at assisting the member states most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. On the other hand, citizens are hesitant to support fiscal integration as they on average reject a recovery fund financed by joint EU borrowing, constituted by grants to less affluent member states that are administered by the European Commission or by individual

member states themselves. This suggests that preferences for European solidarity and risk-sharing are more complex than often assumed in the European integration literature. This is especially the case as citizens' preferences for the recovery fund vary across the five countries under study. As likely net beneficiaries, Italian and Spanish respondents are keener on European risk-sharing through grants and on redistribution to countries in distress. By contrast, sociotropic projections of collective self-interest lead Dutch and German respondents to be more hesitant about these aspects. As our sample was limited to five countries, we could not formally test macro-level explanations of recovery fund support pertaining to a country's economic competitiveness, and whether it is a net-payer or net-receiver into the EU budget.

Our results point to significant variation in the recovery fund preferences between citizens who identify as left-wing or right-wing as well as between citizens who hold pro- and anti-EU positions. Right-wing and anti-EU citizens are less keen on an expansive recovery fund with re-distributional consequences than their left-wing and pro-EU counterparts. Variation between countries and citizens, notwithstanding, our descriptive estimates show surprisingly high levels of overall citizen support for the Next Generation EU scenario of the recovery fund. Support for the Next Generation EU agreement is high even though it includes elements that prove to be unpopular, such as joint borrowing and EU Commission governance. A plurality of respondents, moreover, believe that a recovery fund will have a positive effect on their household, region, and country as well as on Europe as a whole.

Future research should address whether these citizen preferences are genuine. As questions pertaining to fiscal integration are complex, citizens may be primarily steered by political cues of political parties and other elites. As the enthusiasm for European solidarity is found to be particularly outspoken during crises and exogenous shocks, it remains a question whether the support for risk-sharing and fiscal integration remains high when the urgency of the COVID-19 crisis dissipates.

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# ONLINE APPENDIX

to

## **Viral Solidarity? EU Solidarity and Risk-Sharing in the COVID-19 Crisis**

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## Appendix A: Information about the survey

### Introductory frame:

*“Many countries in the European Union have independently launched large support programs to fight the economic and healthcare consequences of the COVID-19 (“coronavirus”) pandemic. The size of these national programs varies from country to country, depending on the impact of the pandemic and the spending capacities of each state.*

*In addition, European governments are discussing an additional support program to be jointly implemented at the European level. This program would complement any action already undertaken at the national level and would ensure a common European response.*

*We would like to know your opinion on what such a program should look like. Therefore, you will be shown alternative policy proposals in the next few pages. You will be asked to indicate which options you prefer, and how much you are in favor or against any given proposal.”*

### Description of policy dimensions

Each policy package differs on six attributes that have two or three different levels each (see Table 1). The attributes reflect the key dimensions in the negotiations on the European pandemic recovery fund. The first dimension focuses on the *purpose* of the recovery fund. Its three levels capture whether the fund should only cover expenditures related to healthcare, or whether its scope should be broader by also supporting the economy, or the fight against climate change. The second dimension concerns the *financing* of the fund. The two levels reflect the trade-off whether existing funds should be used such as the EU budget, or whether the EU should issue loans on the financial market. The third dimension relates to the *repayment mechanism* capturing on the discussion whether the funds are distributed as loans or as grants. The two levels specify whether countries either repay exactly what they receive (loans), or whether countries repay collectively (grants). The fourth dimension concerns the *distribution* of the fund capturing the discussion whether countries in financial distress should be the primary recipients of the fund. The two levels cover whether all EU countries are supported equally (per inhabitant), or whether EU countries hit hardest by the pandemic should receive more support. The fifth dimension pertains to the time horizon or *duration* of the recovery fund. The two levels distinguish between a program that is limited in time or one that is maintained after the pandemic. Finally, the sixth dimension pertains to the *governance* structure of the proposed EU action focusing on who administers the fund. The three levels distinguish three modes of political oversight: the European Commission (supranational), or the finance ministers of the member states collectively (inter-governmental) or individually (national).

**Figure A.1.** Screenshot of the conjoint experiment (in English).

Consider the following two policy options.

	Option 1	Option 2
What is the purpose of this programme?	Support for healthcare only	Support for healthcare and the economy
Who decides how the money is spent?	The European Commission	National finance ministers together
How is the money repaid?	Each country repays exactly what it receives	Each country repays exactly what it receives
How is the money distributed?	Countries hit harder by the coronavirus crisis receive more	Countries hit harder by the coronavirus crisis receive more
How long does the programme last?	The programme is fully terminated once the coronavirus crisis is over	The programme is fully terminated once the coronavirus crisis is over
How is the programme financed?	Additional money is borrowed by the EU on the financial markets	Existing money is taken from European resources such as the EU budget

Which one of the two following options for this European programme do you prefer?

Option 1  
 Option 2

How much are you in favour or against option 1?

Strongly in favour  
 Somewhat in favour  
 Neither in favour nor against  
 Somewhat against  
 Strongly against

How much are you in favour or against option 2?

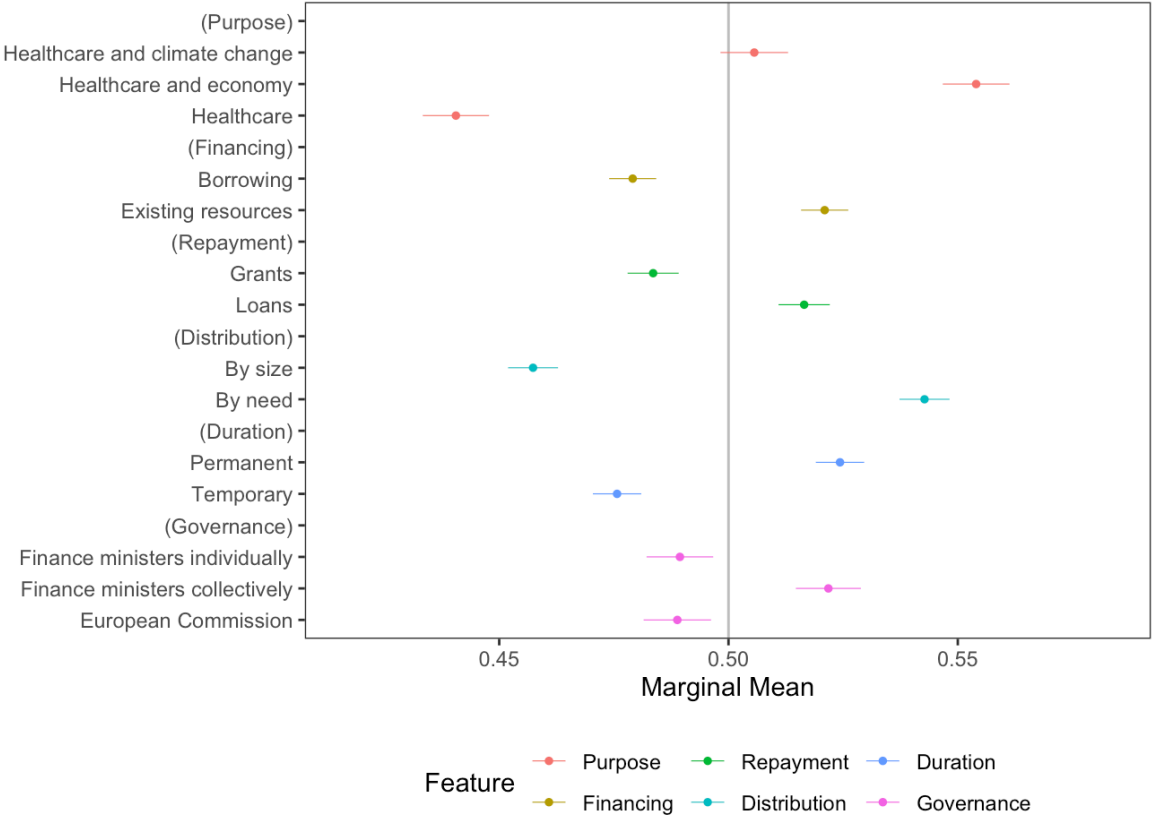
Strongly in favour  
 Somewhat in favour  
 Neither in favour nor against  
 Somewhat against  
 Strongly against

[Next](#)

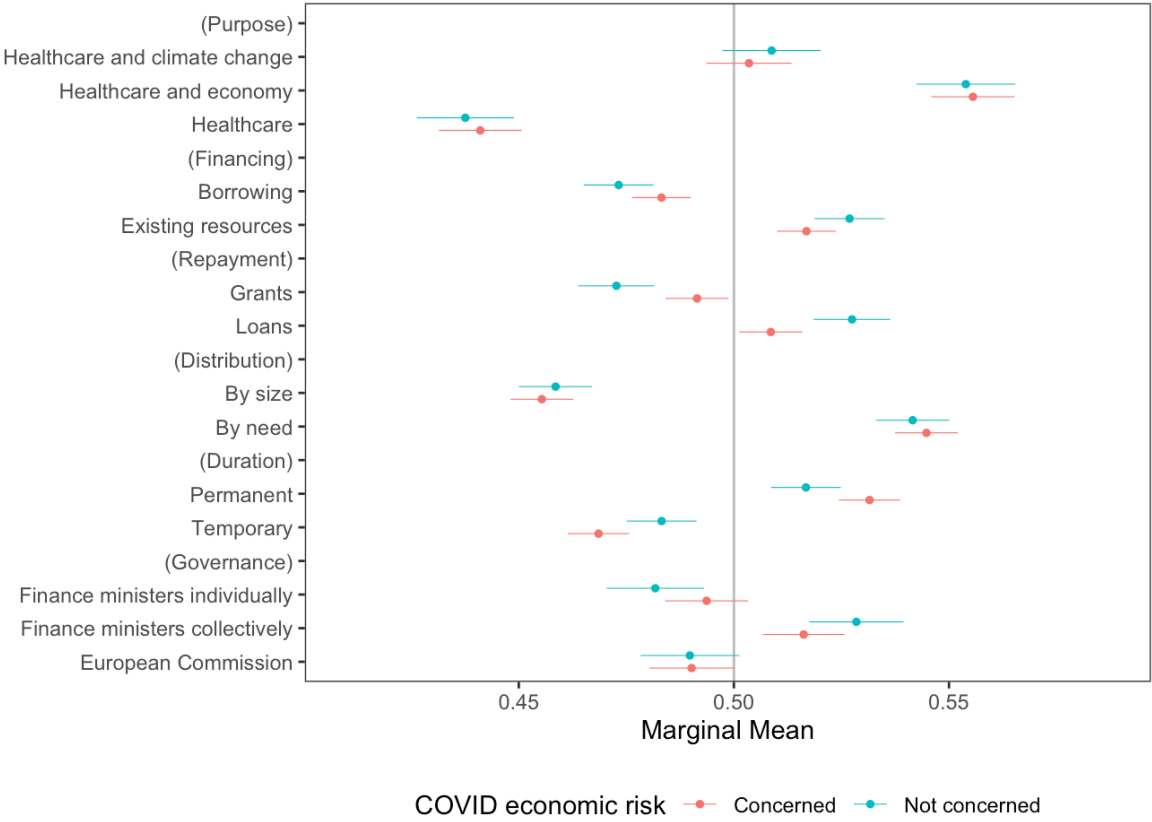
# Appendix B: Additional results

## B.1. Marginal means

Figure A.2. Estimated marginal means for the full sample



**Figure A.3.** Estimated marginal means from the conjoint survey experiment by COVID economic risk exposure



Note: The figure shows the conditional marginal means and 95-percent confidence intervals for all levels of the attributes by COVID economic risk exposure. The marginal means measure how favorable respondents are to a given feature of the European support package.

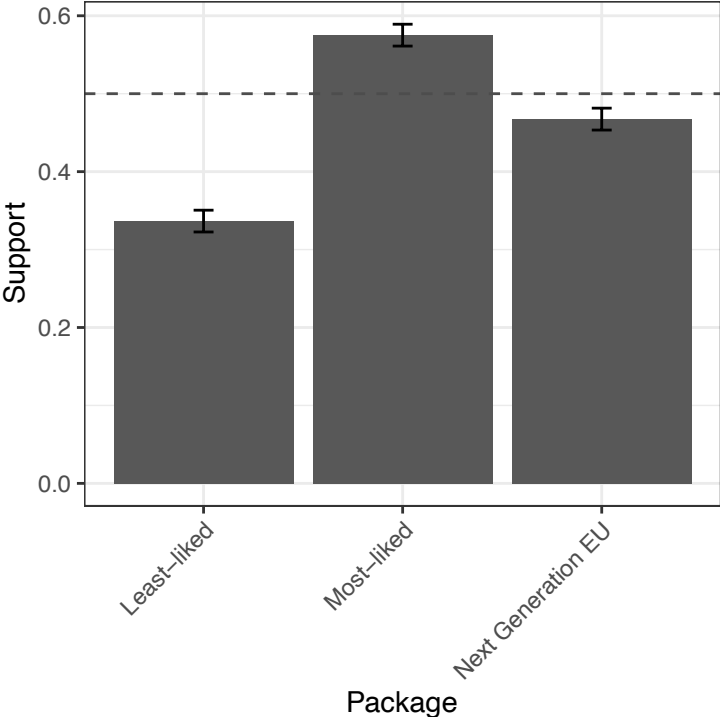


## B.2. Levels of Support

**Table A.1.** Package composition of three selected packages

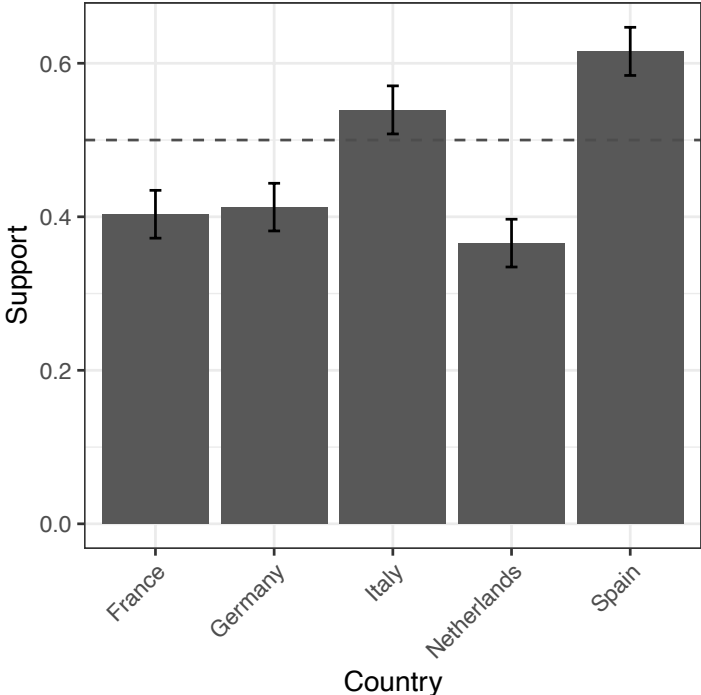
	<b>Least-liked package</b>	<b>Most-liked package</b>	<b>Next Generation EU</b>
<b>Policy Dimension</b>			
<i>Purpose</i>	Support for healthcare only	Support for healthcare and the economy	Support for healthcare and the economy
<i>Financing</i>	Additional money is borrowed by the EU on the financial markets	Existing money is taken from European resources such as the EU budget	Additional money is borrowed by the EU on the financial markets
<i>Repayment</i>	All countries repay together, i.e., rich countries pay more and poor countries pay less	Each country repays exactly what it receives	All countries repay together, i.e., rich countries pay more and poor countries pay less
<i>Distribution</i>	Every country receives the same per inhabitant	Countries hit harder by the coronavirus crisis receive more	Countries hit harder by the coronavirus crisis receive more
<i>Duration</i>	The program is fully terminated once the coronavirus crisis is over	The program is maintained, ready to be used in future crises	The program is fully terminated once the coronavirus crisis is over
<i>Governance</i>	The European Commission	Finance ministers of the member-states together	The European Commission

**Figure A.4.** Estimated levels of support for selected recovery fund scenarios (conservative estimate)



Note: The figure shows the likelihood of supporting for the Next Generation EU package when respondents that express neutral judgments are counted as opposition. 95-percent confidence levels are shown.

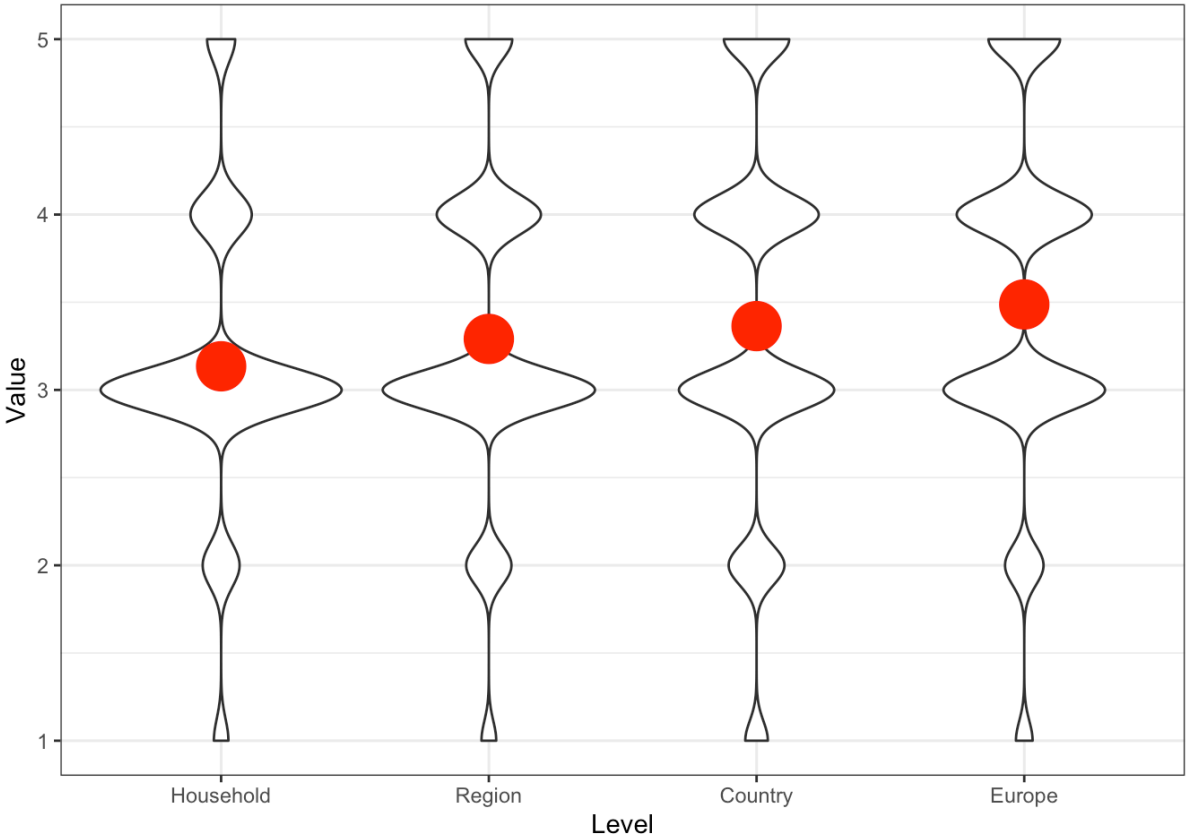
**Figure A.5.** Estimated levels of support for Next Generation EU per country (conservative estimate)



Note: The figure shows the likelihood of supporting for the Next Generation EU package when respondents that express neutral judgments are dropped. 95-percent confidence levels are shown.

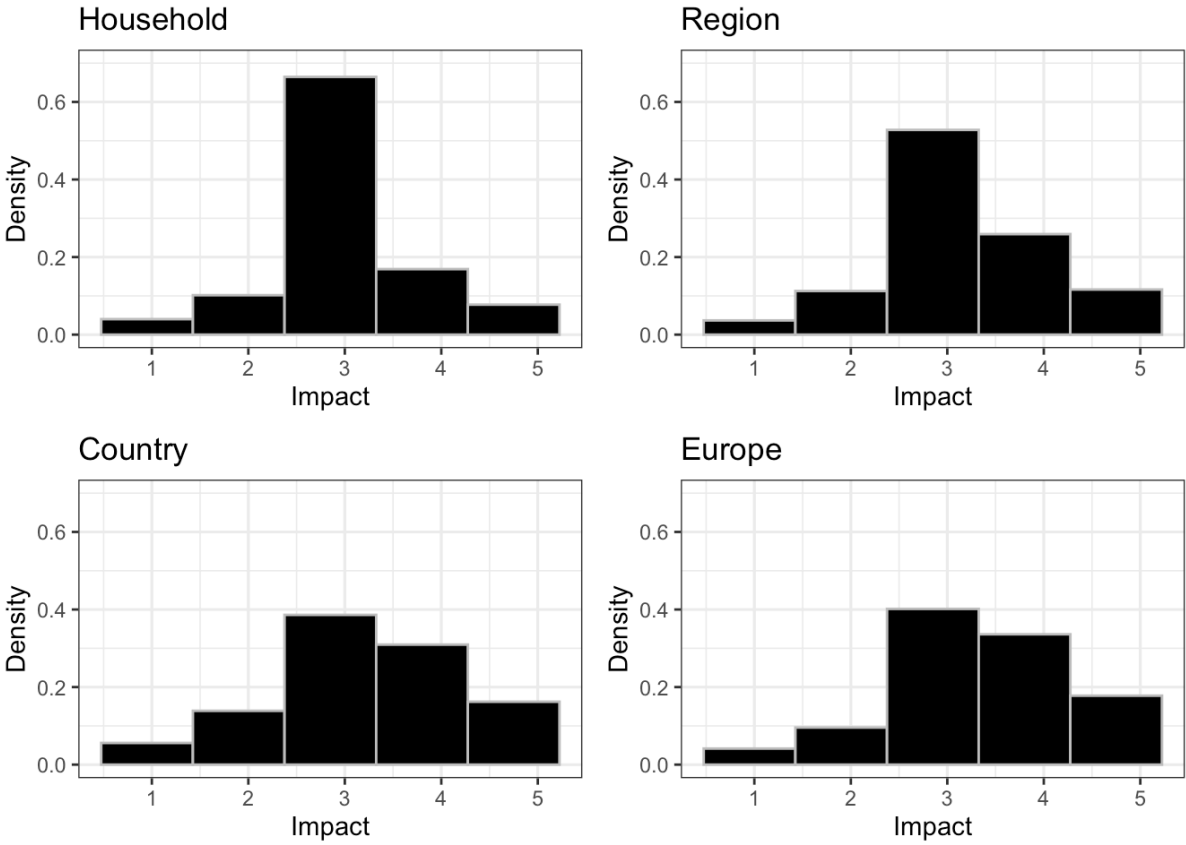
### B.3. Impact of the Pandemic Recovery Fund

Figure A.6. Violin plots for the evaluation of the impact of the European support program on different levels



Note: The figure illustrates the distribution of respondents on a 5-point scale from 1 to 5. The red points show of all respondents.

Figure A.7. Distribution of the evaluation of the impact of the program by level



**Table A.2.** Individual-level determinants of the evaluation of the impact of the program on different levels

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Household (1)	Region (2)	Country (3)	Europe (4)
Gender: Female	0.006 (0.020)	0.012 (0.022)	0.030 (0.025)	-0.022 (0.024)
Age	0.001 (0.004)	0.0003 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.011* (0.004)
Age squared	-0.00003 (0.00004)	0.00000 (0.00004)	0.0001 (0.00005)	0.0001** (0.00004)
Education: Middle (Ref.: Low)	-0.010 (0.025)	0.014 (0.028)	0.035 (0.031)	0.076* (0.030)
Edu: High	-0.024 (0.028)	0.007 (0.031)	0.023 (0.035)	0.110*** (0.033)
Income: Middle (Ref: Low)	0.009 (0.025)	-0.001 (0.028)	-0.036 (0.031)	-0.008 (0.029)
Income: High	0.024 (0.029)	0.014 (0.032)	-0.011 (0.036)	0.004 (0.034)
Income: Refused	-0.090* (0.040)	-0.067 (0.044)	-0.052 (0.050)	-0.118* (0.047)
EU position: Bad thing (Ref: good thing)	-0.499*** (0.030)	-0.571*** (0.034)	-0.834*** (0.038)	-0.828*** (0.036)
EU position: Neither good nor bad	-0.192*** (0.025)	-0.293*** (0.028)	-0.409*** (0.031)	-0.453*** (0.029)
Left-right position: Center (Ref: left)	-0.022 (0.025)	-0.062* (0.027)	-0.074* (0.031)	-0.109*** (0.029)
Left-right position: Right	0.014 (0.028)	-0.031 (0.031)	-0.096** (0.035)	-0.112*** (0.033)
COVID: Concerned (Ref: Not concerned)	0.095*** (0.022)	0.065** (0.024)	0.040 (0.027)	-0.020 (0.026)
Country: Germany (Ref: France)	-0.030 (0.032)	-0.041 (0.036)	-0.207*** (0.040)	0.115** (0.038)
Country: Italy	0.008 (0.033)	0.018 (0.036)	0.073 (0.041)	-0.065 (0.038)
Country: Netherlands	-0.125*** (0.032)	-0.244*** (0.035)	-0.405*** (0.040)	-0.132*** (0.038)
Country: Spain	0.351*** (0.033)	0.443*** (0.037)	0.447*** (0.041)	0.319*** (0.039)
Constant	3.220*** (0.095)	3.400*** (0.106)	3.752*** (0.119)	3.995*** (0.113)
Observations	6,161	6,161	6,161	6,161
R <sup>2</sup>	0.106	0.131	0.175	0.156
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.104	0.129	0.173	0.153
Residual Std. Error (df = 6143)	0.782	0.869	0.976	0.925
F Statistic (df = 17; 6143)	43.058***	54.582***	76.666***	66.585***

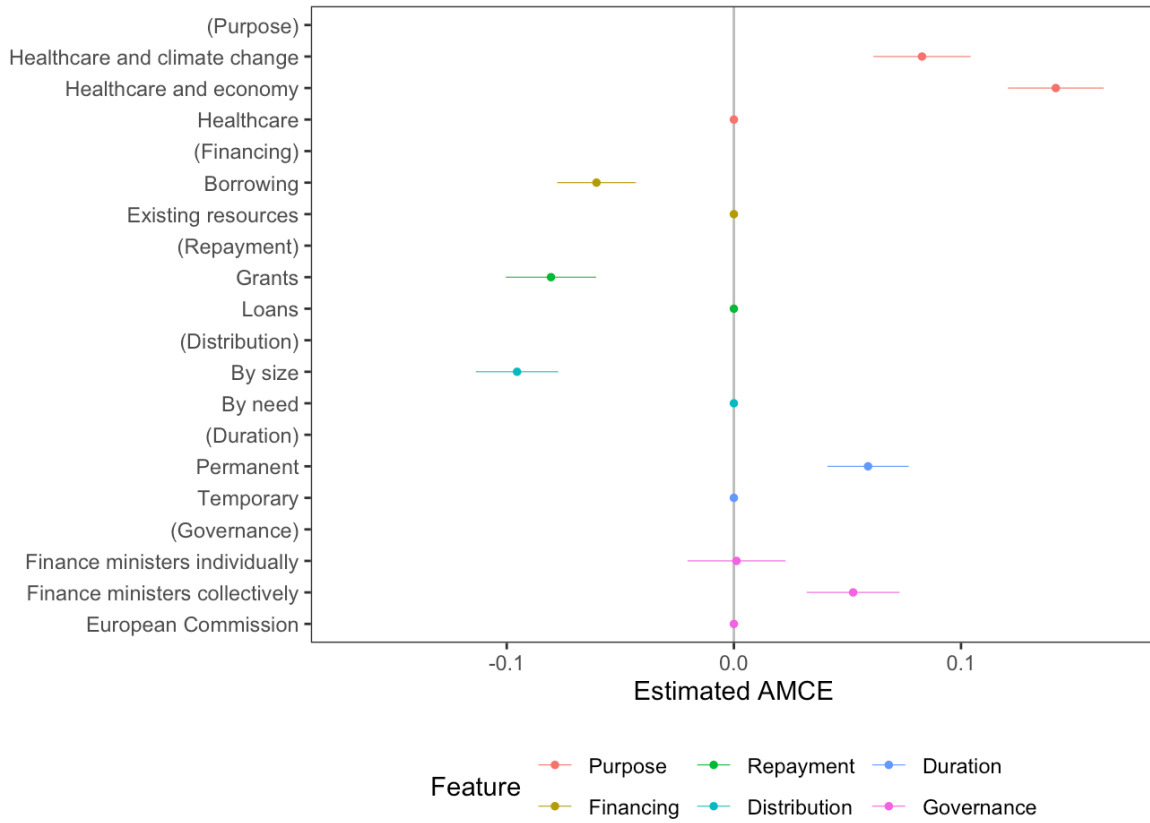
*Note:*

\* p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

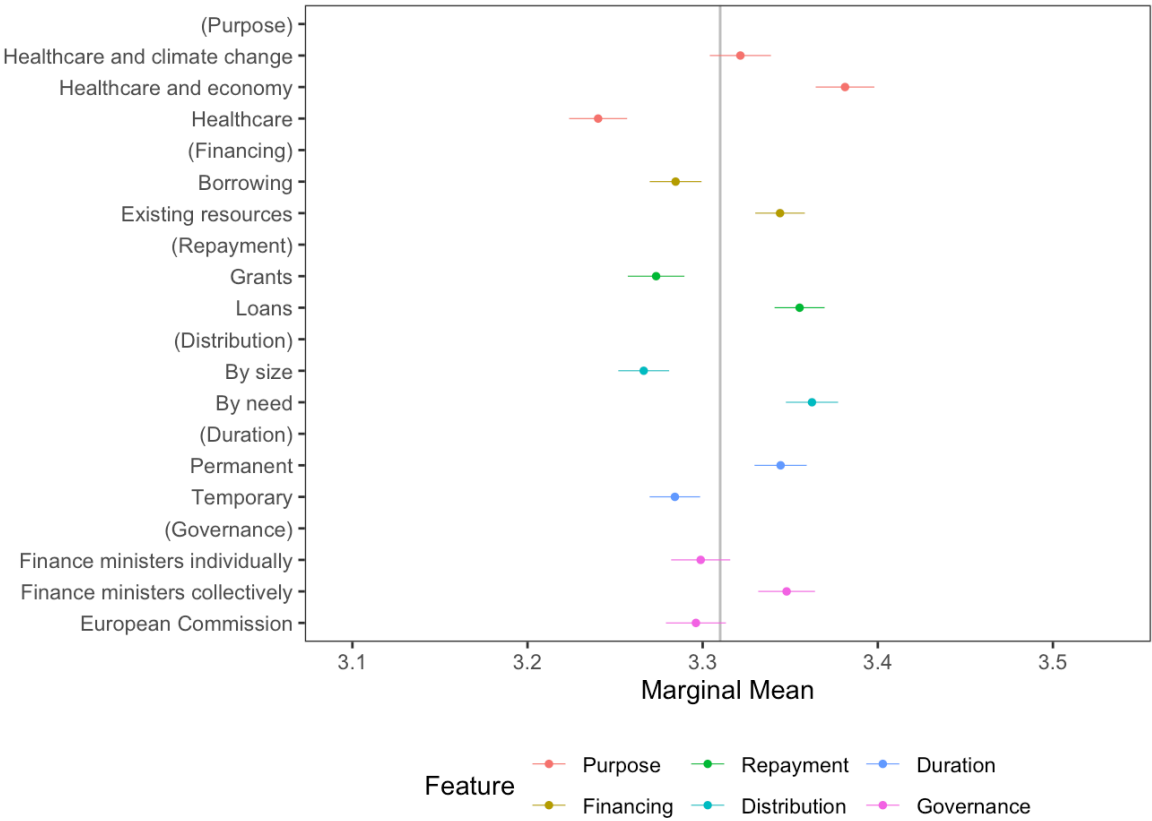
## Appendix C: Robustness checks

### C.1. Conjoint analysis with rating variable

Figure A.8. Estimated AMCEs with the rating variable



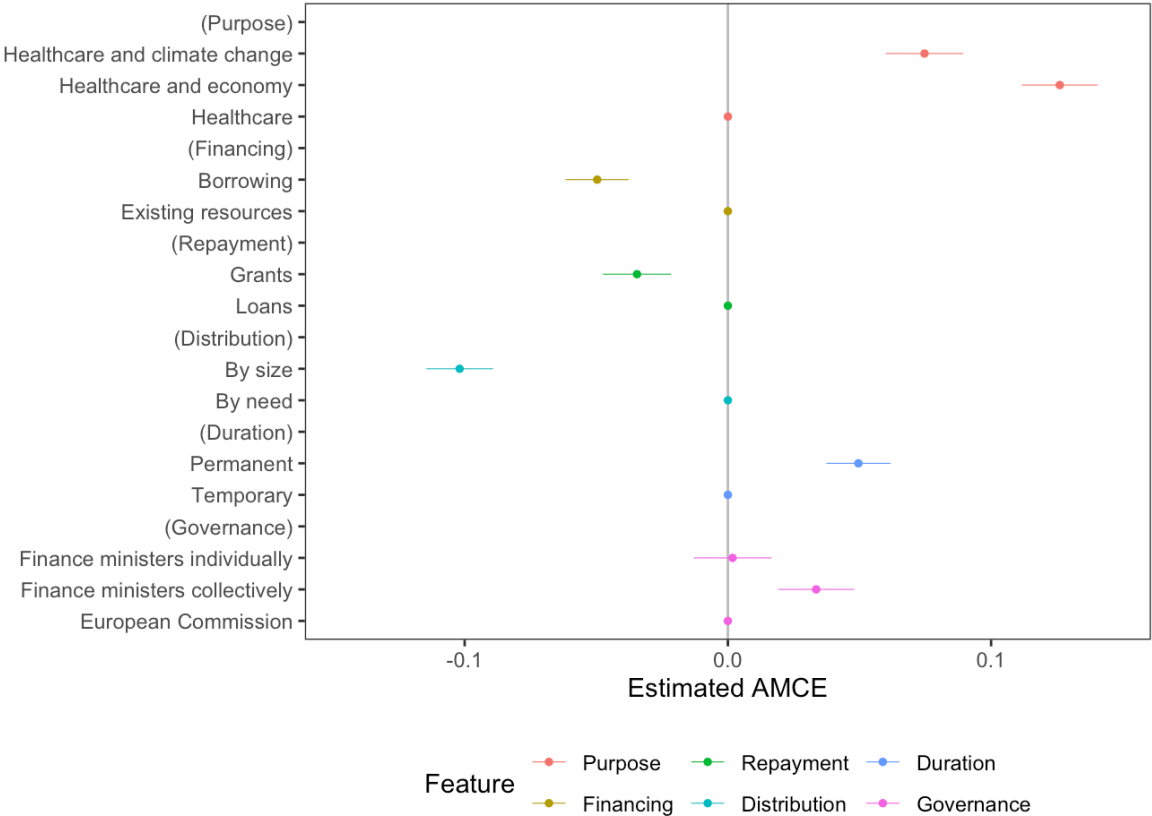
**Figure A.9.** Estimated marginal means with the rating variable



### C.2. Excluding respondents who failed the attention check

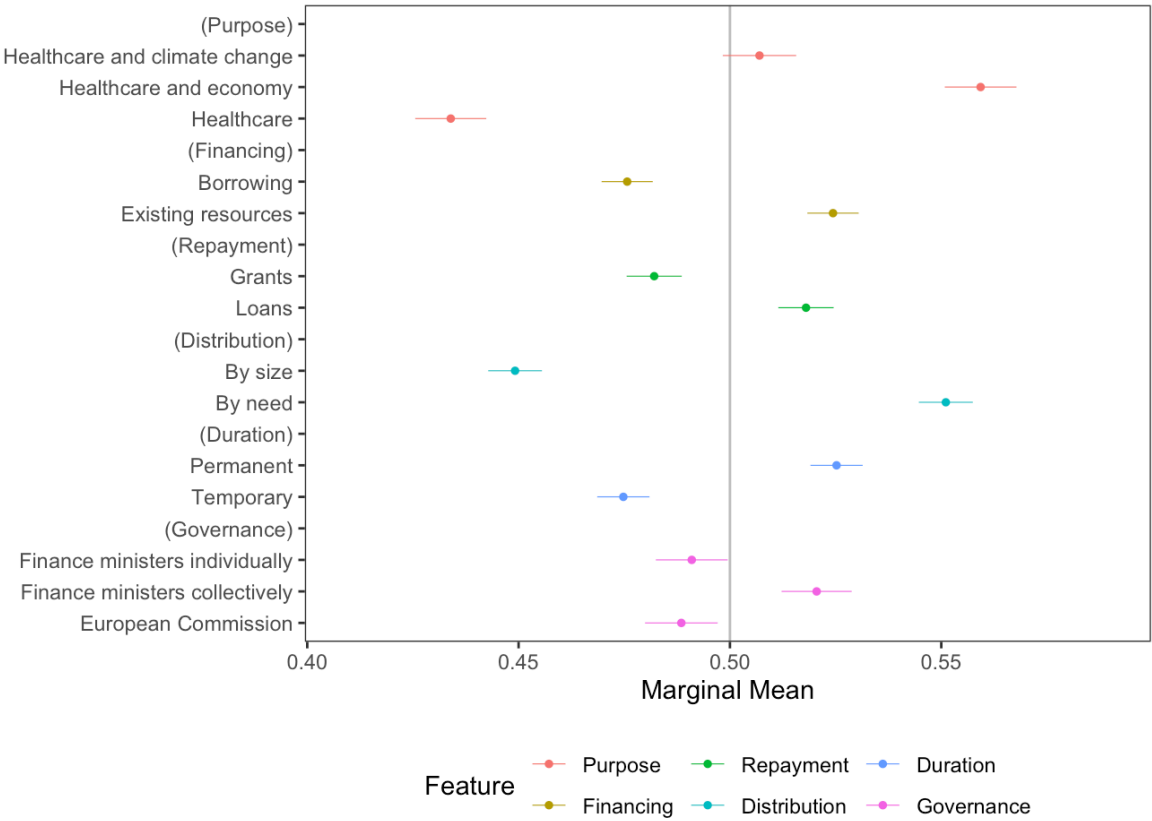
The question asked for this attention check is as follows: “On a scale of 0 to 10 (where 0 is not at all important and 10 is extremely important), how important are these issues for you? To ensure that you are still paying attention, we ask that you choose the value 7 for ‘Focus.’” Subsequently, respondents will be asked to indicate the importance, on a scale from 0 to 10, for ‘organized crime,’ ‘gay rights,’ ‘taxation,’ ‘national sovereignty’ and ‘focus.’ Respondents are considered to have failed the attention check if they choose a different value than 7 for the item ‘focus.’

**Figure A.10.** Estimated AMCEs excluding respondents who failed the attention check

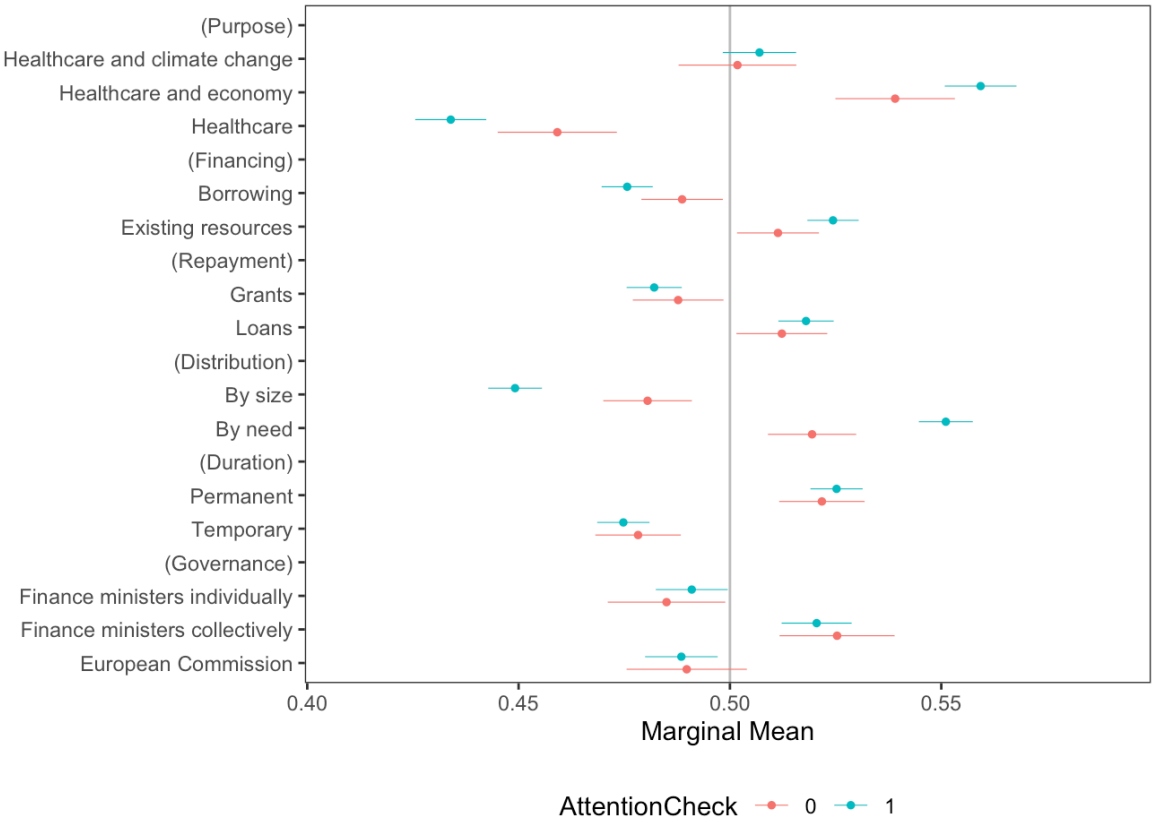




**Figure A.11.** Estimated marginal means excluding respondents who failed the attention check

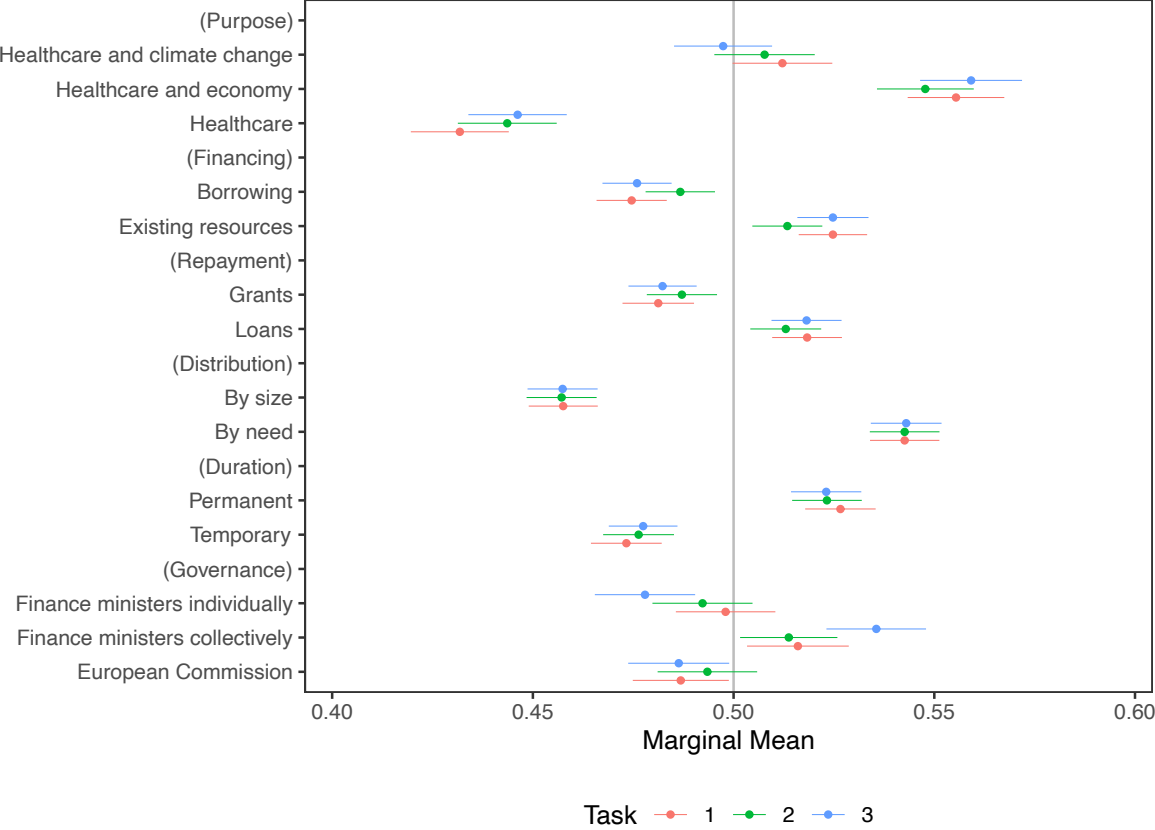


**Figure A.12:** Estimated marginal means by response to the attention check (1=passed, 0=failed)

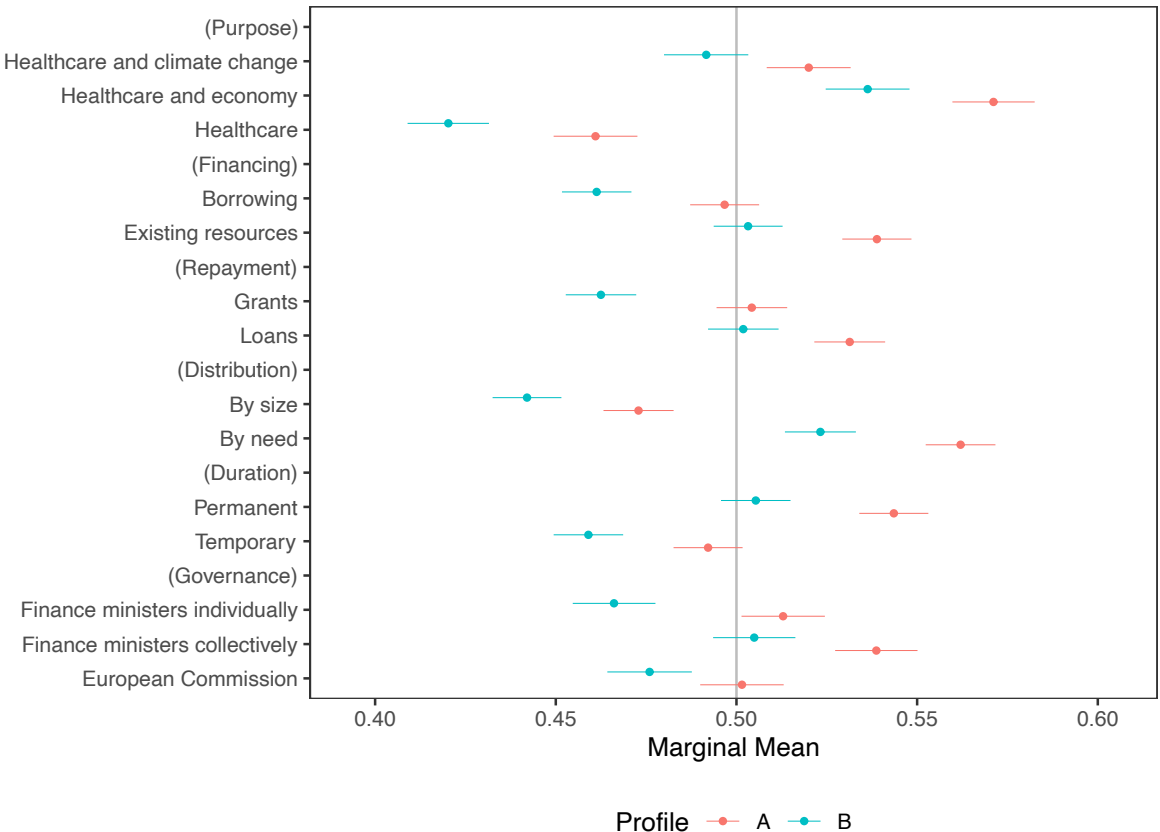


C.3. Additional robustness tests

Figure A.13. Estimated marginal means by task



**Figure A.14.** Estimated marginal mean by profile order



**Figure A.15.** Estimated marginal mean by time of survey completion

