

Citizen Perceptions of Trust and Corruption in the EU Administration: The Application of Heuristics Based on Domestic Experiences (Working Paper*)

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Abstract

Euroscepticism is a widespread phenomenon among European citizens. It is partially responsible for Brexit and could threaten the long-term political stability of the political union. Scholars have found that distrust in EU institutions is a key factor in euroscepticism. We analyze perceptions of corruption and distrust in the EU administration, arguing that people often do not judge the bureaucratic apparatus of the EU by itself but use heuristics to form their opinions. Because most citizens of the European Union have little real exposure to the EU public administration, domestic experiences are likely to be more decisive for forming their view than interaction with European bureaucrats. Empirically, we show that perceptions of domestic central and local bureaucracies are a significant predictor of perceptions of EU bureaucracies. These findings have important implications for both the academic discourse and practical responses to the phenomenon of euroscepticism.

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The most recent version of this paper may be obtained at the following URL:
http://www.janvogler.net/EU_Trust.pdf

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1 Introduction

Euroscepticism is a persistent phenomenon (Raunio, 2007; Torreblanca and Leonard, 2013; Usherwood and Startin, 2013) that has generated intense public and academic interest over the last three decades. It is often understood as a suspicious—if not oppositional (Krouwel and Abts, 2007) or even hostile (McLaren, 2007, 236-237)—view of EU institutions and integration (Leconte, 2010). There has been an extensive debate regarding its origins and sources with respect to both political parties (Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008*a*; Szczerbiak and Taggart, 2008*b*; Kopecký and Mudde, 2002; De Vries and Edwards, 2009) and citizens (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas and De Vreese, 2011; Hooghe and Marks, 2007; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010).¹

Research has shown that “institutional distrust in the EU” is a key driver of eurosceptic attitudes (Abts, Heerwegh and Swyngedouw, 2009). This is not surprising because the (“unelected”) bureaucratic apparatus of the EU is frequently portrayed as the worst aspect of EU integration (The Economist, 2017). Thus, it has often been a target of eurosceptics (Hanley, 2004, 693, 704; Startin and Krouwel, 2013, 68; Teubert, 2017) who see the EU’s public administration as the ideal type of “technocratic governance” (De Wilde and Trenz, 2012, 538).

Because distrust in EU institutions may be a key factor in determining levels of eu-

¹Moreover, studies have investigated euroscepticism in a wide variety of geographic settings, amongst others including Britain (Daddow, 2013; Forster, 2003; Gifford, 2017), France (Benoit, 1997; Goodliffe, 2015; Milner, 2000), the Netherlands (Lubbers and Jaspers, 2011; Vollaard, 2006), Norway (Skinner, 2012), the New Member States (Neumayer, 2008), and the Nordic Countries (Archer, 2000; Raunio, 2007; Sitter, 2001). Multi-country studies have analyzed euroscepticism from a comparative perspective (Benedetto and Quaglia, 2007; Kuhn, 2012). Additionally, studies have analyzed its prevalence in newspapers (Rowinski, 2016), in the broader public discourse (De Wilde and Trenz, 2012), and as it relates to the financial crisis (Sericchio, Tsakatika and Quaglia, 2013).

roscepticism (Abts, Heerwegh and Swyngedouw, 2009), this paper aims to explain distrust and perceived levels of corruption in the EU public administration. The strong attitudes that many European citizens hold with respect to the EU public administration are interesting because most European citizens have almost no exposure to the EU bureaucracy. Thus, the central question of this research paper is: What explains distrust and perceived levels of corruption in the EU bureaucracy at the level of the individual European citizen?

Our theory is based on insights from psychology and behavioral economics regarding the use of heuristics (Gilovich, Griffin and Kahneman, 2002; Simon, 1957; Tversky and Kahneman, 1974): Because the vast majority of European citizens have no interaction with the EU bureaucracy, most of them have to form their judgments based on inferences. One possible type of inference that citizens might apply are mental shortcuts based on previous experiences with public administrations. In particular, experiences with and perceptions of domestic local and central bureaucratic institutions may shape citizens' general view of public administrations, which then impacts their opinion of the EU bureaucracy. The process of making a judgment about the inherent qualities of object A based only on external commonalities with object B is an aspect of the "representativeness heuristic" (Kahneman and Tversky, 1972). In short, because the EU public administration also "represents" a public bureaucracy, knowledge from comparable institutions at the domestic level may be used to evaluate it.

Even though this paper specifically deals with distrust in the public administration of the European Union, its results are of broader significance. Distrust in political and administrative institutions can broadly undermine the functioning of democracies (Lenard, 2008; Whiteley, Clarke, Sanders and Stewart, 2016), amongst others by fueling perceptions of cor-

ruption (Wroe, Allen and Birch, 2013). Thus, this phenomenon is not limited to the EU in the present day, but can be observed in many other political systems and at different time periods (Hart, 1978).

To test our theory, we use original data from a survey with 1,001 citizens of Romania. We have chosen Romania as a testing ground for our theory for multiple reasons.

First, in Eastern Europe there has been widespread criticism and skepticism of the EU and European Integration (Neumayer, 2008; Torreblanca and Leonard, 2013). Moreover, the ruling parties of many Eastern European Countries have signaled that they are dissatisfied with the EU administration or have been in open conflict with it (The Economist, 2018; The Guardian, 2018). The Romanian parliamentary majority and the EU have experienced similar disputes over planned judicial reforms (Reuters, 2018). In general, substantial euroscepticism in Eastern Europe, including Romania, is a substantial threat to the long-term stability of the political union and should be more deeply investigated.

Second, within Eastern Europe, Romania is an ideal case because its domestic bureaucracy is considered having a long history of involvement in corruption (Gallagher, 2005). Therefore, we can expect to find sufficiently many people who have been exposed to corrupt practices to identify a possible statistical relationship.

Third, by focusing on a single country, we can hold certain factors constant which may impact attitudes towards the EU, such as the size of the domestic welfare state (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000) and national political structures.

In short, with this paper we connect to a prolific subset of the literature on the European integration process that deals with the phenomenon of euroscepticism (Kopecký and Mudde, 2002; Taggart, 1998). For the purpose of this analysis the finding that it is in particular

distrust in EU institutions that drives euroscepticism (Abts, Heerwegh and Swyngedouw, 2009). Therefore, we analyze the determinants of distrust in the EU administration on the individual level. Our theoretical argument is that, because most citizens have no exposure or interaction with the EU bureaucracy, people often use heuristics—views of and experiences with their domestic public administration—to form their opinion on the EU. We have chosen Romania for our empirical analysis because its public administration is known for having substantial corruption issues and there have been clashes between national politicians and the European Union.

We proceed as follows. First, we discuss the phenomenon of euroscepticism and our theoretical perspective regarding the application of heuristics in more detail. Then, we introduce our empirical approach and data. In the following section, we present comprehensive information on the regression results. Finally, we discuss the results of our analysis and the theoretical and practical implications for the phenomenon of euroscepticism.

2 Theory

In this section, we discuss euroscepticism and develop a theoretical perspective based on heuristics, specifically the representativeness heuristic, to explain some of the variation in institutional distrust towards the EU. We also consider the possibility of reverse causality and two additional challenges to our argument: (1) broad distrust in a large number of public institutions (which would undermine the claim of *representativeness* based on fact that we consider two bureaucracies) and (2) imperial legacies as a key factor in distrust towards the EU.

2.1 The Impact of Euroscepticism and Institutional Distrust in the Public Administration

The European Union has long suffered from substantial negative attitudes among a subset of citizens—eurospecticism is a persistent phenomenon that is unlikely to evaporate any-time soon (Usherwood and Startin, 2013). As an institution above all affiliated national governments—and with some uncertainty about who exactly its primary constituents are—, far away from the daily life of a large number of most people, it is sometimes difficult for citizens to identify with this institution or even to develop an attachment to it (Harteveld, Meer and De Vries, 2013; Peitz, Dhont and Seyd, 2018).

Even though it may be difficult for citizens to develop trust in an institution that is supposedly so far away from their lived realities, a minimum of positive attitudes towards the EU may be necessary to preserve the political stability of the Union. Most importantly, the events related to Brexit—the British exit from the EU—show how wide-ranging the effects of

distrust in the European Union and its fundamental institutions can be (Henderson, Jeffery, Liñeira, Scully, Wincott and Wyn Jones, 2016; Hobolt, 2016; Peitz, Dhont and Seyd, 2018; Vasilopoulou, 2016). As Brexit shows, if a majority of citizens do not have trust in the EU or perceive it as corrupt, this could lead to the disintegration of the EU in the long run.

The problem of institutional distrust in the public administration is an issue that is not limited to a single country or society. For instance, in the United States, conservative media has recently promoted a theory of the “deep state” as a source of misbehavior and corruption (Chaffetz, 2018; Lofgren, 2016). The exact meaning of the term is somewhat ambiguous but it generally refers to ‘unelected’ bureaucrats who are in high positions and are accused of following a partisan political agenda and/or undermining the democratically elected government.

In short, euroscepticism is a potentially ‘explosive’ phenomenon. If scepticism towards the EU grows stronger, it could ultimately lead to the disintegration of the EU as a political entity—a process that might have been initiated by Brexit. Moreover, the underlying issue of institutional distrust in the public administration is a transnational phenomenon that can be observed in other contexts as well—most prominently in current American politics.

2.2 The Application of Heuristics to Form Judgments of the EU Bureaucracy

Most employees of the relatively small EU public administration are located in Brussels. Only approximately 43,000 people work for it (32,000 for the European Commission, 7,500 for the European Parliament, and 3,500 for the European Council) (European Union, 2018).

Relative to other political units of comparable size, this is a tiny number. The small size of the EU's central bureaucracy becomes apparent when compared to, for instance, more than 2 million employees in the American federal public administration. Due to the central bureaucracy's small numerical size, few EU citizens have ever had direct contact with employees of the EU bureaucracy.

Therefore, when asked about the extent to which they trust or distrust the EU bureaucracy, almost all European citizens *cannot* make a judgment based on direct interactions with any EU bureaucrat. Considering this marginal level of real exposure, how do people make judgments under conditions of uncertainty? Which reference points do they use?

It is reasonable to assume that people could see or hear negative judgments about the EU bureaucracy from others, including newspapers, TV, friends, or family. However, news coverage of the EU is typically limited to major events, such as the introduction of the Euro. Media coverage of other EU-related issues is fairly marginal (De Vreese, 2001; Peter, Semetko and De Vreese, 2003). Beyond simplistic portrayals as 'unelected bureaucrats,' the EU bureaucracy is typically not at the center of media attention.

Considering the little real exposure to the European bureaucracy and the limited coverage of the EU public administration in most news media outlets, it is likely that people use some form of heuristics to make judgments about the EU bureaucracy. The study of such heuristics has been prominent in the disciplines of psychology and behavioral economics. For example, in their seminal study, Tversky and Kahneman (1974) describe a number of key heuristics that are frequently used by humans to make inferences about phenomena they do not have complete information on.

The heuristic that is most relevant to us in the context that we study is the so-called

“representativeness heuristic.” When people observe a phenomenon that they do not have precise information on, they potentially use their knowledge of related phenomena to form a view or judgment about it. This is an extremely common mental shortcut which has a great danger to lead to cognitive biases and the incorrect judgment of specific situations (Kahneman and Tversky, 1972; Tversky and Kahneman, 1974).

The representativeness heuristic is used in a large variety of different contexts. It is applied even in situations in which we would expect rational decision making based only on the available information to dominate, such as entrepreneurial decisions (Wickham, 2003). It is even used in situations that may decide about life and death, such as diagnoses by medical professionals. For instance, Brannon and Carson (2003) show that nurses judged the sources of patient symptoms in part based on patient characteristics that were unrelated to the concrete symptoms.²

With respect to perceptions of the EU administration, we can apply the representativeness heuristic to make some straightforward predictions. Many people can make concrete judgments about their domestic public administration because they are exposed to it a relatively high frequency, for instance through local public service delivery (James, 2007; Poister and Henry, 1994; Van Ryzin, 2004). For instance, in Romania—the site of our empirical test—a number of public services are administered by the local public administration, ranging from the simple procedure of applying for an ID card to requesting financial assistance from the government or a business permit. Given this relatively high frequency of direct exposure (compared to direct exposure to the EU bureaucracy), people are more likely to form concrete views, based on real interactions, of their local public administration.

²Also see Cioffi (1997) for a comprehensive overview of the use of heuristics in clinical decision-making.

Furthermore, citizens are likely exposed to reports of the experiences of family members and friends who also directly interact with the domestic public administration. Thus, more concrete and comprehensive exposure to the domestic public administration also allow citizens to form a more concrete and comprehensive picture of the quality of institutions, including on issues such as corruption levels.

Even though there is somewhat less exposure to and interaction with the central public administration, it is still more likely that either people themselves or some of their friends and relatives have some form of concrete exposure to this bureaucracy, too. Even if exposure to domestic central institutions occurs only rarely, people are likely to have significantly greater first-hand and second-hand experience with the national central bureaucracy than with the EU administration.

Considering the greater exposure to and likelihood of interaction with the domestic local and domestic central bureaucracy, public administrative institutions at those two levels are likely to shape the views of most people about how public administrations function generally and what their fundamental characteristics are. This more precise knowledge about the conditions of local and national public administrations can be used as a basis to make inferences about comparable phenomena with similar characteristics, specifically the EU public administration. Thus, without much further knowledge regarding the true underlying levels of corruption or other properties of the EU administration, EU citizens can be expected to (partially) use their knowledge of domestic bureaucracies to form an opinion of the EU bureaucracy.

With respect to perceptions of corruption and trust/distrust in the EU administration, we can derive four hypotheses from the above discussion:

Hypothesis 1: Individuals who perceive their domestic local public administration to be more corrupt will perceive the EU public administration to be more corrupt as well.

Hypothesis 2: Individuals who perceive their domestic central public administration to be more corrupt will perceive the EU public administration to be more corrupt as well.

Hypothesis 3: Individuals who have more trust in their domestic local public administration will have more trust in the EU public administration as well.

Hypothesis 4: Individuals who have more trust in their domestic central public administration will have more trust in the EU public administration as well.

2.3 The Possibility of Reverse Causality

Is it possible that experiences with the EU bureaucracy may drive perceptions of domestic bureaucracies? This certainly is a possibility, but only for a very marginal number of EU citizens, i.e. those that directly and frequently interact with the EU administration. Considering both the social and geographical distance between the EU administration and most EU citizens (with the exception of the inhabitants of Brussels, Frankfurt, Luxembourg, and Strasbourg³), not only the exposure but also the level of accuracy of information is likely to be higher with respect to domestic bureaucracies. Thus, considering the marginal number of EU civil servants and the extremely limited exposure of citizens to the EU administration, the possibility of reverse causality is equally marginal.

³These are the European cities in which the main EU government bodies are located.

2.4 A First Challenge to the Argument: General Trust into Public Institutions

Our theory suggests that experiences with very specific institutions, i.e. local and central domestic *public administrations*, shape perceptions of *comparable* institutions of the same kind at another level, namely the EU public administration. The comparability of institutions at both levels allows for the use of the *representativeness heuristic*.

However, what if this theory about a specific heuristic based on comparable public institutions is actually part of an overall trust in public institutions? This would mean that it might be more directly related to an “overall world view of institutions.” For example, some people may simply have overall greater levels of trust in all state institutions. In this case, it is not a heuristic based on comparable institutions, but more part of an individual’s “global perception of institutions.”

In order to account for this alternative explanation, we consider trust in two additional public institutions, namely courts and the police. If we find a robust relationship to those two institutions, it would strengthen the argument that we merely observe general institutional trust instead of the application of the representativeness heuristic specifically.

We can derive a first rival hypothesis from the above discussion:

Hypothesis 5: Individuals who have more trust in several types of public institutions (specifically the police and courts), have higher levels of trust in the EU bureaucracy.

2.5 A Second Challenge to the Argument: Historical Imperial Rule

Existing studies show that there are historical legacies with respect to trust in some public institutions (Vogler, 2019; Becker, Boeckh, Hainz and Woessmann, 2016). During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Romania was partially ruled by the Habsburg Empire (Vogler, 2019), which allows us to control for the possible impact of historical imperial rule on perceptions of EU administration. Thus, we need to test if there are any historical legacies that might explain differential trust into public institutions.

We can derive a second rival hypothesis from the above discussion:

Hypothesis 6: Levels of trust in the EU bureaucracy and levels of corruption differ across the historical imperial borders of the Austrian empire.

3 Empirical Test

In this section of the paper, we introduce the dataset and discuss all of the key variables. The data represent a random sample of Romanian adults from both urban and rural areas. The interviews were conducted face-to-face by trained specialists of the Romanian survey firm INSCOP. A total of 1,001 adults were surveyed in April and May 2017.

3.1 Key Dependent Variables

In order to test our theory, we use two different key dependent variables: (1) Trust in the EU Bureaucracy and (2) Perceived Corruption in the EU Bureaucracy.

Trust in the EU Bureaucracy: The first of our two key dependent variables is the level of trust/distrust in the bureaucracy of the European Union. It is based on the following question: “How much do you trust or distrust the central bureaucracy of the European Union?” Respondents were able to give their reply on a 7-point scale, ranging from high levels of trust to high levels of distrust. Further details on this indicator can be found in the appendix.

Perceived Corruption in the EU Bureaucracy: The second key dependent variable is the perceived level of corruption in the bureaucracy of the European Union. It is based on the following question: “Do you agree or disagree with the statement that corruption is a problem of the European Union’s central bureaucracy?” Respondents were able to give their reply on a 7-point scale, ranging from high levels of trust to high levels of distrust. Further details on this indicator can be found in the appendix.

Why do we use two different indicators instead of creating a composite measurement? In

this respect, it is important to note that trust in the EU bureaucracy and perceived levels of corruption are two distinct phenomena, which only have a weak statistical relationship. Neither is a significant predictor of the other one in the framework of a linear regression and their correlation is weak ($|cor| < 0.1$). For further details see [Table 1](#).

Table 1: Relationship: Trust/Perceptions of Corruption

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>
	Trust in EU Bureaucracy
Perc. Corruption of EU Bur.	-0.056 (0.037)
Constant	0.649*** (0.060)
Observations	853
R ²	0.003
Adjusted R ²	0.002
Note: OLS	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

3.2 Key Explanatory Variables

Based on our theory, the key explanatory variables relate to trust and perceived levels of corruption in domestic bureaucracies at different levels (central and local). The detailed questions and answer scales underlying those variables can be found in the appendix.

Trust in the Domestic Central Public Administration: Our first key explanatory variable is trust in the domestic central public administration. We expect that this variable is a significant predictor of trust in the EU bureaucracy.

Trust in the Domestic Local Public Administration: Our second key explanatory variable is trust in the domestic local public administration. We expect that this variable is a significant predictor of trust in the EU bureaucracy.

Perceived Levels of Corruption in the Domestic Central Public Administra-

tion: Our third key explanatory variable is perceived levels of corruption in the domestic central public administration. We expect that this variable is a significant predictor of perceived levels of corruption in the EU public administration.

Perceived Levels of Corruption in the Domestic Local Public Administration:

Our fourth key explanatory variable is perceived levels of corruption in the domestic local public administration. We expect that this variable is a significant predictor of perceived levels of corruption in the EU public administration.

3.3 Alternative Explanatory Variables

Based on the literature on euroscepticism and the challenges to our theory discussed in [section 2](#), we present several alternative explanatory variables below. The detailed questions and answer scales underlying those variables can be found in the appendix.

The Direction of the Domestic Economy: Perceptions of the economic fortune of the country could be influential in terms of the evaluation of bureaucratic performance. The argument that macroeconomic conditions influence perceptions of the EC/EU is shown in several existing studies ([Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993](#); [Garry and Tilley, 2009](#)). Thus, we include satisfaction with the general direction of the economy.

The Economic Effect of EU Membership on the Domestic Economy: Perceptions of the *specific* effect that the EU has on the national economy could be even more decisive when it comes to evaluations of EU institutions (Cf. [Anderson and Reichert, 1995](#)).⁴ Therefore, we include a variable capturing the perceived economic effect of EU membership

⁴A similar argument, namely that the financial costs/benefits of EU membership in terms of financial contributions are of importance is also suggested by [Eichenberg and Dalton \(1993\)](#).

on the domestic economy.

Trust in Local Police: As a first control variable for general trust in public institutions (an alternative theory discussed in [section 2](#)), we include trust into the local police.

Trust in Courts: As a second control variable for general trust in public institutions (an alternative theory discussed in [section 2](#)), we include trust into the local police.

Previous Habsburg Rule: Even though the European Union did not exist at the time of historical imperial rule, there could be cultural legacies of the perception of state institutions which may lead to differential perceptions of EU institutions ([Bădescu and Sum, 2005](#); [Vogler, 2019](#)). Thus, we include a dummy variable for the parts of Romania that historically were under Habsburg rule.

3.4 Additional Covariates

In addition to all of the above variables, we introduce a number of additional covariates. All of these covariates could partially explain perceptions of EU institutions. The detailed questions and answer scales underlying those variables can be found in the appendix.

Location Type: Urbanized areas often have different social structures and socio-economic conditions, which could affect views of supranational organizations. Accordingly, we differentiate between three types of communes: (1) Municipalities (most urbanized), (2) cities (mix of urban and rural), and (3) communes (most rural). Our baseline category is “city” and we introduce dummies for municipalities and communes.

Respondent Age: Age may be an important factor influencing perceptions of the EU. Younger people grew up with Romania already being a part of the European Union. Older

people still experienced Romania under communist/socialist rule. These different experiences may be an important factor influencing views of the EU.

Public Administration Work Experience: People who have worked in public administration previously may perceive bureaucracies differently than people who have only experienced bureaucracies from the outside.

Education Level: Previous studies on euroscepticism have shown that education is a factor for explaining individuals' attitudes towards the EU (Gabel, 1998; Hakhverdian, Van Elsas, Van der Brug and Kuhn, 2013; Lubbers and Jaspers, 2011). Education levels appear to matter most in less wealthy member states of the EU (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010). Since Romania is among the poorest European states, we include a control variable for education levels.

Income Level: In addition to perceptions about the current national level of economic growth, personal economic fortunes could have an impact on attitudes towards the EU bureaucracy (Gabel, 1998; Gabel and Palmer, 1995). Thus, we include a control for income levels.

Female: Men and women may have different attitudes towards the EU and/or institutions. Accordingly, we include a variable differentiating between men and women.

Capital: The Romanian capital of Bucharest not only has a slightly different administrative organization than the other areas of Bucharest, which could have an impact on perceptions of public administration. Additionally, it is the most densely populated area of the country and attracts a large number of young people and foreigners. Due to its very different social structure, we include a dummy for the capital.

3.5 Descriptive Summary Statistics

Table 2 shows descriptive summary statistics for all variables that are used in the empirical test.

Variable	n	Min	q₁	\bar{x}	\tilde{x}	q₃	Max	IQR
Trust in EU Bureaucracy	961	-3	0	0.62	1	2	3	2
Perc. Corruption in EU Bur.	865	-2	0	0.82	1	2	3	2
Direction of the Economy	995	-3	-2	-0.26	0	1	3	3
EU Economic Effect on Econ.	980	-3	0	0.56	1	2	3	2
Trust in Central PA	996	-3	-1	0.12	1	1	3	2
Corruption in Central PA	969	-2	1	1.73	2	3	3	2
Trust in Local PA	997	-3	0	0.93	1	2	3	2
Corruption in Local PA	805	-3	-1	0.26	1	1	3	2
Trust in Police	881	-3	1	0.93	2	2	3	1
Trust in Courts	797	-3	-1	0.71	1	2	3	3
Habsburg Part	1001	0	0	0.41	0	1	1	1
Age	997	18	35	48.67	49	62	89	27
Work Experience in PA	970	0	0	0.04	0	0	1	0
Education	991	0	0	1.46	2	2	4	2
Income	893	0	2	2.61	3	3	7	1
Female	1001	0	0	0.51	1	1	1	1
Capital	1001	0	0	0.04	0	0	1	0

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics: Empirical Analysis

4 Results

In this section, we present the results of our statistical analysis. We show that perceptions of domestic institutions are a significant predictor of perceptions of EU institutions. This is true for both levels of trust/distrust and perceived levels of corruption in the EU administration.

4.1 Trust in the EU Bureaucracy

We begin the presentation of our empirical results with an analysis of the determinants of trust in the EU bureaucracy. In [Table 3](#), we show the results of a large number of different regressions. The first and second regressions consider trust in domestic central and local bureaucracies respectively. The third regression considers both factors simultaneously. In the first three regressions, both trust in the central public administration and trust in the local public administration are significant predictors of trust in the EU bureaucracy when not controlling for additional factors.

[Figure 1](#) and [Figure 2](#) graphically demonstrate the effect that trust in domestic institutions has on trust in the EU administration. Both figures are based on regression three. As the first graph reveals, the relationship between perceptions of central institutions and the EU bureaucracy is particularly strong. In regressions two and three, perceptions of local institutions also have a statistically significant effect on perceptions of the EU bureaucracy but this effect is generally less substantively influential.

In regressions four to seven, we add a number of covariates to check if the results hold when controlling for potentially confounding factors. We find that perceptions of central bureaucratic institutions continue to show a statistically significant effect. However, percep-

Figure 1: Trust in the EU Bureaucracy

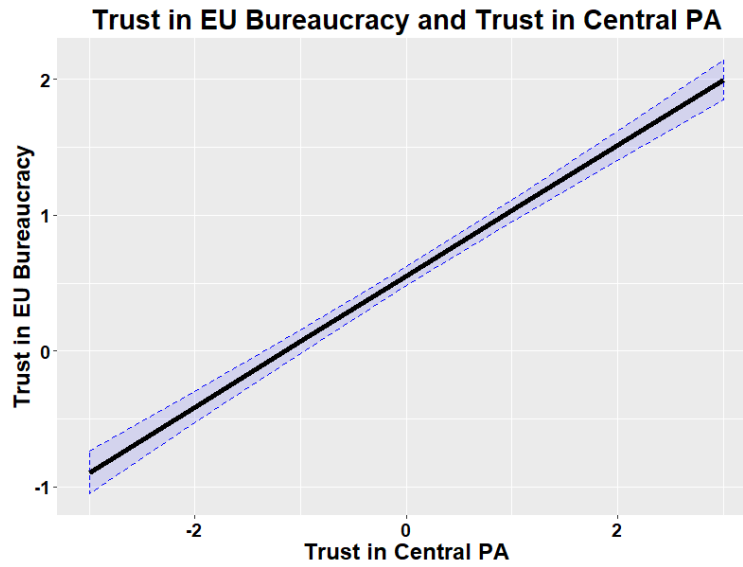
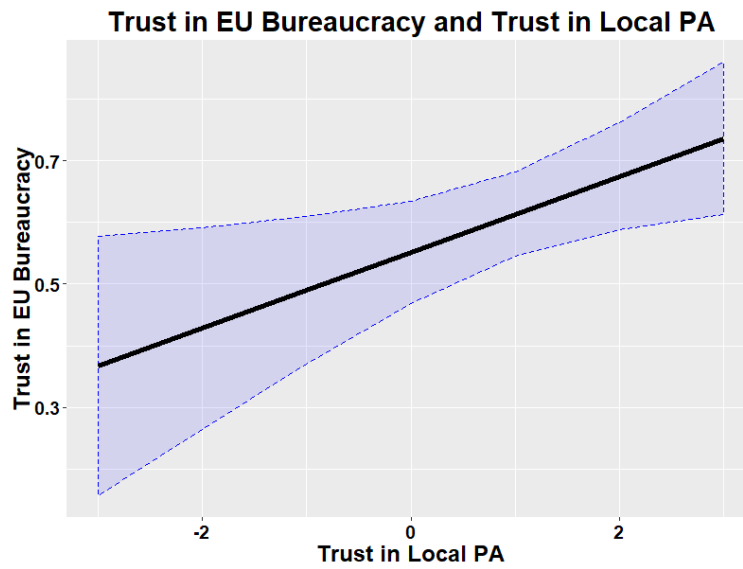


Figure 2: Trust in the EU Bureaucracy



tions of local public administrations are no longer statistically significant.

Table 3: Trust in the EU Bureaucracy

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>						
	Trust in EU Bureaucracy						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Trust in Central PA	0.506*** (0.024)		0.482*** (0.027)	0.391*** (0.028)	0.367*** (0.033)	0.367*** (0.033)	0.364*** (0.037)
Trust in Local PA		0.301*** (0.032)	0.062** (0.031)	0.047 (0.029)	-0.004 (0.040)	-0.003 (0.040)	-0.026 (0.043)
Direction of Econ.				-0.032 (0.026)	-0.001 (0.030)	-0.001 (0.030)	0.001 (0.033)
EU Effect on Econ.				0.368*** (0.027)	0.347*** (0.032)	0.346*** (0.032)	0.311*** (0.036)
Trust in Police					0.030 (0.037)	0.030 (0.037)	0.026 (0.040)
Trust in Courts					0.053* (0.032)	0.053 (0.032)	0.059* (0.035)
Habsburg Part						0.021 (0.090)	0.002 (0.105)
Commune							-0.216 (0.136)
Municipality							-0.153 (0.147)
Age							0.003 (0.003)
Work in PA							0.302 (0.253)
Education							-0.005 (0.049)
Income							-0.009 (0.051)
Female							0.066 (0.099)
Capital							-0.175 (0.322)
Constant	0.549*** (0.042)	0.331*** (0.056)	0.494*** (0.050)	0.297*** (0.050)	0.348*** (0.060)	0.340*** (0.070)	0.438 (0.288)
Observations	959	959	957	937	711	711	611
R ²	0.308	0.087	0.311	0.427	0.433	0.433	0.409
Adjusted R ²	0.308	0.086	0.309	0.425	0.429	0.428	0.394

Note: OLS

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

4.2 Perceptions of Corruption in the EU Bureaucracy

We continue with perceptions of corruption in the EU bureaucracy. In [Table 4](#), we show the results of a large number of different regressions. The first and second regressions consider perceptions of corruption in domestic central and local bureaucracies respectively. The third regression considers both factors simultaneously. In the first three regressions (and in all subsequent regressions), perceptions of corruption at both bureaucratic levels are significant predictors of perceptions of corruption in the EU bureaucracy when not controlling for additional factors.

[Figure 3](#) and [Figure 4](#) graphically demonstrate the effect that perceptions of corruption in domestic institutions has on the same concept with respect to the EU administration. Both figures are based on regression three. Similar to the previous results obtained with respect to levels of trust, the relationship between perceptions of central institutions and the EU bureaucracy is particularly strong. Another similarity is that perceptions of local institutions also have a statistically significant effect on perceptions of the EU bureaucracy but this effect is generally less substantively influential.

In regressions four to seven, we add a number of covariates to check if the results hold when controlling for potentially confounding factors. We find that perceptions of central bureaucratic institutions continue to show a statistically significant effect. However, perceptions of local public administrations are no longer statistically significant.

Table 4: Perceptions of Corruption in the EU Bureacracy

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>						
	Perceived Corruption in EU Bureacracy						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Perc. Corr. in Central PA	0.533*** (0.031)		0.499*** (0.035)	0.524*** (0.036)	0.539*** (0.041)	0.537*** (0.041)	0.522*** (0.047)
Perc. Corr. in Local PA		0.182*** (0.030)	0.089*** (0.027)	0.100*** (0.027)	0.104*** (0.033)	0.103*** (0.033)	0.105*** (0.036)
Direction of Econ.				0.078*** (0.029)	0.074** (0.034)	0.075** (0.034)	0.086** (0.037)
EU Effect on Econ.				-0.029 (0.033)	-0.080** (0.040)	-0.083** (0.040)	-0.102** (0.043)
Trust in Police					0.016 (0.041)	0.014 (0.041)	0.028 (0.043)
Trust in Courts					0.026 (0.038)	0.025 (0.038)	0.011 (0.040)
Habsburg Part						0.055 (0.109)	0.162 (0.125)
Commune							-0.135 (0.156)
Municipality							0.131 (0.169)
Age							-0.001 (0.004)
Work in PA							-0.124 (0.329)
Education							0.119** (0.056)
Income							-0.050 (0.061)
Female							-0.004 (0.116)
Capital							-1.222*** (0.424)
Constant	-0.095 (0.068)	0.782*** (0.052)	-0.039 (0.074)	-0.047 (0.077)	-0.096 (0.096)	-0.111 (0.101)	-0.071 (0.346)
Observations	859	705	700	687	533	533	458
R ²	0.258	0.050	0.271	0.283	0.293	0.293	0.304
Adjusted R ²	0.257	0.049	0.269	0.279	0.285	0.284	0.280

Note: OLS

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Figure 3: Perceived Corruption in the EU Bureaucracy

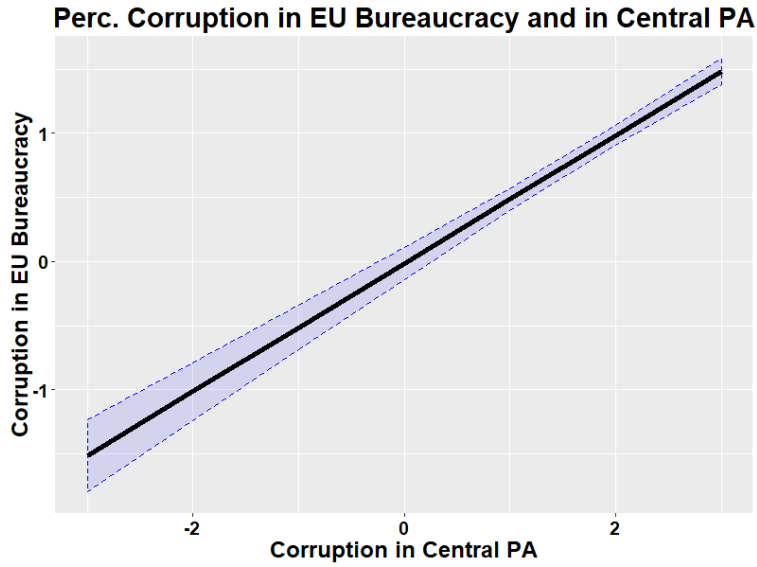
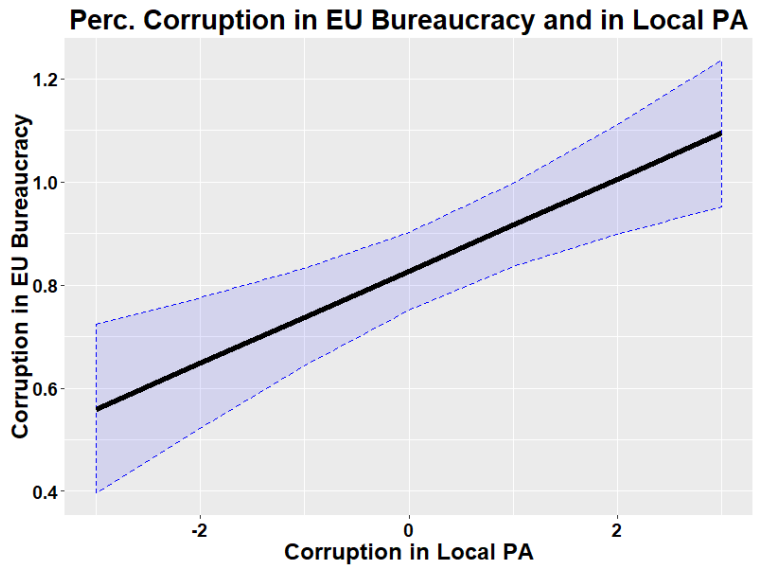


Figure 4: Perceived Corruption in the EU Bureaucracy



4.3 Summary

The empirical analysis has demonstrated that trust/distrust and perceptions of corruption in local and—in particular—in central bureaucracies are a crucial determinant of perceptions of the EU bureaucracy. Since citizens have very little real exposure to the EU administration

and to EU bureaucrats, it is most likely that their views of domestic institutions inform their views of EU institutions based on the representativeness heuristic.

The argument that the representativeness heuristic is crucial in explaining the observed patterns is strengthened by two specific results. First, views of the central public administration are both substantively and statistically more decisive in terms of influencing a respondent's view of the EU administration than views of the local public administration. This is in line with the representativeness heuristic because the domestic central bureaucracy can be considered more comparable to the EU administration than the domestic local bureaucracy.

Furthermore, the rival hypothesis that we merely observe an individual's general level of trust in public institutions does not find support in the data. Both trust in police and trust in the courts are not significant predictors of either trust or perceptions of corruption in the EU administration. This further strengthens the argument that the representativeness heuristic is at work here.

5 Summary and Conclusion

Euroscepticism is a widespread and persistent phenomenon among a substantial subset of EU citizens. Moreover, it has contributed to decisions that were of enormous political, economic, and social relevance, such as the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom (Henderson et al., 2016; Hobolt, 2016; Peitz, Dhont and Seyd, 2018; Vasilopoulou, 2016). Thus, explaining euroscepticism and its components is an endeavor that is of both academic and practical-political significance. Considering its broad relevance, it is no surprise that euroscepticism has generated a prolific research agenda.

Previous research has shown that distrust in EU institutions is a key driver of skepticism of the European project (Abts, Heerwegh and Swyngedouw, 2009). Considering the extremely low level of direct interaction that most European citizens have with the EU administration, we aim to explain how they form their views of those institutions. In this paper, we argue that perceptions of the EU public administration may be (partially) based on mental shortcuts or heuristics based on domestic experiences. Due to very limited information on the EU administration, they may use experiences and views of comparable domestic institutions as a reference point for their views of the EU bureaucracy. Thus, we argue that the *representativeness heuristic* may be at work when people form their opinions of the EU administration.

In our empirical analysis, based on data from Romania, we have found that perceptions of domestic local and central bureaucracies indeed have a strong impact on perceptions of the EU administrations. We have found that the impact of perceptions of central institutions is substantively greater and statistically more significant. This may be due to the more similar

character of the central public administration and the EU administration. Furthermore, we have not found a statistical association with trust in other public institutions, meaning that our results are not driven by general institutional trust.

These results have important academic and political implications. Our study shows that academics who investigate aspects of euroscepticism should take domestic experiences and perceptions of domestic institutions into account. They may be crucial for explaining variations in euroscepticism. Moreover, certain political inferences may be drawn from this study as well. In order to reduce skepticism of EU institutions, European citizens may need more direct exposure to or concrete information about the EU administration, so that they can form opinions on them separately from other institutions of a similar kind. This echoes previous arguments about a more general “communication deficit” that the EU is subject to (De Vreese, Banducci, Semetko and Boomgaarden, 2006).

How do our results fit into the broader literature on euroscepticism? At first glance, our results appear to be inconsistent with Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) because he finds that poorly functioning national institutions increase support for European integration. However, we focus only on a single, highly specific factor of euroscepticism, namely *trust into European public administrative institutions*. There may be other, alternative mechanisms, through which poorly functioning national institutions could *increase* support for European integration. For instance, people who view their domestic government as corrupt may be less inclined to be nationalistic, which may also have a positive impact on attitudes towards the EU. Therefore, future studies may want to consider different causal mechanisms through which perceptions of domestic institutions ultimately affect scepticism of EU integration more broadly—beyond the very specific type of distrust analyzed here.

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6 Online Appendix

In the appendix, we show the underlying questions and coding of our empirical measurements.

6.1 Coding of Key Variables

6.1.1 Key Dependent Variables

Trust in the EU Bureaucracy: “How much do you trust or distrust the central bureaucracy of the European Union?”

1. Completely trust (3)
2. Mostly trust (2)
3. Slightly trust (1)
4. Neither trust nor distrust (0)
5. Slightly distrust (-1)
6. Mostly distrust (-2)
7. Completely distrust (-3)

Corruption in the EU Bureaucracy: “Do you agree or disagree with the statement that corruption is a problem of the European Union’s central bureaucracy?”

1. Strongly agree (3)
2. Mostly agree (2)
3. Slightly agree (1)
4. Neither agree nor disagree (0)
5. Slightly disagree (-1)
6. Mostly disagree (-2)
7. Strongly disagree (-3)

6.1.2 Key Explanatory Variables

Trust in the Domestic Central Public Administration: “How much do you trust or distrust the central bureaucracy of Romania?”

1. Completely trust (3)
2. Mostly trust (2)
3. Slightly trust (1)
4. Neither trust nor distrust (0)
5. Slightly distrust (-1)
6. Mostly distrust (-2)
7. Completely distrust (-3)

Trust in the Domestic Local Public Administration: “How much do you trust or distrust the local public administration?”

1. Completely trust (3)
2. Mostly trust (2)
3. Slightly trust (1)
4. Neither trust nor distrust (0)
5. Slightly distrust (-1)
6. Mostly distrust (-2)
7. Completely distrust (-3)

Perceived Levels of Corruption in the Domestic Central Public Administration: “Do you agree or disagree with the statement that corruption is a problem of Romania’s central bureaucracy?”

1. Strongly agree (3)
2. Mostly agree (2)

3. Slightly agree (1)
4. Neither agree nor disagree (0)
5. Slightly disagree (-1)
6. Mostly disagree (-2)
7. Strongly disagree (-3)

Perceived Levels of Corruption in the Domestic Local Public Administration:

“Thinking about your own experiences and what you have heard from others, how common is it that people make informal payments to the local public administration to speed up bureaucratic procedures or ensure a positive response to a request (for example, to ensure that a request for a business permit will be approved)?”

1. Extremely common (3)
2. Very common (2)
3. Slightly common (1)
4. Neither common nor uncommon (0)
5. Slightly uncommon (-1)
6. Very uncommon (-2)
7. Extremely uncommon (-3)

6.1.3 Alternative Explanatory Variables

The Direction of the Domestic Economy: “Generally speaking, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the direction of Romania’s economy?”

1. Very satisfied (3)
2. Mostly satisfied (2)
3. Slightly satisfied (1)
4. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (0)

5. Slightly dissatisfied (-1)
6. Mostly dissatisfied (-2)
7. Very dissatisfied (-3)

The Economic Effect of EU Membership on the Domestic Economy: “Generally speaking, does Romania’s membership in the European Union have a positive or negative effect on Romania’s economy?”

1. Very positive (3)
2. Mostly Positive (2)
3. Slightly positive (1)
4. Neither positive nor negative (0)
5. Slightly negative (-1)
6. Mostly negative (-2)
7. Very negative (-3)

Trust in Police: “How much do you trust or distrust the local police?”

1. Completely trust (3)
2. Mostly trust (2)
3. Slightly trust (1)
4. Neither trust nor distrust (0)
5. Slightly distrust (-1)
6. Mostly distrust (-2)
7. Completely distrust (-3)

Trust in Courts: “How much do you trust or distrust the courts?”

1. Completely trust (3)
2. Mostly trust (2)

3. Slightly trust (1)
4. Neither trust nor distrust (0)
5. Slightly distrust (-1)
6. Mostly distrust (-2)
7. Completely distrust (-3)

Previous Habsburg Rule: These data were coded based on [Vogler \(2019\)](#).

1. Historical Habsburg Territory (1)
2. Not Historical Habsburg Territory (0)

6.1.4 Additional Covariates

Here we present coding information on two additional covariates (for which the coding was not described in detail in the empirical test section).

Education Level: “What is the highest level of education that you have obtained?”

1. No high school degree (0)
2. High school finished without baccalaureate (1)
3. High school finished with baccalaureate (2)
4. Bachelor’s degree (3)
5. Master’s degree (4)
6. Doctoral degree (4) (No respondent chose this option)

Income Level: “What is the monthly net income of your household (after taxes) (without any unemployment benefits)?”

1. Less than RON 500 (1)
2. RON 500-1,499 (2)
3. RON 1,500-2,999 (3)

4. RON 3,000-4,999 (4)
5. RON 5,000-7,999 (5)
6. RON 8,000-11,999 (6)
7. RON 12,000-16,000 (7) (No respondent chose this option)
8. More than RON 16,000 (8) (No respondent chose this option)
9. All members of my household are retired (0)
10. No members of my household are working (0)