

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Public Support for European Integration: Evidence from Germany

Jay N. Krehbiel* Sivaram Cheruvu†

November 10, 2020

Abstract

The European Union increasingly relies on the willingness of citizens to support the delegation of authority from their national governments to European institutions. Major policy crises have the ability to profoundly shape public support and opposition to greater European integration. In this article, we consider the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for public support of greater European integration. We build on the utilitarian approaches to develop an account of the pandemic's implications for citizens' views on the need for more EU-level policy making. We contend that higher levels of concern for COVID-19 correspond to higher support for further European integration. We then go on to argue that this relationship is conditioned by ideology. We find support for our hypotheses using a nationally-representative survey of 4400 German respondents fielded in April and May 2020.

Keywords: European Union; European Integration; Public Opinion; COVID-19 Pandemic

*Department of Political Science, West Virginia University, 316 Woodburn Hall, P.O. Box 6317, Morgantown, WV, 26506, USA; jay.krehbiel@mail.wvu.edu

†Department of Political Science, Emory University, 327 Tarbutton Hall, 1555 Dickey Drive, Atlanta, Georgia 30322, USA; sivaram.cheruvu@emory.edu

‡The authors thank Michael Nelson and Amanda Driscoll for agreeing to the use of the data for this paper, as well as the reviewer and editor for their invaluable comments. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant Nos. SES-2027653, SES-2027671, and SES-2027664. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation. These surveys were reviewed and cleared by the West Virginia University Institutional Review Board.

International organizations are an increasingly defining feature of global politics (e.g., [Abbott et al. 2000](#)). Few such entities, however, have garnered as much power and influence as the European Union (EU) (e.g., [Moravcsik 1993](#)). Yet while the EU’s early development relied more so on the preferences of political elites than the demands of the European public, “the future of the European Union hinges more than ever on citizens’ support for the European integration project” ([Hobolt and De Vries 2016](#), 413). Consequently, understanding the determinants of this support is a focal point for EU scholars.

In this article, we consider how the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic affects public attitudes toward granting greater authority to the European Union. Building on the extensive literature examining public support for European integration (e.g. [Gabel and Palmer 1995](#); [Hooghe and Marks 2005](#)), we contend that the pandemic leads those citizens most affected to be more supportive of delegating authority to the EU and that such an effect is conditioned by ideology. To evaluate our hypotheses we use data from an original survey fielded to 4400 Germans in April and May 2020 during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We organize the remainder of the article as follows. The next section integrates extant literature on support for European integration into our account of the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on citizens’ desire for greater EU policy making. We then discuss our empirical approach and measurement strategy followed by a presentation of our results. We then conclude by discussing a few key implications of our findings for the EU and highlighting potential avenues for future research.

Determinants of Public Support for European Integration

Since Danish citizens rejected the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, scholars have considered the determinants of public support for European integration (e.g., [Hobolt and De Vries 2016](#)). Coupled with the proliferation of referendums across the EU and the politicization of EU-level issues in national elections, public opinion of European integration has become a consequential factor in determining policy outcomes (e.g., [Hooghe and Marks 2009](#)). Indeed, a robust literature posits a multitude of contributing factors to public attitudes, including economic conditions (e.g. [Gabel and Palmer 1995](#); [Gabel and Whitten 1997](#)), attachment to national identity (e.g. [Carey 2002](#); [Hooghe and](#)

Marks 2005), and the cues given by political elites (Steenbergen and Marks 2007; Van Elsas and Van Der Brug 2015).

One such prominent theoretical account is that individuals' support for European integration is best understood as a function of the costs and benefits of a more expansive and empowered EU. The canonical studies in this tradition argue that individuals with higher education, income, and occupational skills are more likely to benefit from the arrival of new employment and investment opportunities resulting from integration and, thus, they are more likely to support further integration (e.g. Gabel and Palmer 1995; Gabel and Whitten 1997). Low-skilled workers, conversely, are less supportive of integration due to the greater job insecurity resulting from firms' ability to cross borders with ease. More broadly, this utilitarian approach links citizens' attitudes with the direct impact - real or perceived - of transferring policy making from the national to European level.

This cost-benefit paradigm can similarly provide insights into citizens' responses to major crises confronted by the EU. From the Eurozone crisis (e.g., Kuhn and Stoeckel 2014), to the refugee crisis, (e.g., Hangartner et al. 2019), to Brexit (e.g., Hobolt 2016), to democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland (e.g., Kelemen 2017), citizens have debated the powers and competences of the EU to address these problems. The COVID-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to examine how a policy crisis resulting from an exogenous shock affects public support for greater European integration (e.g. Dellmuth and Tallberg 2015). The crisis resulted in EU member states taking a number of strict measures such as the closing of borders in the Schengen area and restricting the freedom of movement generally enjoyed within the EU. As Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said early-on in the crisis on March 16, 2020, "Our measures to contain the Coronavirus outbreak will be effective only if we coordinate on the European level. We have to take exceptional measures to protect the health of our citizens" (European Commission 2020). This call to coordinated action across the EU raises an important question about the degree to which member state citizens believe the EU should be involved in mitigating the crisis, and whether they believe their member states should delegate the necessary authority for the EU to effectively do so.

A burgeoning literature linking the utilitarian account with the consequences of the Eurozone crisis is informative to how crises affect public support for European integration. This crisis made the issue of European integration salient across Europe and had direct economic consequences within member states. Hobolt and Wratil (2015) find that support for the Euro remained high

in the Eurozone throughout the crisis. Furthermore, they find that citizens in Eurozone countries were more likely to believe that the EU was the actor most able to tackle the crisis relative to other actors (such as the International Monetary Fund), and they were more likely to believe their member state benefits from EU membership as the crisis progressed. [Kuhn and Stoeckel \(2014, 634\)](#) find that member states with lower macro-economic performance were more likely to support European economic governance and that this support is about “8 percent higher in the country with the lowest growth rate in Europe (Greece) than in the country with the highest growth rate (Sweden).” Taken together, the results indicate that in the midst of the Eurozone crisis, citizens who believed they would receive the greatest benefits from European integration during the crisis were more likely to have higher support for the EU.

Applying these lessons to the COVID-19 crisis, we may similarly develop expectations for the pandemic’s impact on public attitudes towards EU integration. The EU had several potential avenues of response to the growing crisis early on, including fiscal stimulus to address the pandemic’s economic fallout, managing the allocation of critical medical resources, and coordinating the development and ultimate distribution of a vaccine. The cost-benefit logic suggests that individuals’ support for such expansions of EU authority is at least in part a function of their perceived benefit and cost of a more assertive EU taking such actions. While the durability of support for such actions may be fleeting rather than sustainable in the long term, even a short term expansion of support for EU authority can create an opening for national authorities to pursue a pro-integration agenda. This opening may exist in the context of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic as citizens’ fear drives them to support policy solutions that they otherwise may have opposed. Moreover, such solutions may have long term implications for the bounds of European integration even if they are intended to be limited proposals designed to address the immediate challenge. This dynamic may be most clearly illustrated by German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s support for a pandemic recovery fund backed by the borrowing of the entire EU, despite a long standing opposition towards similar policies. Although described by Merkel as a “one-off effort,” observers have largely hailed the move as a watershed event for European integration ([Erlanger 2020](#)). Following the cost-benefit logic, support for such expanded EU policy making should be greater for those most likely to benefit from a more robust EU response to the pandemic. Conversely, such support should be weaker among those who view more EU involvement as unacceptably costly.

A number of factors, such as socioeconomic status (e.g., [Hakhverdian et al. 2013](#)) and education (e.g., [Gabel 1998](#)) may inform a cost-benefit calculation with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic. The most clearly identifiable influence, however, is an individual’s level of concern for contracting the virus. Delegating authority to the EU brings little benefit for those who view the virus as posing little to no threat. Consequently, such individuals should be unlikely to support expanding the EU’s authority since doing so comes at the unnecessary costs of ceding a degree of national sovereignty and contributing more resources to greater EU financial needs. In contrast, for someone more concerned by the pandemic, greater EU authority can yield benefits such as stronger collective policy responses to the economic and social impact of the pandemic, sharing of expertise and resources across the member states, and coordination on strategies for mitigating the risk of future outbreaks. For example, those concerned by the pandemic may see the EU as a force for expediting the development and distribution of a vaccine. While the costs of further EU integration remain, for these individuals the benefits an empowered EU brings to combating the pandemic are more likely to be sufficient for them to support delegating more authority to the EU. Taken together, this reasoning suggests that support for granting the EU more authority should increase with concern for the COVID-19 pandemic. This logic leads us to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 *Support for greater EU policy making increases as an individual’s concern for contracting COVID-19 increases.*

Such an effect, however, is likely not completely independent from individuals’ existing political attitudes. Just as much of European politics is structured by the left-right ideological dimension (e.g., [De Vries and Hobolt 2012](#)), so too may support for European integration be in part a function of citizens’ ideology. The existing literature has a variety of findings regarding the relationship between ideology and EU integration. For example, some studies find that left-wing citizens are less likely to support European integration (e.g., [Deflem and Pampel 1996](#); [Llamazares and Gramacho 2007](#)), while others argue that it is indeed right-wing citizens that are less likely to support European integration (e.g., [McLaren 2007](#); [Van Elsas and Van Der Brug 2015](#)). Furthermore, a number of studies have also suggested that a “U” shaped relationship exists whereby far-right and far-left parties are the least-likely to support European integration, while parties in the center are

more supportive (e.g., [König, Marbach and Osnabrügge 2017](#); [Lubbers and Scheepers 2010](#)). These scholars all agree, however, that ideology conditions citizens' opinions towards the EU.

Following this logic, we expect ideology to condition how concern for COVID-19 affects support for EU policy making. For those who are already predisposed to supporting European integration, the effect of the pandemic is likely relatively muted; these individuals already are likely to be pro-EU and so there is less room for the crisis to drive their views. In contrast, concern created by the pandemic may have a more significant pro-EU effect on those who otherwise would be likely to oppose further EU integration. For these individuals, there is more of an opportunity, so to speak, for the pandemic to affect their views on the utility of an EU with greater authority. Consequently, we expect that concern for COVID-19 is less likely to affect support for EU policy making among citizens whose ideology predisposes them to support EU integration and is more likely to affect support for EU policy making among citizens whose ideology predisposes them to not support EU integration. Our second hypothesis follows from this logic.

Hypothesis 2 *The effect of concern for COVID-19 on support for European policy making is conditioned by ideological support for EU integration.*

Data and Methodology

To evaluate our hypotheses we use data from an original survey of 4400 Germans fielded from late April through mid-May 2020.¹ Although studies of public support for the EU often use cross-national data from surveys like the Eurobarometer (e.g., [Hooghe and Marks 2005](#)), focusing on Germany has several notable advantages. For one, this approach allows us to control for a wide range of factors related to the pandemic that could otherwise be difficult to consistently track and measure across countries, like governments' COVID-19 responses and the varied timing of the pandemic's arrival in member states. Similarly, limiting our analysis to Germany addresses the potential confounding effect of heterogeneous political systems and norms, such as cross-national differences in the conceptualization of the left-right ideological axis (e.g., [König, Marbach and Osnabrügge 2017](#); [Van Elsas and Van Der Brug 2015](#)). In the context of Germany this approach

¹The survey was administered online by YouGov with a sample that is representative of age, education, gender, and state residency.

further controls for key contextual factors, such as differences between the population as a whole and those who resided in the former East Germany (e.g., [Alesina and Fuchs-Schündeln 2007](#); [Fuchs-Schündeln and Masella 2016](#)). Moreover, Germany is a natural and logical case to examine support for expanding EU authority given its status as the largest and arguably most influential EU member state (e.g., [Borzel 2002](#)). Finally, Germany arguably provides a difficult test for our hypotheses thanks to its traditionally high levels of support for the EU (e.g., [Guinaudeau and Schnatterer 2019](#)), as in such contexts we might not otherwise expect to see a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic significantly shift public opinion towards European integration.²

The timing of the survey is similarly critical for our analyses, as the rapidly evolving nature of the COVID-19 crisis means that survey responses may be conditioned by the context in which they are given. As [Table 1](#) shows, a number of significant events had already occurred by the time the survey entered the field. In particular, the German government took several measures to protect its own citizens, including a ban on exporting critical medical equipment and closing the country's borders. Notably, such policies did not suggest an immediate sense of German solidarity with other EU member states, as they came potentially at the expense of countries like Italy and Spain that were struggling with the initial spike of cases.

Perhaps just as important as the events that had occurred was the one that took place after the survey's fielding – the announcement of the EU's pandemic recovery fund. Proposed in late May 2020 and approved in July 2020, the recovery fund marked a milestone moment in EU cooperation both in general and specifically regarding the pandemic. In addition to its scale, the recovery fund is noteworthy for being funded with EU-backed bonds. Such collective funding of debt has long been a highly contentious issue within the EU (e.g., [Daniele and Geys 2015](#)), so by drawing on survey data collected prior to this major event we are able to capture respondents' broader view on the proper level of EU involvement rather than a reaction to this specific policy.

Turning to our specific variables, for our analysis we first require a measure of public support for greater European integration to serve as our outcome variable. To this end, the variable *Support for More EU Authority* is based on responses to the following question:

²We would anticipate that this dynamic provides some external validity, as demand for EU intervention was perhaps strongest in many southern European countries with a weaker commitment to the EU and less advantaged institutional position in the EU than Germany.

TABLE 1 Timeline of Covid-19 Events

January 24	•	First EU Covid-19 case in France
February 24	•	EU announces EUR 232 million aid package to combat Covid-19
February 28	•	First joint procurement of personal protective equipment (PPE) by Commission and member states
March 3	•	French government announces it is taking control of production of PPE, requisitioning face masks, and capping the price of sanitizing gel
March 4	•	Germany announces export ban on PPE
March 6	•	EU health ministers hold emergency meeting and sharply criticize moves by France, Germany, Italy, and the Czech Republic to curb PPE exports
March 9	•	Germany reports first Covid-19 deaths
March 10	•	EU leaders meet via video conference and provide Commission mandate to step up Covid-19 response and coordinate member states
March 15	•	Germany restricts cross-border traffic from France, Switzerland, Austria, Denmark and Luxembourg
March 16	•	Chancellor Merkel announces measures severely restricting social gatherings and ordering the closure of non-essential businesses
March 18	•	Germany travel restrictions expanded to include EU citizens from Italy, Switzerland, Denmark, Luxembourg and Spain
March 19	•	Commission adopts temporary framework allowing member states full flexibility under state aid rules to support economy
March 23	•	German government decides on a financial aid package totalling around EUR 750 billion to mitigate the damage of Covid-19 on the economy (Approved by Bundestag on March 25 and Bundesrat on March 27)
April 2	•	Commission proposes EUR 100 billion fund to support workers and businesses (Approved by Council on May 19)
April 14	•	Commission activates Emergency Support Instrument in EU budget to provide EUR 2.7 billion in aid to member states' healthcare systems
April 15	•	Survey begins

Some have argued that the European Union needs greater authority to effectively confront major public health crises like the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, while others have criticized the European Union's response as evidence of its ineffectiveness. Do you

think that the federal government should grant the European Union more or less authority for confronting crises like the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak?³

Responses are coded using a three point scale where 1 indicates a preference for less EU authority, 2 a preference for no more or less EU authority, and 3 a preference for more EU authority. In contrast to standard Eurobarometer or European Social Survey questions used to measure support for the EU, the content and structure of this question provides direct insight into the connection between the pandemic and public support for expanding the EU’s jurisdiction over the specific policy area most closely related to the crisis. Moreover, the question does not prime respondents to focus on a specific proposal and instead captures a broader attitude toward the EU’s role in the crisis.⁴ In total, 849 respondents favored more EU authority, 1750 no more or less EU authority, and 950 less EU authority.⁵

Since our theoretical argument focuses on the linkage between the severity of a crisis and public support for a more empowered EU, our key explanatory variable is designed to capture each respondent’s level of concern for the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather than rely on geographically-tied data like the number of infections or deaths in a state or region, we use respondent-level data that directly captures their feelings about the pandemic. We do so with the question “Which, if any, of the following statements BEST describes your feelings towards contracting the Coronavirus (COVID-19)?” Respondents use the following four point scale to indicate how scared they are of contracting the virus: (1) I am not at all scared that I will contract the Coronavirus; (2) I am not

³To avoid potential ordering effects, respondents are randomly assigned either the quoted statement or one with the order of the first sentence reversed: “Some have criticized the European Union’s response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis as evidence of its ineffectiveness, while others have argued that the European Union needs greater authority to effectively confront such major public health crises.”

⁴As an example of why this distinction is useful to us, consider public opinion in Germany towards the EU project broadly construed and support EU-level policy making in the specific area of health and social welfare policy. While a majority of Germans generally support the former, public support for the latter is consistently lower in Eurobarometer surveys.

⁵The primary drawback to the wording of our DV is that for some respondents the abstract nature of the question increased the likelihood of a “Don’t Know” response. The “Don’t Know” option was selected by 850 (19.3%) respondents. In our main analysis we remove these responses, but as a robustness check we replicate our analyses after recoding “Don’t Know” responses as the middle category (a preference for no more or less EU authority). See appendix for results.

very scared that I will contract the Coronavirus; (3) I am somewhat scared that I will contract the Coronavirus; (4) I am very scared that I will contract the Coronavirus.⁶ Following the logic of the first hypothesis, we anticipate a higher values of this variable, which we label *COVID-19 Concern*, to correspond with greater support for granting the EU greater authority over making public health policy.

For our second hypothesis, we use respondents' self-placement on a 10 point left-right ideological scale with 1 the furthest left and 10 the furthest right. Following the logic of our second hypothesis, we interact this variable, *Left-Right Placement* with *COVID-19 Concern*. As scholars have noted that opposition to EU integration tends to be greater in Germany among those on the right than those on the left of the ideological spectrum (e.g., [Van Elsas and Van Der Brug 2015](#)), we expect the effect of *COVID-19 Concern* to be greater for more ideologically right-leaning respondents than their left-leaning counterparts. Consequently, we anticipate a positive and statistically significant interaction term.

In addition, we include a series of political and demographic control variables. For demographics, we account for respondents' gender, year of birth, whether they have a university degree, level of income, whether they live in an urban, suburban or rural area, their state of residence, and whether they lived under the former East German regime. To address the potential for confounding by political attitudes, we control for respondents' confidence in the Federal government (3-point scale), whether respondents agreed with the statement "I don't think the German Government should take any measures" in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, whether respondents would consider voting for the Alternative for Germany (4-point scale), and how closely they have been following news about COVID-19 (4-point scale).⁷

Since our outcome variable is ranked from supportive to neutral to opposed of more EU policy making, we estimate ordered logistic regressions both with and without control variables to evaluate our hypotheses.⁸ We include respondent weights, which were post-stratified on 2017 Gen-

⁶Respondents could also answer "Don't Know" or indicate that they already had been infected with COVID-19. However, very few - 88 and 26 respectively - did so.

⁷See appendix for descriptive statistics.

⁸For robustness we also estimate OLS regressions. See appendix for results.

eral Election vote choice and a stratification of gender, state, age (4-categories), and education (4-categories).

Results

The results of our analysis are presented in Table 2. As indicated by both Model 1 and Model 2 and predicted by Hypothesis 1, respondents' concern of contracting COVID-19 corresponds to their views on expanding or contracting the EU's policy making authority to confront the crisis. Specifically, support for having the German government delegate more competencies to the EU increases as fear of contracting the virus grows. In contrast, those with little concern for COVID-19 were substantially more likely to oppose granting the EU greater authority. Importantly, this statistical relationship holds after controlling for potential confounding demographic and political variables.⁹

To evaluate the substantive significance of this relationship, we estimate the predicted probability of favoring or opposing more EU authority based on *COVID-19 Concern*. Figure 1 presents these estimations based on Model 1. Consider first the probability of supporting greater EU authority, as represented by the black line in the figure. This probability stands at only 17% for those not at all concerned about contracting COVID-19. However, the likelihood of supporting more EU-level policy making increases to 29% for those somewhat scared of the virus and to 37% for those most concerned. Conversely, the probability of opposing expanded EU competencies reaches 35% for those least concerned by COVID-19 while the probability of such an attitude for those most concerned is only 16%. Although attenuated by the inclusion of control variables in Model 2, the magnitude of our result in that model remains substantial with the predicted probability of supporting greater EU authority increasing from 18% to 26% across the range of *COVID-19 Concern*.¹⁰

⁹While not the focus of this study, we do note a few interesting results regarding our controls. The negative coefficient for *Income* stands in contrast to previous research linking higher income with greater support for European integration (e.g., Gabel and Whitten 1997). The lack of a statistically significant coefficient for education similarly differs from past findings (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2005), but comports with some recent scholarship (e.g., Hakhverdian et al. 2013).

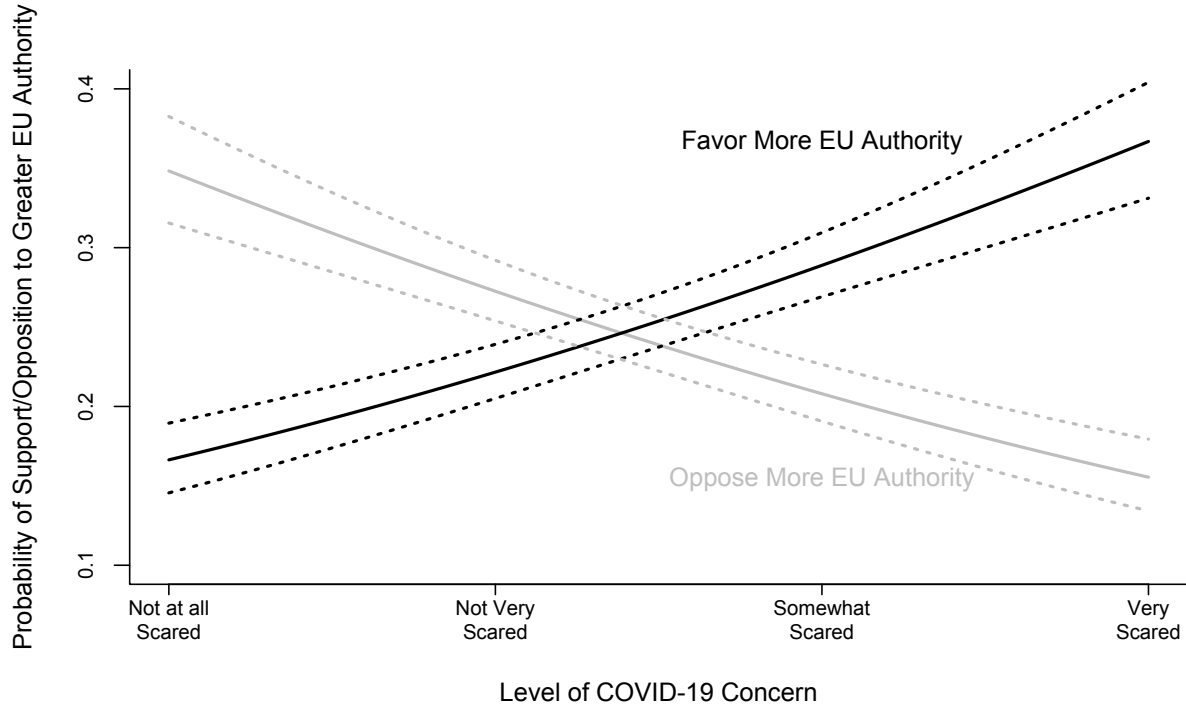
¹⁰The probability of opposing more EU authority decreases from 24% to 18% across the range of *COVID-19 Concern*.

Table 2: Ordered Logistic Regressions of Support for Expanded EU Authority

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
COVID-19 Concern	0.355*** (0.043)	0.150*** (0.048)	-0.077 (0.121)	-0.094*** (0.022)
Left-Right Placement		-0.089*** (0.026)	-0.418*** (0.056)	-0.203*** (0.028)
COVID-19 Concern × Left-Right Placement			0.079*** (0.022)	0.047*** (0.008)
University/College Degree		-0.121 (0.091)		-0.123 (0.090)
Income		-0.037** (0.015)		-0.037** (0.015)
Female		-0.032 (0.080)		-0.029 (0.080)
Suburban		-0.171* (0.091)		-0.170* (0.091)
Rural		-0.014 (0.091)		-0.017 (0.091)
Former East German Resident		0.034 (0.087)		0.031 (0.087)
Confidence in Federal Gov't		-0.462*** (0.060)		-0.459*** (0.059)
COVID-19 Attentiveness		0.160** (0.062)		0.159** (0.063)
Year of Birth		0.014*** (0.0002)		0.014*** (0.0002)
Oppose Any Federal COVID-19		-1.245*** (0.006)		-1.220*** (0.006)
Consider Voting for AfD		-0.468*** (0.048)		-0.467*** (0.048)
Intercept 1 2	-0.2712*** (0.1138)	24.7821*** (0.0043)	-2.7166*** (0.3529)	23.7018*** (0.0035)
Intercept 2 3	1.9668*** (0.1202)	27.3754*** (0.0621)	-0.3919 (0.3491)	26.2963*** (0.0620)
State Fixed Effects?	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	3,448	2,670	2,696	2,670

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors in parentheses. Urban is the reference category for Suburban and Rural coefficients.

Figure 1: Concern for COVID-19 and Support for Further European Integration

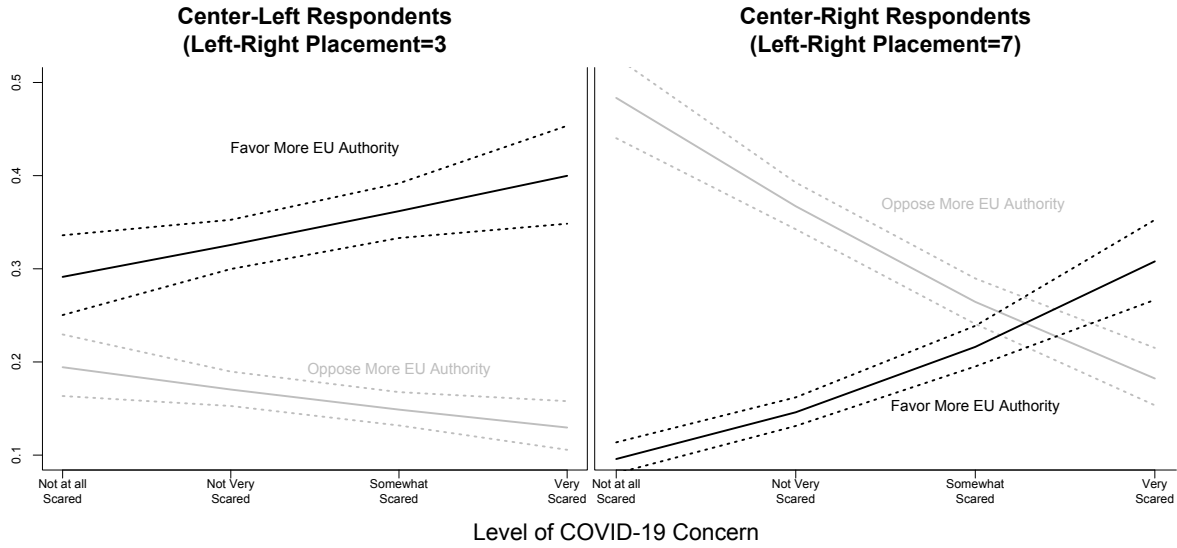


Based on Model 1. Dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Probability of selecting the middle option of “No more or less authority to the EU” is omitted from the figure.

We turn now to our second hypothesis, which predicted the effect of *COVID-19 Concern* to be greater for right-leaning respondents than left-leaning respondents. As indicated by the positive coefficient for the interaction term between *COVID-19 Concern* and *Left-Right Placement*, we find support for this expectation. That is, the effect of concern for contracting COVID-19 on support for more EU policy making authority increases as respondents become more conservative. Substantively, this suggests that the pandemic’s effect on opinion towards the EU may be more pronounced among those most predisposed to being Euroskeptic. In contrast, the pandemic appears to have relatively limited effect on the vies of those on the left of the ideological spectrum who are more likely to have supported EU integration prior to the crisis.

Figure 2 illustrates this dynamic by considering the predicted probabilities of supporting or opposing more EU authority conditional on being a center-right (*Left-Right Placement*=7) or center-

Figure 2: Concern for COVID-19, Ideology and Support for Further European Integration



Based on Model 3. Dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Probability of selecting the middle option of “No more or less authority to the EU” is omitted from the figure.

left (Left-Right Placement=3) respondent.¹¹ Consider first the left portion of the figure, which presents the predicted probabilities for a center-left respondent. For such respondents, fear of contracting COVID-19 has a relatively limited effect on support or opposition for more EU policy making authority.¹² However, such respondents also appear to simply have an across the board higher likelihood to support more EU authority. This contrasts with the right portion of the figure, which presents the predicted probabilities for a center-right respondent. In this case, we see a clear effect of *COVID-19 Concern* on attitudes towards the EU. For those not at all concerned about the virus, the likelihood of support for more EU authority barely reaches 10% while the probability of opposition to greater EU is 46%. As concern rises, however, we see support for more EU authority grow substantially and eventually become more likely than opposition to empowering the EU (31% compared to 18%). In short, the effect of the pandemic on attitudes towards the EU appears to be conditioned by ideology.

¹¹This roughly corresponds to one standard deviation (1.78) above and below the mean (4.98).

¹²Specifically, going from “not at all scared” to “very scared” increases the likelihood of favoring more EU authority from 29% to 40% and decreases the likelihood of opposition from 19% to 13%.

Conclusion

A number of crises - Brexit, the refugee crisis, the Eurozone crisis - have profoundly shaped how the European public views the European Union. With the continued success of the European experiment increasingly dependent on the goodwill of the bloc's citizens, understanding the consequences of such crises for the EU's public standing has become a central question for both scholars and policymakers alike. In this article, we argue that the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic similarly has influenced support for more European integration, with those most concerned about contracting the virus more likely to support empowering the European Union than those unconcerned by the pandemic. We then extended our account to consider the implications of ideology for the pandemic's effect on attitudes, with the prediction that the effect will be greater for those ideologically predisposed to opposing EU integration. Analysis of an original survey of 4400 Germans fielded in April and May 2020 conformed with these expectations.

These results have several implications for both the EU's shorter term effectiveness at responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and long term prospects. For one, our results suggest public support for EU action to control COVID-19 and its economic impacts is partially a function of the severity of the pandemic. This new source of public support may have already contributed to the decision by member states to empower the European Council by adopting an unprecedented 750 billion euro stimulus package in which member states will sell collective bonds to help offset the economic impact in the hardest hit member states ([European Council 2020](#)). Member states have extensively debated issuing collective bonds - or "Eurobonds" - in the past without reaching agreement (e.g., [Matthijs and McNamara 2015](#)). The issuing of temporary Eurobonds to help solve the crisis may generate momentum for such a policy to become permanent, which would represent a massive step towards European fiscal integration. Similarly, public support for EU intervention in other policy areas, particularly regarding public health, may lead to EU citizens supporting granting the EU more permanent authority.

Our finding relating to the conditioning role of ideology similarly highlights the insights we can glean with survey data collected in the early stages of the pandemic. While we demonstrate that in Germany support for EU authority increased among right-wing voters concerned about the virus, in other member states we may see such an increase from the left. For example, Pablo Iglesias,

the Second Deputy Prime Minister and leader of the left-wing populist euroskeptical Podemos party in Spain, heaped strong praise on German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the European Council for agreeing to the economic recovery fund in July 2020 (Hedgecoe 2020). This support stands in stark contrast to the party’s euroskeptical foundations in the aftermath of the global financial crisis (Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro 2018). We may expect, similarly, that left-wing populists in Spain that were previously less favorable towards further EU authority were more likely to support increased EU intervention during the early months of the crisis. Such dynamics may be present in other EU member states, as polling by the European Council on Foreign Relations in June 2020 found that across the EU “large majorities of people in all surveyed countries say that they are now more firmly convinced of the need for further EU cooperation than they were before the crisis” (Krastev and Leonard 2020). Our results suggest that this increase in support for EU cooperation may include shifts in the views of ideological constituencies in member states traditionally skeptical of EU integration.

Our study additionally highlights potential avenues for future research on the dynamics of public support for European integration. Perhaps most significantly, this study cannot distinguish between a long term shift in attitudes and a more ephemeral one that may fade over the course of the pandemic and after. While even a short-lived increase in public support can, and likely already has, have significant consequences for how the EU responds to the crisis and moves forward, understanding the longer term dynamic between the pandemic and attitudes towards the EU remains an important question to address. Furthermore, future research can see if crisis exposure predicts future electoral outcomes. If constituencies with greater exposure to COVID-19 are more likely to support European integration, we may expect these constituencies to more reliably vote for parties supporting European integration in the future relative to constituencies with less exposure. Finally, our results speak to the dynamics of public support for international and regional organizations beyond Europe (Schlippak 2015). The global nature of some crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic makes such institutions similarly susceptible to seeing their public standing affected, and the theoretical and empirical account presented here suggests one testable hypothesis for this broader impact.

References

- Abbott, Kenneth W, Robert O Keohane, Andrew Moravcsik, Anne-Marie Slaughter and Duncan Snidal. 2000. "The Concept of Legalization." *International Organization* 54(3):401–419.
- Alesina, Alberto and Nicola Fuchs-Schündeln. 2007. "Good-Bye Lenin (or Not?): The Effect of Communism on People's Preferences." *American Economic Review* 97(4):1507–1528.
- Borzel, Tanja A. 2002. "Member State Responses to Europeanization." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40(2):193–214.
- Carey, Sean. 2002. "Undivided Loyalties Is National Identity an Obstacle to European Integration?" *European Union Politics* 3(4):387–413.
- Daniele, Gianmarco and Benny Geys. 2015. "Public support for European fiscal integration in times of crisis." *Journal of European Public Policy* 22(5):650–670.
- De Vries, Catherine E and Sara B Hobolt. 2012. "When dimensions collide: The electoral success of issue entrepreneurs." *European Union Politics* 13(2):246–268.
- Deflem, Mathieu and Fred C. Pampel. 1996. "The myth of postnational identity: Popular support for European unification." *Social Forces* 75(1):119–143.
- Dellmuth, Lisa Maria and Jonas Tallberg. 2015. "The social legitimacy of international organisations: Interest representation, institutional performance, and confidence extrapolation in the United Nations." *Review of International Studies* 41:451–475.
- Erlanger, Steven. 2020. "Merkel and Macron Propose E.U. Coronavirus Aid Fund - The New York Times."
- URL:** <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/18/world/europe/coronavirus-european-union-fund.html>
- European Commission. 2020. "COVID-19: Commission presents guidelines for border measures to protect health and keep goods and essential services available."
- URL:** https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip20_468

European Council. 2020. “Special meeting of the European Council (17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 July 2020) – Conclusions.”

URL: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu//media/45109/210720-euco-final-conclusions-en.pdf>

Fuchs-Schündeln, Nicola and Paolo Masella. 2016. “Long-Lasting Effects of Socialist Education.” *The Review of Economics and Statistics* 98(3):428–441.

Gabel, Matthew. 1998. “Public Support for European Integration: An Empirical Test of Five Theories.” *Journal of Politics* 60(2):333–354.

Gabel, Matthew and Guy D Whitten. 1997. “Economic Conditions, Economic Perceptions, and Public Support for European Integration.” *Political Behavior* 19(1):81–96.

Gabel, Matthew and Harvey D Palmer. 1995. “Understanding variation in public support for European integration.” *European Journal of Political Research* 27(1):3–19.

Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro, Margarita and Carolina Plaza-Colodro. 2018. “Populist Euroscepticism in Iberian party systems.” *Politics* 38(3):344–360.

URL: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0263395718762667>

Guinaudeau, Isabelle and Tinette Schnatterer. 2019. “Measuring Public Support for European Integration across Time and Countries: The ‘European Mood’ Indicator.”

Hakhverdian, Armen, Erika Van Elsas, Wouter Van der Brug and Theresa Kuhn. 2013. “Euroscepticism and education: A longitudinal study of 12 EU member states, 1973–2010.” *European Union Politics* 14(4):522–541.

Hangartner, Dominik, Elias Dinas, Moritz Marbach, Konstantinos Matakos and Dimitrios Xefteris. 2019. “Does Exposure to the Refugee Crisis Make Natives More Hostile?” *American Political Science Review* 113(2):442–455.

Hedgecoe, Guy. 2020. “Spain’s Iglesias sees EU moving his way on economic policy – POLITICO.”
URL: <https://www.politico.eu/article/spain-podemos-pablo-iglesias-sees-eu-moving-his-way-on-economic-policy/>

- Hobolt, Sara B. 2016. "The Brexit vote: a divided nation, a divided continent." *Journal of European Public Policy* 23(9):1259–1277.
- Hobolt, Sara B and Catherine E De Vries. 2016. "Public Support for European Integration." *Annual Review of Political Science* 19:413–432.
- Hobolt, Sara B and Christopher Wratil. 2015. "Public opinion and the crisis: the dynamics of support for the euro." *Journal of European Public Policy* 22(2):238–256.
- Hooghe, Liesbet and Gary Marks. 2005. "Calculation, Community and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration." *European Union Politics* 6(4):419–443.
- Hooghe, Liesbet and Gary Marks. 2009. "A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus." *British Journal of Political Science* 39(1):1–23.
- Kelemen, R. Daniel. 2017. "Europe's Other Democratic Deficit: National Authoritarianism in Europe's Democratic Union." *Government and Opposition* 52(2):211–238.
- König, Thomas, Moritz Marbach and Moritz Osnabrügge. 2017. "Left/Right or U? Estimating the Dimensionality of National Party Competition in Europe." *Journal of Politics* 79(3):1105–1105.
- Krastev, Ivan and Mark Leonard. 2020. "Europe's pandemic politics: How the virus has changed the public's worldview – European Council on Foreign Relations."
URL: https://ecfr.eu/publication/europes_pandemic_politics_how_the_virus_has_changed_the_publics_worldview/
- Kuhn, Theresa and Florian Stoeckel. 2014. "When European integration becomes costly: the euro crisis and public support for European economic governance." *Journal of European Public Policy* 21(4):624–641.
- Llamazares, Iván and Wladimir Gramacho. 2007. "Eurosceptics among Euroenthusiasts: An analysis of Southern European public opinions." *Acta Politica* 42(2-3):211–232.
- Lubbers, Marcel and Peer Scheepers. 2010. "Divergent trends of euroscepticism in countries and regions of the European Union." *European Journal of Political Research* 49(6):787–817.

- Matthijs, Matthias and Kathleen Mcnamara. 2015. "The Euro Crisis' Theory Effect: Northern Saints, Southern Sinners, and the Demise of the Eurobond." *Journal of European Integration* 37(2):229–245.
- McLaren, Lauren. 2007. "Explaining mass-level euroscepticism: Identity, interests, and institutional distrust." *Acta Politica* 42(2-3):233–251.
- Moravcsik, Andrew. 1993. "Preferences and Power in the European Community: A Liberal Inter-governmentalist Approach." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31(4):473–524.
- Schlipphak, Bernd. 2015. "Measuring attitudes toward regional organizations outside Europe." *Review of International Organizations* 10:351–375.
- Steenbergen, Marco R and Gary Marks. 2007. "Evaluating expert judgments." *European Journal of Political Research* 46(3):347–366.
- Van Elsas, Erika and Wouter Van Der Brug. 2015. "The changing relationship between left-right ideology and euroscepticism, 1973-2010." *European Union Politics* 16(2):194–215.

Supplementary Analyses

Descriptive Statistics. Table 3 provides descriptive statistics for the variables used in models 1 and 2.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Pctl(25)	Pctl(75)	Max
Support for More EU Authority	3,549	2.028	0.712	1.000	2.000	3.000	3.000
COVID-19 Concern	4,235	2.647	0.833	1.000	2.000	3.000	4.000
University/College Degree	4,161	4.076	0.875	1.000	4.000	5.000	5.000
Female	4,400	1.517	0.500	1	1	2	2
Year of Birth	4,400	1970	17.475	1929	1954	1985	2001
Income Level	3,556	5.675	2.740	1.000	4.000	8.000	12.000
Consider Voting for AfD	4,070	1.546	1.033	1.000	1.000	1.000	4.000
Urban/Suburban/Rural	4,399	1.891	0.838	1.000	1.000	3.000	3.000
Former East Germany Resident	4,389	1.807	0.395	1.000	2.000	2.000	2.000
Confidence in Federal Gov't	4,390	2.080	0.882	1.000	1.000	3.000	4.000
Left-Right Placement	4,381	4.961	1.736	1.000	4.000	6.000	10.000
COVID-19 Attentiveness	4,400	1.766	0.739	1	1	2	4
Oppose Any Federal COVID-19 Response	4,400	1.960	0.196	1	2	2	2

Note: Does not include “Don’t Know” and skipped responses.

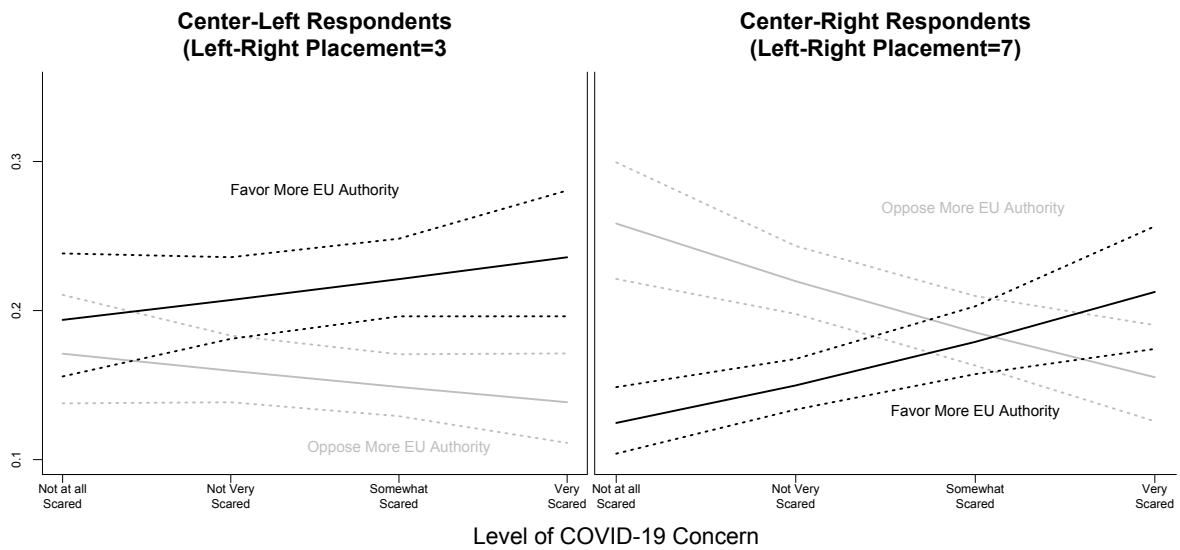
Re-Categorizing Don't Know Responses. As we noted in the discussion of our data and variables, nearly 20% of respondents answered “Don't Know” to our dependent variable question on support for greater EU authority. In our primary analysis we excluded those respondents, but to ensure that this approach has not adversely affected our main finding we replicate the ordered logit models with “Don't Know” responses recoded as the middle category, “No more or less EU authority.” As is evident from the results of these models presented in Table 4, our findings are largely robust to this alternative approach for dealing with Don't Know responses. We do note that in model 4A, the interaction term fails to reach a standard level of statistical significance. If we examine the predicted probabilities estimated from this model to get a better sense of the substantive dynamic (see figure below), however, we see a relationship between ideology, concern for COVID-19 and support for EU policy making that is consistent with our second hypothesis.

Table 4: Ordered Logistic Regressions of Support for Expanded EU Authority with Re-categorized “Don’t Know” Responses

	Model 1A	Model 2A	Model 3A	Model 4A
COVID-19 Concern	0.326*** (0.041)	0.152*** (0.045)	-0.067 (0.125)	-0.014 (0.133)
Left-Right Placement		-0.086*** (0.024)	-0.391*** (0.058)	-0.163** (0.064)
COVID-19 Concern × Left-Right Placement			0.073*** (0.023)	0.032 (0.024)
University/College Degree		-0.129 (0.089)		-0.129 (0.089)
Income		-0.040*** (0.014)		-0.040*** (0.014)
Female		-0.048 (0.075)		-0.047 (0.075)
Suburban		-0.152* (0.085)		-0.152* (0.086)
Rural		-0.001 (0.086)		-0.002 (0.086)
Former East Germany Resident		0.060 (0.081)		0.058 (0.081)
Confidence in Federal Gov’t		-0.462*** (0.056)		-0.461*** (0.056)
COVID-19 Attentiveness		0.134** (0.055)		0.132** (0.056)
Year of Birth		0.013*** (0.0002)		0.013*** (0.0002)
Oppose Any Federal COVID-19 Response		-0.831*** (0.006)		-0.808*** (0.010)
Consider Voting for AfD		-0.433*** (0.045)		-0.431*** (0.045)
Intercept 1 2	-0.6073*** (0.1044)	22.6987*** (0.0030)	-2.6903*** (0.2816)	22.0036*** (0.0091)
Intercept 2 3	2.1547*** (0.1114)	25.7022*** (0.0625)	0.1465 (0.2783)	25.0074*** (0.0642)
State Fixed Effects?	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	4,220	3,112	4,201	3,112

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors in parentheses. Urban is the reference category for Suburban and Rural coefficients.

Robustness Analysis: Predicted Probability of Support for More EU Authority with Recoded Don't Know Responses



Based on Model 4A. Dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Probability of selecting the middle option of “No more or less authority to the EU” is omitted from the figure.

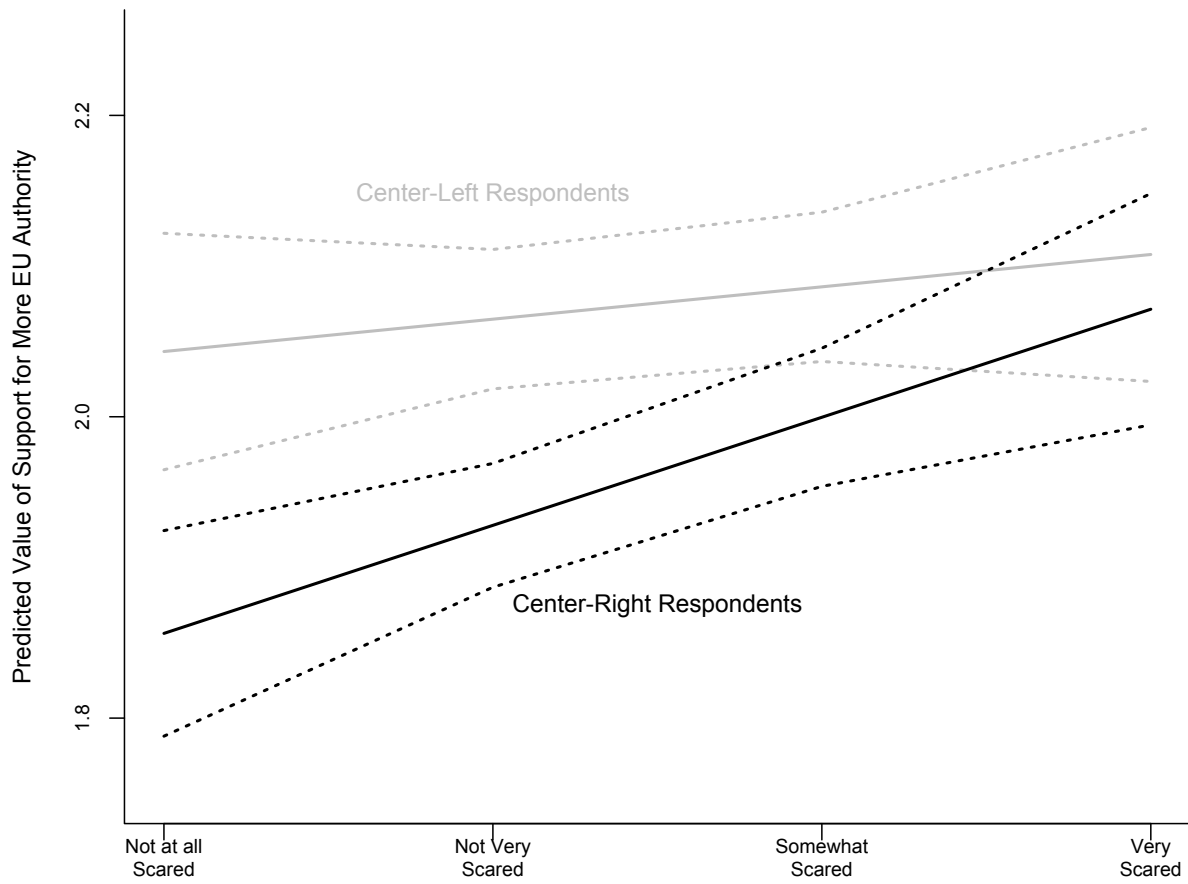
OLS Regressions. As a further robustness check of our result, we re-estimate Model 1 and 2 using OLS. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 5. Similar to the previous robustness analysis, we find that the interaction term in the fully specified model (Model 4B) does not reach standard levels of statistical significance. Again, however, we see that the dynamic predicted by our second hypothesis is present when we examine the predicted values (see figure below).

Table 5: OLS Regressions of Support for Expanded EU Authority

	Model 1B	Model 2B		
COVID-19 Concern	0.128*** (0.014)	-0.020 (0.041)	0.050*** (0.016)	-0.016 (0.044)
University/College Degree			-0.038 (0.030)	-0.039 (0.030)
Left-Right Placement		-0.145*** (0.019)	-0.029*** (0.008)	-0.059*** (0.021)
COVID-19 Concern × Left-Right Placement		0.027*** (0.007)		0.013 (0.008)
Income			-0.012** (0.005)	-0.012** (0.005)
Female			-0.007 (0.026)	-0.006 (0.026)
Suburban			-0.053* (0.031)	-0.053* (0.031)
Rural			-0.005 (0.032)	-0.006 (0.032)
Former East Germany Resident			0.010 (0.041)	0.009 (0.041)
Confidence in Federal Gov't			-0.159*** (0.019)	-0.159*** (0.019)
COVID-19 Attentiveness			0.050** (0.019)	0.049** (0.019)
Year of Birth			0.004*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)
Oppose Any Federal COVID-19 Response			-0.328*** (0.072)	-0.318*** (0.072)
Consider Voting for AfD			-0.143*** (0.015)	-0.142*** (0.015)
Constant	1.696*** (0.035)	2.468*** (0.107)	-6.255*** (1.476)	-5.953*** (1.488)
State Fixed Effects?	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	3,479	3,468	2,713	2,713

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Standard errors in parentheses.
Urban is the reference category for Suburban and Rural coefficients.

Figure 3: Robustness Analysis: Predicted Values of Support for More EU Authority (OLS Models)



Based on Model 4B. Dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. Probability of selecting the middle option of “No more or less authority to the EU” is omitted from the figure.