

Attributing Blame? Evidence from Multilevel Governments in Europe

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- This is a working paper
- that emphasizes the relevance of a set of null and fringe findings
- regarding a very unexplored set of questions in the EES Voter Study
- with substantial and methodological implications

Motivation: Democratic accountability in multilevel contexts

- ▶ General statement: Decentralization challenges democratic control by blurring responsibility attribution
- ▶ Theoretical discrepancy regarding the causal mechanism
 - ① Classical reward-punishment model: vertical fragmentation of powers generates confusion among voters and the probability of ending up administering sanctions in a random way increases (Cutler 2004, Anderson 2006)
 - ② Voters are aware of central government's decreased authority and assign less weight to the economy in their votes (Dutch and Stevenson 2008)
 - ③ Yet, most of the variation is at the individual level! What about group-serving bias?

- ▶ The effect of partisanship
 - ▶ Government partisans are very likely to deny their government's responsibility for a bad situation, while taking credit for a good one, and viceversa for opposition partisans (among others, Rudolph 2003, Malhotra and Kuo 2008, Marsh and Tilley 2010 and Tilley and Hobolt 2011)
- ▶ In multilevel contexts
 - ▶ This process is accentuated
 - ▶ Individuals face the complexity of multilevel governance and low information regarding *who does what* by using partisan rationalizations more intensely (Cutler 2008, Brown 2010)
 - ▶ With the exception of Hobolt and Tilley's (2013, 2014) analysis about EU level attributions, this research is case specific

- ▶ EES Voter Study since 1999
 - ▶ Perceived and preferred levels of government to deal with a country's "most important problem" (MIP)

	2004		2009		2014	
	Perceived	Preferred	Perceived	Preferred	Perceived	Preferred
Regional	19.62	22.22	14.82	14.63	12.48	9.46
National	63.70	57.43	53.55	51.10	64.60	57.96
European	16.68	20.34	31.63	34.27	22.91	32.50
Observation	18,664	19,450	21,889	23,364	21,502	24,277

- ▶ Regardless of the level of decentralization or integration in each country
- ▶ Opportunity to attribute responsibility to a SINGLE and MOST responsible level for a negative outcome or a policy failure (Rudolph 2003, Malhotra and Kup 2008, Brown 2010)
- ▶ A large comparative and unexplored sample of citizens attributing blame among levels of government

What are the MIPs

- ▶ The problem at the top of the list of an individual and the “plurality important problem winner” at the aggregate
- ▶ They reflect variation in problem status
- ▶ Example: as the 2009 EES Voter Study shows, when economy worsens “economic mentions” increase
- ▶ What they are not (Wlezien 2005, Jennings and Wlezien 2011 and 2015)
 - ▶ They are not good measures of the changing importance of issues to the public over time
 - ▶ They are not public policy preferences registering support for government action
 - ▶ People may not want more policy in response to bad conditions
 - ▶ People may want more policy even if conditions are good

Multinomial logistic regression

- DV: Three mutually exclusive government level choices
- We focus on 2004, 2009, and 2014 cross-sections

Accounting for group-serving bias in the EU

- **Partisans of national incumbent(s)**
 - Should tend to blame significantly more regional and European levels of government for policy failures (national base category)
- **EU supporters**
 - Should tend to blame significantly more regional and national levels of government for policy failures (European base category)

Controlling for

- Respondents' age, gender, education, occupational status, level of information, interest in politics...

Table: Partisans of national incumbent(s) parties

Independent Variables	Model 1 - 2004		Model 1 - 2009		Model 1 - 2014	
	Ref. category: National Level		Ref. category: National Level		Ref. category: National Level	
	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. European Level	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. European Level	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. European Level
Incumbents' Partisan	-.275** (.128)	-.071 (.095)	-.090 (.078)	.060 (.053)	-.189** (.081)	.009 (.071)
constant	-1.502*** (.405)	-.775** (.314)	-1.612*** (.289)	-.063 (.259)	-11.00** (4.457)	-14.95*** (3.35)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Number of countries	20		27		28	
Observations	12,575		18,336		17,397	

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ | Standard errors clustered by country

Table: Supporters of the EU

Independent Variables	Model 2 - 2004		Model 2 - 2009		Model 2 - 2014	
	Ref. category: European Level		Ref. category: European Level		Ref. category: European Level	
	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. National Level	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. National Level	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. National Level
Europhiles	-.1497** (.138)	.068 (.076)	-.149* (.077)	-.084 (.066)	-.234*** (.085)	-.098* (.063)
constant	-.647 (.076)	.667** (.276)	-1.463*** (.273)	.0868 (.234)	2.60 (4.763)	15.45*** (3.52)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Number of countries	21		27		28	
Observations	14,058		20,051		19,568	

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ | Standard errors clustered by country

- Are ‘in group’ respondents behaving as if, rather than assigning blame, they would have to select which is the most important level of government?
- If so, what is the difference between “perceived” and “preferred” level questions?

Table: Partisans of national incumbent(s) parties

Independent Variables	Model 3 - 2004		Model 3 - 2009		Model 3 - 2014	
	Ref. category: National Level		Ref. category: National Level		Ref. category: National Level	
	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. European Level	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. European Level	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. European Level
Incumbents' Partisan	-.059 (.144)	.065 (.083)	-.0002 (.064)	.130 (.084)	-.076 (.071)	.184*** (.072)
constant	-.851** (.395)	-.047** (.337)	-1.495*** (.291)	.115 (.259)	-13.01** (4.009)	-18.71*** (3.76)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Number of countries	20		27		28	
Observations	13,936		19,580		19,568	

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ | Standard errors clustered by country

Table: Supporters of the EU

Independent Variables	Model 4 - 2004		Model 4 - 2009		Model 4 - 2014	
	Ref. category: European Level		Ref. category: European Level		Ref. category: European Level	
	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. National Level	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. National Level	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. National Level
Europhiles	-.479*** (.134)	-.295*** (.090)	-.516*** (.095)	-.437*** (.114)	-.378*** (.067)	-.413*** (.067)
constant	-.310 (.565)	.317 (.370)	-1.300*** (.294)	.137 (.247)	4.355 (4.351)	18,42*** (3.57)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Number of countries	21		27		28	
Observations	15,736		21,394		22,133	

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ | Standard errors clustered by country

Accounting for decentralization

Probability of assigning responsibility to regional governments (2009 EES)

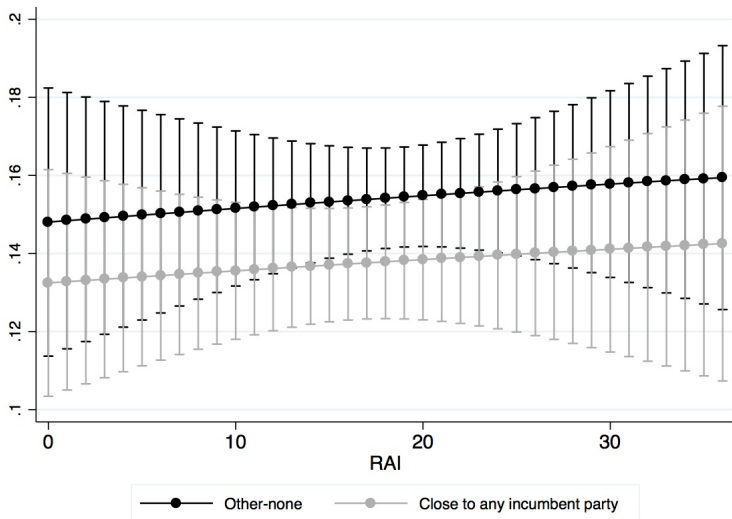


Table: Sample restricted to non-affiliated regions

Independent Variables	Model 6 - 2009		Model 6 - 2014	
	Ref. category: National Level		Ref. category: National Level	
	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. European Level	Attr. Resp. Regional Level	Attr. Resp. European Level
Incumbents'	.193	.097	.252	.081
Partisan	(.234)	(.393)	(.238)	(.277)
constant	-1.612 (1.547)	-.602 (.992)	10.63 (18.39)	-4.67 (10.20)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Number of countries	4		5	
Observations	588		1,063	

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$ | Standard errors clustered by country

- ▶ Results show very mixed behavioral patterns that question the generalizability of selective attribution models
 - ▶ Is this about MIPs? It could be... though supporters of the EU react to the perceived vs. preferred question
 - ▶ Is this a problem of our research design? It could be too... partisans also seem to react to different model specifications
- ▶ Data opportunity seems evident but what are these questions actually capturing?
 - ▶ In progress...

Thank You!