Working title:

The road to trust. An analysis of the factors determining citizens’ trust in the European Commission

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Introduction

Citizens’ trust in governmental institutions throughout Europe is faltering (Edelman, 2017), including the European Union (EU). Since 2009, which marked the beginning of the European sovereign debt crisis, all European institutions have been suffering from a continuous decline of citizens’ trust. Even Brexit, according to some commentators, was even perceived as an ‘Incarnate Trust Defeat’ (Edelman, 2017; Oliver, 2016). This is a worrisome development for European integration since scholars generally agree that citizens’ trust in political institutions is necessary for the functioning of a political system (cf. Hetherington, 1998). And, others have argued that low levels of political trust undermine citizens’ willingness to make material and ideological sacrifices (Chanley, 2002; Hetherington and Husser, 2012). In line with this more general literature on the level of trust in institutions and according consequences of low trust, it has been argued that for the EU in particular, unstable trust in European institutions threatens effective governance as well as an efficient functioning of the community per se (Hix, 2013; Levi, 1998; Tyler, 2001), strengthens anti-European movements (Rudolph and Popp, 2009) and may even lower compliance with EU regulations (Fard and Rostamy, 2007; Scholz and Lubell, 1998; Tyler, 1990; Tyler and Degoe, 1996). But while we possess solid information about the effects of trust, or lack of thereof, our understanding of the factors determining trust remain somewhat limited. We address this gap in this article and hope to thereby contribute to the more general debates on current EU crises.

Many studies have examined trust in European institutions (Arnold, et al., 2012;
Bolleyer and Smirnova, 2017; Dotti Sani and Magistro, 2016; Fischer and Hahn, 2008; Hix, 2013; Hudson, 2006; Kumlin, 2009; Muñoz, et al., 2011; Roth, et al., 2013). On closer inspection, three observations stand out: firstly, most empirical research focuses on the European Parliament (EP) (e.g., Dotti Sani and Magistro, 2016; Kumlin, 2009; Muñoz, et al., 2011). Yet, the European Commission (EC) is generally considered the most visible body representing Europe (Hartlapp, et al., 2014; Hix, et al., 2007; Kassim, et al., 2013) and is, due to its monopoly of legislative initiative, a powerful actor in the EU’s legislative decision making (Hörl, et al., 2005; Tsebelis and Garrett, 2001; Wonka, 2007). Secondly, most studies have relied on survey data provided by the Eurobarometer (e.g., Armingeon and Ceka, 2014; Roth, et al., 2013) and the European Social Survey (e.g., Dotti Sani and Magistro, 2016). In these surveys, trust is usually measured as an overall attitude towards an institution using a single-item indicator. This method is critical for two reasons: single-item measurements do not to check for validity and reliability; trust is situation-specific and situations cannot be adequately represented in a single item (Bauer and Freitag, 2017). Thirdly, most studies from a sociological and political science perspective have viewed trust as an attitudinal concept (e.g., Arnold, et al., 2012; Freitag and Ackermann, 2015; Roth, et al., 2013). Another branch of research, the behavioural economic literature (e.g., Gangl, et al., 2015b), focuses on the behavioural consequences of trust, i.e. on the question of whether trust can be turned into action. Since a political system can only be stable if citizens are willing to participate, it seems promising to combine the perspectives. Thus, in this paper trust will be understood as a necessary pre-condition for supportive potential behaviour towards the EC or the EU, more generally.

In reaction to the first and second observations above, here we present newly collected data on trust related to the EC. Addressing observation number two, we used measurement instruments with valid psychometric properties to capture citizens’ trust in the EC. Since we collected our own data, we could – against most current practices – use a multi-item measurement, in line with a prominent legacy initiated by Stokes (1962). Building on Buskens and
Weesie (2000) ideas, we conducted a factorial survey to analyse the cues for trust in different situational settings. Thereby, we not only offer a better understanding of the factors impacting trust in the EC but also introduce an alternative measurement for trust in political institutions.

In consideration of foreseeable criticisms towards synchronizing two branches of research, one mainly focusing on the attitudinal component and the other on the behavioural consequence of trust, we decided to measure both aspects in our survey: Trust is measured, as outlined above, using instruments with valid psychometric properties and the behavioural consequence is measured with a question regarding willingness to pay taxes.

The paper is organised as follows. In the next section, definitions, theoretical assumptions and hypotheses are presented. In the research design section, we motivate our choice for a vignette study and provide information on the data gathered from a sample of German citizens. We then test our hypotheses by means of clustered OLS regression models. The results are displayed and discussed in the final sections of the article.

Theory and hypotheses

While no one doubts the central role of trust in social theory, there is less agreement on its definition (see Becerra and Gupta 1999, Newton and Zmerli 2011, Bauer and Freitag 2017). We therefore first review the concept of political trust before differentiating political trust from related concepts. Then, we introduce the concept of risky investment as a behavioural consequence of trust. Finally, we develop our model and present those variables that should determine trust; and, in a second step, risky investment.

Political trust

For us, trust characterizes a relationship between a trustor – in our case, the citizens – and a trustee, i.e. the EC (Bauer and Fatke, 2014; Bauer and Freitag, 2017). In line with Levi and
Stoker (2000), we see trust as a psychological state involving the willingness to be vulnerable based on positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another party (Mayer, et al., 1995; Rousseau, et al., 1998). This willingness to be vulnerable is closely linked to positive beliefs about the other party: ‘the initial grant of trust depends on one persons’ evaluation that another will be trustworthy’ (Levi, 1998). In the case of political trust, the references of individual trust expectations are institutional actors and in this study the EC (see also Kotzian, 2011; McLaren, 2007). We thus distinguish trust from concepts, such as generalized trust (Uslaner, 2002), which describes an individual tendency to trust independent of a specific situation (Bauer and Freitag, 2017).

Since trust describes an expectation the trustor has about the trustee, a good conceptualisation and measurement of trust needs to capture both. A reasonable way to do so is to examine the trustor’s evaluation of the trustee’s trustworthiness. The literature distinguishes various dimensions of the trustor’s beliefs about the trustee. For instance, Uslaner (2002) found that trust comprises the belief in the goodwill of the other, which is closely linked with integrity, a term some authors (e.g., Catterberg and Moreno, 2005; Citrin and Green, 1986) have used to describe the trustee’s adherence to a set of moral principles in line with the trustor’s expectation (Mayer, et al., 1995). Furthermore, trust is also related to expectations of competence, performance, and ability (see also Citrin and Green, 1986; Das and Teng, 2001; Dekker, 2004; Sako, 1992). Together all these dimensions form an overall trust judgment.

**Risky investment as behavioural consequence of political trust**

We agree with researchers, like Bauer and Freitag (2017) and Hardin (2002), who have argued that trust describes a relationship that is located on an attitudinal rather than on a behavioural level. However, attitudinal trust alone is not enough for a political system to work. Citizens need to put their trust into action, such as by paying taxes (Gangl, et al., 2015b). Such
into-action-trusts have been linked to trust particularly in the way economists measure trust (Dasgupta, 1988); and this relationship is also modeled as an important element of the wider trust literature (Mayer, et al., 1995). Therefore, it is also important to consider ‘risky investments’ as a behavioural consequence of trust (cf. Deutsch, 1960; Kramer, 1990).

**What determines trust?**

As we have already outlined, numerous studies have identified the determinants of trust in political institutions. Yet, the literature is highly fragmented due to the heterogeneous theoretical conceptualisations of trust. Here, we focus on a few factors broadly acknowledged to determine trust in the EC, namely (I) political participation, (II) value congruence, (III) performance outcome and (IV) attributability of performance.

**Political participation.** We argue that political participation promotes political trust through two main avenues. Firstly, political participation provides citizens with some degree of control. Hence, with the ability to vote on practical issues or to elect representatives, more trustworthy individuals are selected into institutions and untrustworthy behaviour can be sanctioned. This strengthens trust in institutions as it gives citizens the power to control the decision-making process, at least indirectly (see Bauer and Fatke, 2014; Freitag and Ackermann, 2015; Schneider, et al., 1997; Slovic, 1993). Secondly, political participation leads to identification as it makes citizens experience how the institution values their opinions by means of public involvement and possibilities of voice (Tyler, 1990). Doteuchi (2002), addressing the link between participation, identification and political trust, finds that direct political participation in municipal governments enables people to feel a stronger connection to their town’s civil society. Finally, Cheema (2005) argued that ‘the possibility of being heard’ is key to trust in public institutions (see also Persson, et al., 2013). Moreover, Fennema and Tillie (1999) claimed that working together for the same goal leads to trust. Based on these argu-
ments, we therefore hypothesise:

**H1:** The more opportunities for an individual to exert political participation, the higher is his/her individual level of trust in the EC.

*Value congruence.* Ideological concerns also drive trust. More precisely, the perceived congruence of the citizens’ and the government’s values should reflect positively on trust. This positive effect of value congruence has been extensively discussed in organisation science research (Edwards and Cable, 2009; Elangovan and Shapiro, 1998; Jones and George, 1998; Siegrist, et al., 2000; Williams, 2001). Recently, the meaning of value congruence has also gained some momentum in political science (Anderson, 2010; Esaiasson, 2010; Kleiner and Bücker, 2014; Nelson and Garst, 2005). In this respect, people tend to appreciate those policies and candidates with which they perceive the greatest match of values (Katz and Hass, 1988; Kinder, 1998; Nelson and Garst, 2005). Shared core values act as a clear token for a more community-based relationship rather than exchange-oriented (see also Lewicki and Bunker, 1996). Shared values thus create a ‘community-feeling’ (Kehoe and Ponting, 2003; Sitkin and Roth, 1993) in which those who are viewed as belonging to the same community are expected to behave in a more trustworthy manner and to deserve more trust than those who are not. On the contrary, a lack of perceived value congruence between two parties is likely to make them distrust each other (Bouckaert, et al., 2002; Jones and George, 1998). Thus, our second hypothesis is as follows:

**H2:** The higher an individual’s perceived value congruence with the EC, the higher is his/her individual level of trust in the EC.

*Performance outcome.* It is uncontested in research on political trust that people trust those governments more that display beneficial performances. This trust arises because a bet-
ter performance of governments signals its competence. As such, citizens’ trust (and distrust) can also be seen as a rational response to governmental and policy outcomes (Chanley, 2002; Kleiner and Bücker, 2014; March, 1989; North, 1990). In addition, better performance might also be linked to goodwill in the sense that a well-performing government is able to further citizens’ wellbeing. Hence, a government that produces wanted outcomes will be perceived as more trustworthy. This relationship between performance and trust has been demonstrated recurrently, particularly when it comes to economic indicators: people evaluate performance according to their own financial status and to their perception of the state of the economy as a whole (Espinal, et al., 2006; Fiorina, 1978). The more successful the government in regard to meeting people’s needs – e.g. economic growth rate or the sufficient provision of public goods (for instance Alesina and Perotti, 1995; Van de Walle and Bouckaert, 2003) – the higher the people’s trust in the government (Citrin and Green, 1986; Hetherington, 1998). Other studies have shown that political performance – more broadly and in the sense of ‘being effective’ in task accomplishment (e.g. combating corruption, Lu, 2014; Mishler and Rose, 2001) or legislation (e.g. safeguarding domestic security, Chanley, 2002) – also has a positive effect on political trust. Thus, we propose this third hypothesis:

**H3:** The more positively an individual evaluates the EC’s performance outcomes, the higher is his/her individual level of trust in the EC.

**Attributability of performance outcomes.** The attributability of outcomes means that citizens perceive their government as unambiguously accountable for a certain result. A clear communication of ‘who is responsible for what’ enables citizens to evaluate outcomes and to distinguish those aspects the government controls from those it does not. This transparency enables citizens to quickly update their expectations and thereby promotes trust (Hupe and Edwards, 2012; Lu, 2014; Tomkins, 2001; Velez, et al., 2008).
In addition and if citizens can directly attribute performance outcomes, they will feel a lower risk in making themselves vulnerable towards a regulatory body as it gives them a sense of ‘being in control’ over decision-making processes. Hence, the way decisions are influenced becomes more transparent as well. We consider this mechanism to be particularly important in the context of multi-level EU governance, in which it often remains unclear as to which level holds responsibility for which outcome – especially considering the common practice of so-called ‘blame games’, wherein national governments claim policy success for themselves while shifting the responsibility for disagreeable policies to the European level (Bouckaert, et al., 2002). Thus, we postulate this fourth hypothesis:

**H4:** The clearer the attributability of the EC’s performance outcomes, the higher is the individual level of trust in the EC.

**Trust as a necessary condition for risky investments**

The trust literature assumes that such trust in action, also referred to as the behavioural component of trust, is associated with a feeling of reciprocal trustworthiness between parties, mostly argued as trust begets trust (Lewis and Weigert, 1985). This relationship between a trusting attitude and trust in action has also been explored in the literature on tax compliance or tax morale (Frey and Torgler, 2007; Gangl, et al., 2015b; Torgler, 2003). Positive trust attitudes towards public authorities are thought to reflect citizens’ beliefs that their money is well spent, the authority is competent and the actions and rules of the authorities are adjusted to the interests of the public, i.e. are well intentioned. These beliefs are viewed as strengthening tax moral and tax compliance, as one possible way to demonstrate trust in action. As such, we understand trust as a necessary pre-condition for a risky investment and accordingly assume that all the mechanisms outlined above also hold true for risky investments. Thus, we hypothesise the following:
H5: Political participation, value congruence, performance outcome and the attributability of performance outcomes are related to citizens’ risky investments in the same way as trust.

Alternatively, it might be true that trust is a necessary condition for risky investments. In that case, trust will act as a mediator in a regression model. Therefore, we postulate this sixth hypothesis:

H6: The effects of political participation, value congruence, performance outcome and the attributability of performance outcomes on citizens’ risky investments are mediated by trust.

Research design

We test our hypotheses with a factorial survey design, also known as vignette study, which is a special form of an experimental design. Vignettes are short stories, in which the independent variables, in our case political participation, value congruence, performance outcome, and the attributability of performance outcomes are randomly varied. Vignette studies combine the advantages of experimental and survey designs: The experimental logic allow for the focus on causal process by reducing problems of endogeneity, spurious correlation, or omitted variable (Tomz and Weeks, 2013). The survey context offers a more naturalistic setting than laboratory experiments (Gerber and Green, 2008; Sauer, et al., 2009). In the following subsections, we introduce the details of the vignette study design, the measurements of the variables, and the sampling procedure.

Design of the vignette study and measurement of the independent variables

In vignette studies the independent variables are operationalised through hypothetical, but
realistic short stories which respondents are asked to evaluate. Therefore, the vignette design allows capturing our concept of trust as we argue that trust is dependent on the situational setting. Vignettes can be based on a third person who acts within or witnesses the situation described in the short story. This is an example of one vignette used in our study:

Starting from the next legislative period, Mr. Maier will have the legal right to directly vote for the President of the European Commission 5-year incumbency.

Being on vacation in Hungary, Mr. Maier witnesses a violent repression by security forces of a peaceful demonstration for freedom of expression. Mr. Maier considers freedom of expression as highest value to be protected. Thus, he favors the European Commission initiative, whereupon Hungary should be severely sanctioned and, as an ultima ratio, banned from the European Union.

Mr. Maier wants to change his electricity provider. Due to a directive, initiated by the European Commission, he can now choose the most attractive one between providers from all over Europe.

Shopping in his local supermarket, Mr. Maier wants to choose between various meat products from all over Europe. A European Commission quality seal does warrant European standards of the product itself as well as of its production.

In our study, we have four independent variables hypothesised as drivers of political trust and represented in the vignettes. Each independent variable describes a condition which can be present (can be understood in experimental logic as treatment) or not (control). Table 1 shows the variation of the conditions for the independent variables. Thus, each independent variable can take on two values to be varied in the vignette, resulting in a $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ experimental setting. Hence, the total number of all possible vignettes is 16. Three of the 16 vignettes were randomly assigned and presented to each participant of the study. Results from our cognitive
and technical pretests suggested to show three vignettes to be the most effective way to avoid satisficing and comprehension problems of respondents.

Table 1: Overview of variations in the vignettes.

--- insert Table 1 about here ---

Measurements of the dependent variables

The dependent variables of goodwill and competence trust as well as the behavioural consequence of trust were measured with the following scales.

**Political trust.** Political trust in the EC was measured as a decomposed index of (1) goodwill trust and (2) competence trust (Mayer and Davis, 1999, see also Bøggild (2016) for a distinction between moral and pragmatic trust). In line with the work of Searle and colleagues (2011), all items were adapted to the institutional level and translated into German.¹ Using the scale of Searle and colleagues (2011) is justified for three reasons: content validity, criterion validity and reliability. In terms of content validity, a close inspection of the items presented in the online appendix does mirror the core of our trust definition. Accordingly, trust is conceptualized as a citizen’s willingness to be vulnerable based on his/her evaluation of the EC’s trustworthiness. Trustworthiness expectations, in turn, become manifest in citizens’ positive expectations related to the EC’s ability (i.e. competence and performance) and goodwill (i.e. benevolence and integrity perceptions). A sample item for ability reads: “*The European Commission is known to be successful at the things it tries to do*”. A sample item for goodwill-based trustworthiness expectations is: “*My needs and desires are very important to the European Commission*”. In terms of criterion validity, we refer to the work of Dietz

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¹ The complete scale is available in the online appendix.
and den Hartog (2006), who reviewed 14 established measures of trust. Results of their review show that trustworthiness beliefs (as in our case) are paramount for the explanation of trust-related behaviour. Also, they incorporate ability and goodwill intentions in the same measure in order to avoid serious measurement error because current psychometric trust measurement research lacks comprehensive insights on which contingency factors matter most for which trustworthiness beliefs. Finally, to examine if the two dimensions of goodwill and competence trust were identifiable, we performed a principal axis analysis (promax rotation) as well as structural equation modelling. Our CFA suggested that a one-factor model of political trust ($\chi^2 = 150.48$ (Prob > $\chi^2 = 0.000$); RMSEA: 0.144; CFI: 0.97, TLI: 0.95) is to be preferred over a two-factor model of goodwill- and competence-based trust (Pearson's correlation: $r = 0.93$). Cronbach’s alpha of the whole political trust scale ($\alpha = 0.95$) was satisfactory. The measurement model is presented in the online appendix.

**Risky investment.** We operationalised the trust-based behaviour of risky investment as a survey item asking for the percentage of overall taxes that citizens are willing to direct to the EC (instead of devoting the same amount to national taxes). We chose this indicator because tax morale has often been linked to trust-based positive expectations in governments (Scholz and Lubell, 1998). More precisely, we followed the idea of the ‘slippery slope framework’ rationale (Kirchler, et al., 2008), which is explicit in the positive relationship between trust as the psychological willingness to be vulnerable and trust-based risky behaviour (i.e. tax compliance, see Gangl, et al., 2015a; Gangl, et al., 2015b). In addition, taxes arguably do not depict a low-cost situation.

A comprehensive overview as well as the full list of survey items of our political trust measures are provided in the online appendix as are an overview on the control variables and the reasoning behind their selection.
Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix.

--- insert Table 2 about here ---

**Sampling**

From February 25th until March 10th 2013, the data was gathered. Thus, data collection took place shortly after the enforcement of the European Citizen’s Initiative, which allowed citizens to participate directly in the development of EU policies. However, the most prominent aspect of EU politics shortly before and during the time of the survey was the Eurozone crisis. For example, the European stability mechanism (ESM) and the European fiscal pact were have been established shortly before the survey. Thus, the data collection took when the EU was facing challenges but took actions.

The data was collected from SoSci Survey Panel Munich, which is an online access panel. Only German citizens were surveyed. Our gross sample was \( n = 617 \); the net sample consisted of 540 interviewees. Excluding all item- and unit-non-responses, the answers of 256 respondents remained. As mentioned above, we randomly presented three vignette to each study participant. Thus, we were able to analyse \( n = 256 \times 3 = 768 \) factorial cases, which were treated as units of analysis.

Descriptive statistics of our sample (see Table 2) include age (in decades), political orientation, sex, educational level and German Federal State of residence. Compared with the national distributions of the latter characteristics from the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, our sample predominantly consisted of young cohorts (25-39 years), left-oriented voters (German Green Party, DIE LINKE) as well as of a disproportionate level of higher educated people (BA-/MA-degree). Regarding sex and German Federal State of residence, the distribution within the sample corresponds to the Federal Statistical Office of Germany.
Analysis

We employed an OLS regression with clustered standard errors (SE). Clustered standard errors are a parsimonious way to control for the fact that each respondent answered three vignettes, which violates the OLS assumption of independence of the observations (see Dunning, 2012). Alternatively, multilevel mixed effects, i.e. linear regression models consisting of varying intercepts and slopes, could be applied (Auspurg and Hinz, 2015). However, our data did not allow for estimating varying intercepts and slopes; thus, we followed the approach of Mäs, et al. (2005), who supported models with clustered standard errors on the context level (in our case, the respondent level) as a suitable and efficient alternative. Since it could be argued that the scaling of the risky investment variable is not suitable for OLS regressions, we also estimated ordered logit models with clustered SEs.2

Results

The results of the regression analyses are displayed in Table 3. Model 1 shows the regression with the dependent variable (trust), the independent variables (political participation, value congruence, performance outcome, and attributability) and all control variables.3 In this model, value congruence, performance outcome, and attributability exert a strong, significant and positive impact on trust. This means that if citizens perceive a fit of values between the EC and themselves, their trust into the EC will increase by 0.53 on a scale ranging from 1 to 5. If performance outcome can be observed, trust increases by 0.21; and if it is attributable to the EC it is 0.29. Thus H2, H3 and H4 can be confirmed, whereby the effect of value congruence exerts the strongest effect. The effect of political participation is also positive but not significant. Thus, H1 cannot be confirmed. Hence, the right to vote does not seem to impact the citi-

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2 The results of these additional analyses are presented in the online appendix.
3 Model 5 is the same model however without control variables. It shows the same effects with one exception: political participation exerts a significant effect without control.
zens’ trust beliefs towards the EC. Model 2 presents the same regression, but the dependent variable is risky investment instead of trust. In this model, political participation is found to have a significant positive effect on risky investment, i.e. the behavioural consequence of trust: if citizens have the right to vote, the willingness to pay taxes to the EC increases by 0.19 on a 4-point-scale Value congruence and attributability of the performance outcome once again have a significant positive effect whereas performance outcome is no longer significant. Thus, H5 can only be partially confirmed.

To obtain a better understanding of whether trust is mediating the effect of value congruence, performance and attributability on risky investment, Models 3 and 4 present regression models with risky investment as the dependent variable and trust as the independent variable. In both models, trust as a belief has a significant and positive effect on risky investment. In Model 4, both value congruence and attributability are no longer significant in contrast to Model 2 in which political participation remains significant and positive under the control of trust. Hence, H6 can be partially confirmed. The effects of value congruence, performance outcome and attributability are all mediated by trust (as a belief) while political participation has only a direct influence on risky investment in a trust context.

Table 3: Results of the regression analyses.

--- insert Table 3 about here ---

**Conclusion**

The aim of our study was to investigate which factors drive citizens to trust the EC and then to determine if trust leads to the behavioural consequence of risky investment. Therefore, we identified four determinants of political trust from the literature and derived hypotheses ac-

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1. Model 6 is the same model however without control variables. It shows the same effects as the models with controls.
Accordingly. To test our hypotheses, we conducted a vignette study. We found that trust in the EC is strongly related to perceptions of value congruence, performance outcomes and the attributability of such outcomes to the institutional actor. These trust beliefs are also related to what we have termed ‘risky investments’, in the form of tax payments, directed towards the European commission. Furthermore, we demonstrate that political participation also matters, but unlike some findings in the literature, participation was not linked to trust beliefs. Instead, it had a direct impact on risky investments. Finally, our findings also point to the relevance of individual level factors, such as citizens’ personal disposition to trust.

Future research should aim at replicating our findings by using larger, ideally cross-national samples, in order to reduce the potential impact of national characteristics or bias produced by sampling and to enhance the generalizability of our results. Strength of this article is the modulation of causality and our results point to the importance of one strong determinant of political trust: value congruence. We show that citizens’ trust is strongest when they find value congruence between their own beliefs and the actions of the EC. This finding is in line with the broader trust literature, which has emphasised that value congruence is of relevance in situations in which specific one-to-one relationship information is absent – i.e. no information is available on whether the trustor ‘likes me personally’ (Mayer, et al., 1995). In addition, the emerging distrust literature has argued that low trust as well as the emergence of distrust are linked to perceptions of the incongruence of core values (Bijlsma-Frankema, et al., 2015). The trust levels towards the EC are modest or even near the distrust threshold.

Furthermore, we found that participation was significant for risk-related investments in relationships, i.e. for a stronger exposure towards the EC. This finding is partially reflected in the literature. For example, Mayer and colleagues (1995) argued that trust beliefs may translate into risky investments if the level of risk at stake matches the level of trust expectations. Hence, participation – electing the president of the EC, in our case – can also be understood as
a risk mitigation instrument that directly contributes to trust in action rather than in a mediated fashion.

Against the backdrop of recent academic but also real-world advances, our results bear implications for both theory and practice. The strong impact of value congruence shows that this variable must be accounted for in a much more prominent way in future research on political trust. For us, this underlines that the EC is widely perceived as the guardian and promoter of the EU as a value-based community and that it needs to act more clearly to guard and promote shared core values. Clearly, citizens seem to appreciate the value-based actions of the EC.

It is debatable, however, whether this finding has a travel potential to other EU organs such as EP or national governments. For the EP, control functions might matter more than value congruence; a translation to national governments, however, does not seem to be implausible ex ante. Possibly, even stronger results may be reached when applying the same design to national executives.

Concerning political participation, our results strongly advocate for a more robust democratisation of the EU polity. It is interesting to note that political participation indeed seems to affect political trust as hypothesised by a number of scholars (Hetherington, 2005; Hix, et al., 2007). However, this only holds with respect to the behavioural consequences of trust. Thus, our results also support recent policy initiatives on the installation of a European tax union as a token for an advancing European integration. Our results show that citizens are indeed willing to pay taxes to a superior, supra-national authority as long as the pivotal actor grants the possibility of political involvement. Hence, our results support the idea that civic controls foster trust so that citizens turn out to be convinced accomplices rather than passive consumers. We conclude therefore that citizens are more willing to become vulnerable if they may exert stronger control over and influence on their representatives (Tyler, 2001). Thus,
trust depends on both citizens and the European Commission. However, further changes demand that citizens and EU officials remain able and willing to tango.
References


Hill).


ONLINE APPENDIX

APPENDIX I – Measurements for trust expectations, risky investment and exemplary vignette

I.1. Political trust expectations (5-point Likert Scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Trust dimension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The European Commission is capable of performing its job</td>
<td>Competence trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The European Commission is known to be successful at the things it tries to do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The European Commission has much knowledge about the work that needs to be done</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The European Commission is very concerned about the my welfare</td>
<td>Goodwill trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>My needs and desires are very important to the European Commission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The European Commission will go out of its way to help me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adopted and translated into German from Searle and colleagues (2011)

I.2. Trust expectations – measurement model

One Factor Model

[Diagram of the measurement model with factor loadings and explained variance]
I.3. Trust-based risky investment

Based on the above description: What percentage of all your fiscal duties, you are willing to pay directly to the European Commission? Your overall tax burden does not increase.

☐ 1%  ☐ 5%  ☐ 10%  ☐ 15%

Source: own measure
I.4. Exemplary vignette short story and all trust scales from our survey

**Note:** Please note, that the survey was administered in German. Hence, we safeguarded validity and comprehensibility via back-and-forth translation.
APPENDIX II – Control variables

Education. Based on the findings of Gabel’s (1998) policy appraisal model, we included educational background. Hereupon well-educated people tend to advocate the EU as a whole as well as its legislative bodies. Based on individually rational motives, Gabel (1998) shows, that poorly qualified people more often showed EU-skeptical tendencies, because the harmonization of internal markets led to an increase of labor market competition. Educational background was measured by one’s highest educational achievement.

Political Orientation. The impact of a citizen’s political orientation is captured via the policy-shift model (Hix, Noury, and Roland 2007) assuming, that the greater the overlap of the national and supranational policy model, the greater the respective endorsement for EU-integration. We argue that this also affects political trust and that centrist voters will tend to trust the EC more as opposed to party affiliates at both margins of the German policy continuum. Political orientation was measured via a respondents vote intention, i.e. “Sunday Question”.

Residence. We controlled for county of residence following the idea of economic benefits (Anderson and Reichert 1995). The model shows that beneficiaries of certain policies are more likely to support them. Hence, citizens living in ‘rural’ Federal states, which are likely to receive EU-structural and agricultural support, might trust the European Commission more than citizens of non-receiving states. This variable was measured by a median split of EU-subsidies.

Disposition to trust. We controlled for a personality trait variable: Disposition to trust. Disposition to trust has been shown to influence trust over and beyond positive expectations of the trustor (Bijlsma-Frankema, Sitkin, and Weibel 2015a). The concepts of disposition to trust is comparable to generalized trust (Uslaner 2002) or basic trust (Erikson 1959, 57). In addition, it has been shown to matter strongly for abstract, less ‘experienceable’ trust objects such
as institutions (Colquitt, Scott, and LePine 2007, Freitag and Ackermann 2015). Personal disposition to trust was measured with the multi-validated 8-item survey scale (7-point Likert) proposed by Costa and McCrae (1992).

**Interest and Support.** We also controlled for *personal interest in EU affairs*, and the support for *Germany’s EU-membership* to account for a possible self-serving bias. Both aspects were measured directly and in accordance to the Eurobarometer’s wording.

**Knowledge.** Finally, we controlled for *citizen’s knowledge on the European Commission* (Knowledge) with the help of a first year exam question of an introductory class of Political Science and Public Administration at the University of Konstanz. The question was: *Which of the following answers hold true? (1) The European Commission takes the initiative for European Legislation, (2) The European Commission is set up of 27 departments, each led by a Commissioners of a different member state (3) The German chancellor, Angela Merkel, is member of the European Commission (f), (4) Günther Oettinger is member of the European Commission, (5) The European Commission comprises 754 representatives (f).* We then re-coded answers (3) and (5), and built up a dummy of whether or not this unit of analysis should be incorporated in the analysis.
Appendix III – Additional regression models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) Trust</th>
<th>(2) Risky investment</th>
<th>(3) Risky investment</th>
<th>(4) Risky investment</th>
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<td>(0.17)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(0.17)</td>
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<td>(0.27)</td>
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<td>-0.12</td>
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<td>-0.23</td>
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<td>-0.09</td>
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<td>(0.27)</td>
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<td>Disposition to trust</td>
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<td>(0.12)</td>
<td>(0.12)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constant cut 1</td>
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<td>2.27**</td>
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<td>(1.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>5.03***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(1.17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>(1.28)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.38)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
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<td>565</td>
<td>565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R-squared</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
Appendix IV – Vignette narratives and random drawing

*Overview of vignette frequencies resulting from random drawing from the universe of vignettes*

![Graph showing vignette frequencies](image_url)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Participation (H1)</th>
<th>Verbal representation in the vignette</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
<th>Experimental condition</th>
<th>Numerical expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Starting from the next legislative period, Mr. Maier will have the legal right to directly vote for the President of the European Commission 5-year incumbency.</td>
<td>Institutionalised form of political participation: General right to vote (Hix 2013)</td>
<td>Treatment = right to vote</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Maier does not have the legal right to vote for the President of the European. Instead the President is nominated by means of non-public procedures, as hitherto.</td>
<td>Control = no right to vote</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value Congruence (H2)</th>
<th>Verbal representation in the vignette</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
<th>Experimental condition</th>
<th>Numerical expression</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being on vacation in Hungary, Mr. Maier witnesses a violent repression by security forces of a peaceful demonstration for freedom of expression. Mr. Maier considers freedom of expression as highest value to be protected. Thus he favors the European Commission initiative, whereupon Hungary should be severely sanctioned and, as an ultima ratio, banned from the European Union.</td>
<td>Securing citizen’s freedom of expression as a basic EU value: trade-off scenario between the EC’s sanctioning measures for a country violating citizens’ freedom of expression versus EC’s decision to follow the principle of non-interference in a country’s internal affairs (cf. Sitkin &amp; Roth, 1993)</td>
<td>Treatment = Experience of value congruence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being on vacation in Hungary, Mr. Maier witnesses a violent repression by security forces of a peaceful demonstration for freedom of expression. Mr. Maier considers freedom of expression as highest value to be protected. The European Commission decided not to take initiative to change the current status quo in Hungary.</td>
<td>Control = No Experience of value congruence</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Outcome (H3)</th>
<th>Verbal representation in the vignette</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
<th>Experimental condition</th>
<th>Numerical expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Maier wants to change his electricity provider. Due to a directive, initiated by the European Commission, he can now choose the most attractive one between providers from all over Europe.</td>
<td>EU internal market regulation: citizens’ experience of economic benefits due to EC’s performance (see Hix &amp; Høyland, 2011)</td>
<td>Treatment = Economic benefits</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Maier wants to change his electricity provider. He can only choose between the four big German energy providers, thus his freedom of choice is limited. Furthermore he has only limited possibilities to counter price rises and/or shifts in supply.</td>
<td>Control = No Economic Benefits</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributability of the Performance Outcome (H4)</th>
<th>Verbal representation in the vignette</th>
<th>Reasoning</th>
<th>Experimental condition</th>
<th>Numerical expression</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shopping in his local supermarket, Mr. Meier wants to choose between various meat products from all over Europe. A European Commission quality seal does warrant European standards of the product itself as well as of its production.</td>
<td>Clear attributability of EC’s internal market regulation: EC takes responsibility for food safety via a visible “European Commission Food Quality Tag” on meat products (cf. Bouckaert et al., 2002)</td>
<td>Treatment = Clear attributability of EC’s performance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping in his local supermarket, Mr. Meier wants to choose between various meat products from all over Europe. Although he knows that food safety is ensured by European regulation, this does not become visible on the product itself.</td>
<td>Control = No clear attributability of EC’s performance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** Emphasis added by underline to visualize treatment and control condition for the respondent
Table 3: Results of regression analyses.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) Trust</th>
<th>(2) Risky investment</th>
<th>(3) Risky investment</th>
<th>(4) Risky investment</th>
<th>(5) Trust</th>
<th>(6) Risky investment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Political participation</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.19***</td>
<td>0.16**</td>
<td>0.12**</td>
<td>0.19***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value congruence</td>
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<td>0.32***</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.60***</td>
<td>0.40***</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance outcome</td>
<td>0.21***</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.17**</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.07)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributability</td>
<td>0.29***</td>
<td>0.15**</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.34***</td>
<td>0.20***</td>
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<td>(0.10)</td>
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<td>-0.04</td>
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<td>(0.05)</td>
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<td>565</td>
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<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix.

|   | n    | MEAN | sd  | Min. | Max. | 1. | 2.  | 3.  | 4.  | 5.  | 6.  | 7.  | 8.  | 9.  | 10. | 11. | 12. | 13. | 14. | 15. |
|---|------|------|-----|------|------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1.| TRUST| 762  | 2.44| 0.98 | 0    | 5  | 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 2.| Risky Investment| 742  | 2.18| 0.88 | 1    | 4  | 0.52| 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 3.| Political participation| 768  | 0.48| 0.49 | 0    | 1  | 0.07| 0.14| 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 4.| Value congruence| 768  | 0.48| 0.49 | 0    | 1  | 0.31| 0.20| 0.01| 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 5.| Performance outcome| 768  | 0.49| 0.5  | 0    | 1  | 0.12| 0.08| 0.05| 0.02| 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 6.| Attributability| 768  | 0.49| 0.49 | 0    | 1  | 0.19| 0.12| 0.03| 0.01| 0.01| 1   |     |     |     |     |     |     |
| 7.| Sex (1=male) | 759  | 0.48| 0.5  | 0    | 1  | -0.01| -0.03| 0.02| 0.05| 0.04| -0.01| 1   |     |     |     |     |     |
| 8.| Age (in decades) | 768  | 1.98| 1.50 | 0.1  | 5.7| -0.17| -0.15| -0.06| -0.01| 0.01| -0.11| 0.25| 1   |     |     |     |     |
| 9.| Education | 756  | 0.86| 0.34 | 0    | 1  | 0.06| 0.03| 0.01| 0.03| 0.03| 0.01| -0.05| -0.30| 1   |     |     |     |
| 10.| Political Orientation| 597  | 0.38| 0.48 | 0    | 1  | 0.02| -0.01| -0.02| -0.03| -0.06| -0.03| -0.04| -0.09| -0.08| 1   |     |     |
| 11.| Residence| 735  | 0.56| 0.49 | 0    | 1  | -0.05| -0.09| 0.01| -0.01| -0.02| -0.02| 0.02| 0.06| -0.07| -0.12| 1   |     |
| 12.| Disposition to trust| 768  | 4.43| 1.04 | 1.33 | 7  | 0.18| 0.11| 0.05| 0.03| 0.04| 0.03| 0.01| 0.04| 0.13| -0.10| 0.12| 1   |     |
| 13.| Interest in EU | 762  | 0.66| 0.47 | 0    | 1  | 0.01| -0.08| -0.08| -0.07| -0.13| 0.02| -0.08| -0.04| 0.14| 0.08| 0.06| -0.11| 1   |
| 14.| Support | 744  | 0.97| 0.29 | 0    | 1  | 0.23| 0.16| 0.04| -0.01| 0.04| 0.07| -0.12| -0.09| -0.04| 0.10| 0.05| 0.09| -0.07| 1   |
| 15.| Knowledge | 768  | 3.71| 1.05 | 1    | 5  | -0.07| 0.03| -0.02| 0.01| 0.06| 0.02| 0.12| 0.09| 0.05| -0.18| 0.11| 0.10| -0.14| 0.01| 1   |