

Contributions to Political Science

Simon Bauer

Citizens' Support for the European Union

Empirical Analyses of Political Attitudes
and Electoral Behavior During the EU
Crisis

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and Electoral Behavior During the EU Crisis

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Schweich, Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany

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Preface

The European crises between 2006 and 2015 have accompanied my personal and academic journey when I studied economics and empirical political science at the University of Mainz between 2007 and 2013 and continued my academic career as a doctoral researcher and lecturer at the Technical University of Darmstadt until 2018. Thereby, I had the opportunity to expand my knowledge of the interrelatedness of economic phenomena, politics, and the individual political psychology during challenging times to European integration. By the omnipresent perception to live in extraordinary times—while studying in lecture hall, exchanging ideas in everyday life, and travelling the European continent—I felt encouraged to develop a research project focusing on the European citizens' perspective on these so-called crises.

This book presents the current state of research on the Euro crisis from multiple scholarly disciplines only to ultimately pursue the goal to understand and structure individual patterns of attitude change to European integration during that period. I am deeply grateful to Arthur Benz for his continuous support and helpful debates during my years at TU Darmstadt. He always trusted me to develop independent ideas and encouraged me to follow through with the dissertation at hand. I want to thank Edeltraud Roller for letting me discover the potential and depth of a true academic mind and for awakening my interest in political sociology. The encouragement, friendship, and implicit guidance of Nils Steiner during the past six years has been irreplaceable. Last but not least, the endless support and confidence of my family and friends solidly facilitated the practical challenges of the academic life.

Schweich, Germany
December 2018

Simon Bauer

Contents

1	The Crises of the European Union and the Persistence of Citizens’ Support	1
1.1	Research Programme	1
1.2	Overview of the Book	6
	References	8
2	Conceptualizing Citizens’ Support for the European Union	11
2.1	The Concept of Political Support and Its Application to the EU	11
2.1.1	Political Attitudes	12
2.1.2	The Concept of Political Support for the European Union	14
2.1.3	State of Research: Explaining Generalized EU Regime Support	37
2.1.4	Criteria Qualifying a Critical Event for Encompassing Attitude Change	61
2.2	System-Critical Electoral Behaviour in European Parliament Elections	69
2.2.1	Electoral Behaviour as Explicit Consequence of Support	70
2.2.2	General Models of Electoral Behaviour	72
2.2.3	The Second-Order Character of EP Electoral Behaviour	75
2.2.4	The Effect of EU Support on EP Electoral Behaviour	76
	References	78
3	The Euro Crisis: Decoding the Multidimensional and Heterogeneous Phenomenon	97
3.1	The (Political) Economy of the European Crises	98
3.1.1	Symptoms: Shambaugh’s Trilemma	99

3.1.2	Diagnosis: Euro Crisis as a Specific Case of a Debt and Current Account Crisis	101
3.1.3	Therapy: Available Policy Instruments in EMU	106
3.2	Euro Crisis Management and the Politics of Austerity	108
3.2.1	The Chronicle of Political Crisis Management 2010–2015	108
3.2.2	The Attached Conditionality to European Support Programmes	113
3.2.3	Institutional Reforms of the EMU and Democratic Accountability	120
3.2.4	The Economic Status Quo at the End of 2016	122
3.3	The Crisis in the Public: Adverse Perceptions and Blame Games	125
3.4	Interdisciplinary Synthesis: What Crises Are We Talking About?	130
3.5	Concluding Analysis: Is the Euro Crisis a Critical Event?	134
3.6	Excursus: The Euro Crisis as an Event of Globalization	138
	References	143
4	Studying EU Support During the Euro Crisis: An Integrated Research Agenda	153
4.1	Analytic Strategy and Research Design	154
4.1.1	Study I: Level and Development of EU Support and Its Determinants	156
4.1.2	Study II: EU Support During the Euro Crisis (2006–2015)	157
4.1.3	Study III: EU Support During the Euro Crisis (Special Analyses)	158
4.1.4	Study IV: Declining EU Support and Electoral Behaviour in 2009 and 2014	158
4.2	Hypotheses and Expectations	159
4.2.1	Study I: Level and Development of EU Support and Its Determinants	160
4.2.2	Study II: EU Support During the Euro Crisis (2006–2015)	163
4.2.3	Study III: The Citizens' Stance on Euro Crisis Management	171
4.2.4	Study IV: Declining EU Support and Electoral Behaviour in 2009 and 2014	174
4.3	The Integrated Models of EU Support and EU-sceptical Electoral Behaviour	179
	References	182

5	Study I: Level and Development of EU Support and Its Determinants	183
5.1	Data	183
5.2	Operationalization	186
5.2.1	Dependent Variables	186
5.2.2	Independent Variables	188
5.2.3	Contextual Variables	191
5.3	Generalized EU Regime Support	191
5.4	Determinants of Generalized EU Regime Support	198
5.4.1	European Identity	198
5.4.2	Democratic Legitimacy and Responsiveness	199
5.4.3	Economic Performance	200
5.5	Intermediate Conclusion	204
	References	205
6	Study II: EU Support During the Euro Crisis (2006–2015)	207
6.1	Strategy and Methods	207
6.2	Fixed-Effects Model: The Explanation of EU Support from 2006 to 2015	213
6.3	Multilevel Model: The Explanation of EU Support from 2006 to 2015	220
6.4	The Role of Political Involvement and National Attitudes	229
6.5	Intermediate Conclusion	234
	References	237
7	Study III: The Citizens’ Stance on Euro Crisis Management	239
7.1	Subjective Attribution of Responsibility for Austerity	239
7.2	Policy Preferences and Issue Orientations	243
7.3	Evaluations of Crisis Management	246
7.4	Intermediate Conclusion	251
8	Study IV: Declining EU Support and Electoral Behaviour in 2009 and 2014	253
8.1	Data and Methods	253
8.2	Operationalization	256
8.3	Descriptive Analyses	261
8.4	The Explanation of Electoral Behaviour in the 2014 EP Elections	264
8.5	Comparison to the 2009 EP Elections	270
8.6	Intermediate Conclusion	272
	References	274
9	Citizens’ Support for the European Union During the Euro Crisis: Between Scylla and Charybdis	275
9.1	The Critical Event of the Euro Crisis	275
9.2	Avenues for Further Research	281
9.3	The European Union Between Scylla and Charybdis	284
	References	287

List of Figures

Fig. 2.1	Model of system culture. Illustration based on Fuchs (2007)	22
Fig. 2.2	Modified receive-accept-sample model for research on attitudes towards the EU. Own depiction based on Fuchs (2011a). Regular printed components represent Zaller’s original RAS model, italic components point to selected modifications by Fuchs while bold constructs are changes from my own considerations	64
Fig. 3.1	The threefold symptoms of the European crises. Source: Own depiction based on Shambaugh (2012)	99
Fig. 3.2	Annual current accounts of national GDP in percent, 1999–2009, selected countries. Source: Eurostat (bop_gdp6_q)	103
Fig. 3.3	Nominal unit labour costs, change in %, 1999–2009. Data: Eurostat (nama_aux_ulc)	104
Fig. 3.4	Long-term interest rates of sovereign bonds, 1995–2009, monthly data in %. Data: Eurostat (irt_lt_mcby_m)	105
Fig. 3.5	“Crisis-heartbeat”: risk premiums of 10-year-government bonds compared to Germany, 2010–2015. Data: Eurostat (irt_lt_mcby_m)	110
Fig. 3.6	Fiscal pain per capita. Notes: this figure shows the cumulated structural balance adjustments of total government including the fiscal years from 2010–2016. The structural balance measure indicates all structural changes in government expenditure and revenues that cannot be attributed to the effects of the economic business cycle. The depicted sums reflect the total adjustment within the time period and is calculated per capita (2015). Data: IMF (2017), WEO 4/17	117
Fig. 3.7	Burden sharing within Eurozone. Note: the graph depicts unemployment rates (of active population) on the x-axis for both 2007 and 2015. The y-axis shows the level of adjusted disposable income per capita, the value 100 reflects the 1999 level when the second phase of the EMU was launched, the country arrows give insight about the change of ADIpc in 2007 and 2015 (in relation to 1999). Data: Eurostat (2017b) (nasa_10_nf_tr; une_rt_a)	118

Fig. 3.8	The four layer-groups: domain heterogeneity of the Euro crisis in EU-28. Source: own illustration	137
Fig. 4.1	Explanatory model of generalized EU regime support, studies I–III	180
Fig. 4.2	Explanatory model of EP electoral behaviour, study IV	181
Fig. 5.1	Trends of generalized EU regime support, EU 27, 2006–2015; left: EU trust, right: Image of the EU. Source: SEB data, population size weight applied	192
Fig. 5.2	Trust EU (left), Image EU (right), Arith. Means. Notes: SEB data. Population size and post-stratification weights applied	196
Fig. 5.3	Level of EU trust in %, risk premiums in basis points, period of economic adjustment. Notes: SEB data (EU Trust), post-stratification weight applied; risk premium (difference to 10 year-long-term-interest rate of national sovereign bonds), calculated data, eurostat; conditionality/monti tenure period, European Commission	197
Fig. 5.4	Levels of social identity, different indicators, 2006–2015. Note: SEB data, population size and post-stratification weights applied	199
Fig. 5.5	Levels of satisfaction with EU democracy, democratic responsiveness, 2006–2015. Note: SEB data, population size and post-stratification weights applied	200
Fig. 5.6	Levels of subjective evaluations of economic performance, Arith. Means, 2006–2015. Note: SEB data, population size and post-stratification weights applied	201
Fig. 5.7	Subjective national economic situation, unemployment Rates, 2006–2015. Note: Subjective evaluations: SEB data, population size and post-stratification weights applied (SEB); Harmonized unemployment rates in respective layer-groups (Data: Eurostat)	202
Fig. 5.8	Change of personal job situation in 12 months, Arith. Means, 2006–2015. Note: SEB data, population size and post-stratification weights applied	203
Fig. 6.1	Average marginal effects on the probability to trust the EU, based on M5. Note: SEB Data, N = 172,072; Pseudo-R ² McKelvey-Zavoina .54	217
Fig. 6.2	Conditional marginal effects on the probability to trust the EU at crisis contexts A–F, based on M5	218
Fig. 6.3	CMEs of European identity on EU trust at crisis contexts A–F . . .	225
Fig. 6.4	CMEs of satisfaction with EU democracy on EU trust at crisis contexts A–F	226
Fig. 6.5	CMEs of democratic responsiveness (my voice counts) on EU trust at crisis contexts A–F	226

Fig. 6.6	CMEs of the evaluation of EU economic performance on EU trust at crisis contexts A–F	227
Fig. 6.7	CMEs of the evaluation of the personal job situation on EU trust at crisis contexts A–F	227
Fig. 6.8	CMEs of European identity for net receiver/contributor countries (left), and CMEs of EU economic situation in EU-15 vs. CEE member states (right)	228
Fig. 6.9	CMEs of democratic responsiveness over the standardized WGI scores, 2006–15	229
Fig. 6.10	CMEs of political knowledge (left) and education (right) on EU trust at crisis contexts A–F	230
Fig. 6.11	CMEs of trust in national government over political knowledge (left) and political interest (right)	232
Fig. 6.12	CMEs of European identity (left) and EU economic performance (right) on EU trust at crisis contexts A–F	233
Fig. 7.1	Subjective attribution for austerity to the EU, arith. means. Source: SEB 79.3, 80.1, 81.4, 82.3, 83.3, post-stratification and population-size weights applied	240
Fig. 7.2	AMEs on EU trust including responsibility-variable. Model statistics: $N = 99,299$; R^2 MZ: 0.541; AIC 89,863; source: SEB 79.3, 80.1, 81.4, 82.3, 83.3	241
Fig. 7.3	CMEs of subjective attribution of responsibility on EU trust in donor and crisis countries. Model statistics: $N = 99,299$; R^2 MZ: 0.541; AIC 89,863; source: SEB 79.3, 80.1, 81.4, 82.3, 83.3 . . .	242
Fig. 7.4	Predicted probabilities of EU trust in donor and crisis countries for different outcomes of responsibility attribution; relative frequencies of the outcomes of “responsibility” in the entire sample (background). Notes: Unweighted data, source: SEB 79.3, 80.1, 81.4, 82.3, 83.3	243
Fig. 7.5	General policy strategy in crisis management, relative frequencies, 2012 Q2. Source: Special EB 77.2, $N = 26,593$; population-size and post-stratification weights applied	244
Fig. 7.6	Agreement to policy proposals for EMU reform, arith. means. Source: SEB 79.3, 80.1, 81.4, 82.3 (budget, fines); SEB 76.3, 77.3, 78.1, 79.3, 80.1, 81.4, 82.3, 83.3 (Eurobonds, debt); population-size and post-stratification weights applied	245
Fig. 7.7	CMEs of the agreement to policy proposals for EMU reform on EU trust in donor and crisis countries. Notes: Separate model specification based on M4 for each policy variable, see appendix Table D1	246

Fig. 7.8	Evaluations of EU and national crisis management, arith. means by layer-group (left), by country (right). Source: SEB 77.3, N = 24,529 (EU), 25,457 (nat); population-size and post-stratification weights applied	247
Fig. 7.9	CMEs of EU (circle) and national crisis management (triangle) on EU trust in donor and crisis countries, 2012 Q2. Notes: CME estimation based on CM3, 83% confidence interval for pairwise comparison at $p < 0.05$	250
Fig. 8.1	AMEs on the choice set of EP electoral behaviour, total sample, 2014. Notes: N = 13,987, adj. McFadden-R ² : 0.371, Data: Schmitt et al. (2016), unweighted data, list-wise deletion of missing values	265
Fig. 8.2	AMEs on the probability to vote for a EU-supporting party in donor and crisis countries, 2014. Notes: N = 10,173 (donor), 2276 (crisis); adj. McFadden-R ² : 0.368 (donor), 0.382 (crisis); Data: Schmitt et al. (2016), unweighted data, list-wise deletion of missing values	265
Fig. 8.3	AMEs on the probability to abstain in donor and crisis countries, 2014. Notes: N = 10,173 (donor), 2276 (crisis); adj. McFadden-R ² : 0.368 (donor), 0.382 (crisis); Data: Schmitt et al. (2016), unweighted data, list-wise deletion of missing values	266
Fig. 8.4	AMEs on the probability to vote for a EU-sceptical party in donor and crisis countries, 2014. Notes: N = 10,173 (donor), 2276 (crisis); adj. McFadden-R ² : 0.368 (donor), 0.382 (crisis); Data: Schmitt et al. (2016), unweighted data, list-wise deletion of missing values	266
Fig. 8.5	Predicted probabilities of the responsibility attribution to the EU in crisis countries over the evaluation of the national economic situation. Notes: N = 2276; adj. McFadden-R ² : 0.382; Data: Schmitt et al. (2016), unweighted data, list-wise deletion of missing values	270
Fig. 8.6	AMEs on the choice set of EP electoral behaviour, total sample, 2009. Notes: N = 16,065; adj. McFadden-R ² : 0.303; Data: EES (2017), unweighted data, list-wise deletion of missing values	271

List of Tables

Table 2.1	Conceptualization of support for the EU: levels, types and constructs	29
Table 2.2	Summarizing overview of attitude constructs in this chapter	60
Table 3.1	Strategies to tackle current account-imbalances within the Eurozone	107
Table 3.2	Overview of national case study results—economic adjustment programme, 2010–2016	115
Table 3.3	Gross domestic product (GDP) at market prices, percentage change on previous year	123
Table 3.4	Unemployment [annual average, (1) % of active population. (2) of active population under 25]	124
Table 4.1	Classification of Euro crisis contexts	165
Table 5.1	Level of EU trust, selected time periods, relative and absolute differences	193
Table 6.1	Individual-level determinants of EU trust, 2006–2015, fixed-effects logistic regression	214
Table 6.2	Individual-, contextual, and cross-level determinants on EU trust, 2006–2015	222
Table 6.3	Confirmed expectations in study II	234
Table 6.4	Results of hypotheses testing in study II	235
Table 7.1	AMEs of individual-level determinants of EU trust incl. crisis management evaluations, 2012 Q2	249
Table 7.2	Results of hypotheses testing in study III	252
Table 8.1	List of EU-sceptical parties, 2009 and 2014	257
Table 8.2	Reported and actual results of EP electoral behaviour, 2009 and 2014	261
Table 8.3	Political interest by reported voting decision	263
Table 8.4	Share of high- and low-involved abstainers by layer-group	263
Table 8.5	Results of hypotheses testing in study IV	273

List of Acronyms

AIC	Akaike information criterion
AME	Average marginal effect
BIC	Bayesian information criterion
CEE	Central and Eastern European
CHES	Chapel Hill Expert Survey
CME	Conditional marginal effect
CVM	Civic voluntarism model
DV	Dependent variable
EB	Eurobarometer
EC	European Community
ECOFIN	Economic and Financial Affairs Council
ECB	European Central Bank
EES	European Election Studies
EFSF	European Financial Stability Facility
EFSM	European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism
EMU	Economic and Monetary Union
EP	European Parliament
ESM	European Stability Mechanism
EU	European Union
EU27	European Union of 27 Member States (before the accession of Croatia)
ESS	European Social Survey
EVS	European Values Study
EZ	Eurozone, also known as euro area
GESIS	Gesellschaft sozialwissenschaftlicher Infrastruktureinrichtungen
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICRG	International Country Risk Guide
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MNLM	Multinomial logistic model
MoU	Memorandum of understanding
ML	Multilevel

NPISH	Non-profit institutions serving households
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OMT	Outright monetary transactions
PID	Party identification
QMV	Qualified majority voting
RAS (Model)	Receive-Accept-Sample model
RTM	Room to manoeuvre
SEB	Standard Eurobarometer
SES	Socioeconomic status
SGP	Stability and Growth Pact
SOE	Second-order national election
SWD	Satisfaction with (the way) democracy (works)
WGI	Worldwide Governance Indicators

Chapter 1

The Crises of the European Union and the Persistence of Citizens' Support



1.1 Research Programme

In light of economic downturn and rising levels of unemployment, public support for the European Union has decreased significantly between 2009 and 2013. In the end of 2009, still 55% of European citizens reported to trust the EU, while three years later only 37% did so. In the southern periphery, this decline of trust has been even more pronounced: In Italy, Spain, Portugal, Cyprus, and Greece, only 25% of survey respondents trusted the EU—the level of EU trust was at least cut in halves within this country group (Foster and Frieden 2017). From a public policy perspective, preventing the sovereign default of single EU member states proved to be a double-edged challenge for European citizens: On the one hand, financial assistance packages and the founding of new European institutions raised controversial discussions about the citizens' willingness to exercise European solidarity (Bechtel et al. 2014). On the other hand, severe austerity adjustments in the southern periphery attached to those packages drove a wedge between the societies of the so-called *crisis* and *donor* countries. That is, protests against the austerity policy of national governments, the EU in general and conflicts between the member states led to intense and partly adversarial politicisation (Kriesi and Grande 2016). While the observation of sharp decline in favourableness towards European integration is apparent, its heterogeneity across the EU member states leads to the question of what are the underlying mechanisms that led European citizens to at least temporarily turn against their union. Taking the etymological inherent features of the term *crisis* at heart, extraordinary times as well as acute and rapid fluctuations in the economic and societal environment lead to questions of how citizens might react to them.

The subjective perspective of citizens is closely related to the debate on which features of a democratically governed political system guarantee its effective function. Regardless of how a specific political regime is organised, it ultimately depends on the will of its people whether it strives in its glory or ceases to exist. For contemporary political science, Almond and Verba (1963) and Easton (1957,

1965a, b, 1975) laid the groundwork for connecting research on institutional design and comparative government to the empirical study of citizens' value orientations and attitudes—in short, the *political culture*. More than half a century after the seminal study “*The Civic Culture*”, many empirical political scientists still draw on the postulate of *congruence*, that is, the notion that a system's stability depends on the congruence of its structure with citizens' political culture (Almond and Verba 1963, 21f.).

Political culture must be comprehended as the macro-level result of the aggregation of attitudes, which are measured on the individual level as survey responses. Mostly relevant in this tradition is a group of political attitudes subsumed under Easton's concept of *political support*: “*an attitude by which a person orients himself to an object either favorably or unfavorably, positively or negatively*” (Easton 1975, p. 436). The relationship between support and persistence of a political system is (at least) twofold: *Specific support* is directly linked to the evaluation of the outputs of the political system and thus fluctuating with the short-term perceptions of citizens. To the contrary, *diffuse support* is widely independent of the day-to-day outcomes since it consists of stable and long-term orientations towards the system enabling citizens to support political objects “*for their own sake*” regardless of deteriorating outputs in the short-run (Easton 1975, p. 453). The general distinction between types of support, which vary in their stability, and their relevance to persistence of a political system has remained a key feature in most of the later advancements of the support concept. For the analysis of support for the EU, diffuse or generalized types of support are more important due to the potentially more fundamental effect on its persistence. Changes in generalized EU support can only result from a long-term lack of specific support or from profound and sudden changes in the short run. To judge whether a specific crisis to a political system introduces such sudden profound changes to its citizens and represents a threat to diffuse or generalized support attitudes requires both theoretical clarification and empirical tests.

This book seeks to counteract against deficiencies of contemporary research on EU support during crisis and in general. First, early studies on EU support after 2009 have only partly differentiated between the global financial crisis and the crisis in the EU. Second, many contributions to date assume homogeneous effects of the explanatory factors on generalized EU support or alternative conceptualizations by only conducting analyses on entire EU samples. Others only shed light on country-specific changes of support profiting from the possibility to account for national specificities (e.g. Di Mauro 2014; Hobolt and Leblond 2009). However, the Euro crisis presumably came with heterogeneous repercussions to different groups of EU member states on the one hand, and at different points in time on the other hand. Only accounting for the temporal dimension (e.g. Schell 2014) or the regional dimension (e.g. Braun and Tausendpfund 2014), probably falls short of a profound understanding of citizens' attitudes during crisis.¹ This book will pursue a middle

¹Notably exceptions are for instance Foster and Frieden (2017) and Hobolt and Wratil (2015).

course by examining the single country perspective, build reasonable country groups, and aggregate to the entire EU sample. This enables the effects of explanatory factors to vary over time and space—and possibly to profoundly discover the diverging effects between so-called crisis and donor countries on the attitudinal level.

Third, I seek to integrate established families of explanation of EU support. Research on EU support can be considered a moving target much like the evolution of European integration itself (Marks 2004, p. 239; van Elsas and van der Brug 2015, p. 195). The attitude object EU has been continuously changing for the last decades, repeatedly renewing interest in individual variation of EU support. Due to methodological and technical advancements, research designs have changed over time as well. Many earlier studies up until the 1990s remained on the macro level (e.g. Anderson and Reichert 1995). Gradually, individual predictors were introduced to closer identify micro-level mechanisms (Gabel 1998; Gabel and Whitten 1997). The families of explanations being tested have changed over time moving away from an exclusive focus on the utilitarian approach towards considering evaluations of democratic performance (Rohrschneider 2002) and individual social identity (Carey 2002; McLaren 2007). However, many journal articles on EU support focus predominantly on one family of explanation, rather than developing a systematic explanatory model that exemplifies the relative importance of the different explanatory ideas. In the 2000s, both the general trend in quantitative research of conducting multilevel analysis and the increasing number of EU member states (and therefore macro-level cases) led to the reconsideration of contextual determinants such as quality of government or economic fundamentals. Therefore, in addition to incorporating the Euro crisis into the research design on individual attitudes, I attempt to test the main families of explanation in integrated explanatory models (see Chap. 4).

Fourth, when formulating the goal to identify the relevance of changes in generalized EU support for the persistence of the political system EU, a differentiated account of the sources of attitude change but also the permanency of these changes is needed. Given the scenario that the development of citizens' generalized EU support would imply that the persistence of the EU might be at stake, it would be relevant to examine whether these attitudinal changes also manifest in citizens' political behaviour. That is why, I aspire to identify changes of citizens' electoral behaviour in EP elections that are explicitly driven by changes of generalized EU support and its determinants. These four aspects build the starting point for the gradual development of the research design and a systematic conceptualization of attitude constructs in the subsequent chapters.

Despite a large body of literature revolving around the European crises, only few contributions carry out a thorough systemization of the crisis dimensions from a multidisciplinary and comparative perspective. As often with far-reaching transnational economic and societal phenomena, research disciplines only slowly have started to speak to each other. Moreover, there is disagreement and even confusion about which specific phenomena should be subsumed under which term. This conceptual fuzziness has been further aggravated by political elites and mass

media that have become used to justify political decisions since 2008 by immediate necessities in times of crisis. The plethora of crisis terms consists for instance of the “*European debt crisis*”, “*the eurozone crisis*”, “*the great recession*”, “*the Greek crisis*”, and “*the sovereign debt crisis*”.

While almost three years have passed between the first ideas and the completion of this research project, this observation still holds even though to a lesser extent since *within* singular disciplines conceptual clarity has been promoted.² For instance, within economics, the scholarly diversity has been consolidated by strictly differentiating between international, global developments and the distinct European dimension (Frieden and Walter 2017, p. 376). Also, by shifting the perspective from the symptoms to the roots of the crises, the interrelatedness of economic crisis phenomena has been better mapped. A majority of economists explain the European crisis dimension as a balance-of-payment crisis fostered by structural deficiencies that have been made when introducing a currency union within the EU without implementing a thorough fiscal coordination regime (Frieden and Walter 2017). From an economist's point of view, the European crisis dimension has not predominantly been a sovereign debt crisis. Instead, the pressure from the global banking crisis and the rescue strategy of European policy-makers only accelerated the construction flaws of the eurozone and resulted in higher levels of sovereign and private debt, which were evaluated as toxic in a far more risk-averse climate on the financial markets (Baldwin and Giavazzi 2015; De Grauwe 2013).

This exemplary excursion to the converging economic analyses corroborates the conceptual decision I make in this book. That is, I will define the term *Euro crisis* as pointing to exceptional economic, political, and societal circumstances in the EU since the beginning of 2010. It is to be distinguished from the earlier “*global financial crisis*” or “*great recession*” that originated in the United States and affected financial sectors and the real economy worldwide. I propose to predominantly focus on the genuine European phenomena since this book is primarily interested in citizen's changing political support for the EU, although the Euro crisis cannot be understood without accounting for its catalysing roots in the global crises phenomena that developed in 2008 and 2009.

When it comes to approaches that span across multiple perspectives—for instance public opinion, economic analysis, and policy choice—much work has still to be done. Even in the presence of a scholarly consensus or a systematic synthesis of multiple research strands, the question would remain how contextual events such as the Euro crisis can analytically be linked to attitude formation—an individual psychological process that is not directly observable. In this book, I draw from Zaller's *Receive-Accept-Sample* model that describes a process of individual opinion formation suited for indistinct and complex environments (Zaller 1992). Politics is often considered such an environment due to its subordinate role in average citizens' everyday lives and its high demand on cognitive capacity. An individual receives a

²The proposal was drafted in September 2015 while its completion shortly precedes the submission of this book as a dissertation in April 2018.

message about a political issue, accepts or rejects the information, and samples the available information to form an attitude statement in a survey environment. Zaller delivers a microfoundation to clarify the steps of information processing between the individual's perception of a message sent by political elites or mass media and his specific response to a survey question. However, it remains an open question which criteria contextual events must fulfil to exert not only a unique or temporary effect on the individual's information processing but to also induce persistent changes of general value orientations or more stable attitudes. Therefore, this information processing framework that links contextual events to individual survey responses must be extended in a research project that seeks to examine the effects of the Euro crisis on individual political attitudes. This shortcoming of previous research on political attitudes will be approached when I extend Fuchs's theoretical concept of a critical event (Fuchs 2011) with manifest empirical criteria that enables to purposefully analyse the Euro crisis and its repercussions (see Sect. 2.1.4).

At the bottom line, this book aspires to contribute to theory-guided empirical research on (generalized) EU support by conducting analyses on gradual stages of aggregation. I rely on survey data of the Standard and Special Eurobarometer conducted between 2006 and 2015 as well as on the European Elections Studies of 2009 and 2014. The analyses shall be predominantly developed in relation to a profound understanding of a genuine and distinct European crisis. The development of reasonable contextual reference points for the analyses of political attitudes and behaviour shall profit from considering research from (political) economics, communication studies, and sociology. This multidisciplinary synthesis needs to focus on those crisis repercussions that are relevant to the citizens' everyday lives in Europe and to potentially heterogeneous attitude change. This preparatory work is needed to be able to link contexts to individual-level political attitudes. The analyses are interested in the explanation of EU support, its heterogeneity and lastly in a possible behavioural manifestation. The goal is to improve our understanding of whether and how European citizens turned against their union, and to what extent the persistence of the EU political system is at stake. The outlined starting position culminates in the guiding *research questions* of this book:

1. Under which conditions could contextual events change citizens' generalized EU support and the underlying attitudinal mechanisms?
2. Which phenomena of the European crises can be identified as genuinely European and distinct? In what way do these phenomena constitute a clear-cut contextual event that is relevant to the subjective perspective of European citizens and how can they be conceptualized for a study on citizens' attitude change and political behaviour towards the EU?
3. How have generalized EU support and its determinants evolved during the period under investigation (2006–2015)?
4. Does the explanatory power of determinants of generalized EU support change during the Euro crisis?
5. How do these changes reflect the heterogeneous nature of the Euro crisis' repercussions on citizens in different crisis contexts?

6. Did the development and explanation of generalized EU support also manifest in EU-sceptical and EU-supporting electoral behaviour in the 2014 EP elections compared to the previous EP election in 2009 before crisis?

1.2 Overview of the Book

The research programme as outlined in the previous section is divided in eight chapters. Chapter 2 introduces the basic concepts and theoretical models that lay ground for the empirical analyses of attitudes and electoral behaviour during the Euro crisis. The first and focal part defines the general concept of (political) attitudes and conceptualizes political support, explains its relation to the *political culture* paradigm and its adaptation to the supranational political system of the EU. After specifying the most adequate type of political support for the EU as main DV of this book, I introduce established families of explanation both on the individual and the contextual level in a systematic overview of the state of research on EU support. The first part concludes with the introduction of Fuchs' modified version of the *Receive-Accept-Sample* model to provide an overarching framework that includes plausible analytical links between contextual events over elite and media messages to the individual information processing by citizens—ultimately leading to survey responses. My contribution is the expansion of the *critical event* concept with empirical criteria that qualify a contextual event to be critical for attitude change. The second part of Chap. 2 conceptualizes system-critical and system-supporting electoral behaviour in European parliamentary elections. That is, the second DV of this book is narrowed-down and embedded into the theoretical model of EU support as the individual-level behavioural manifestation of varying regime support in the European context.

Chapter 3 delivers the contextual background of the analyses in this book. Its purpose is twofold: First, by providing an extensive and multidisciplinary literature review on the so-called European crises, a focused and clear-cut understanding of the genuine European dimension of the plethora of crisis phenomena is identified. Having then differentiated the *Euro crisis*, which starts with the Greek debt revelations in the end of 2009, from other related and unrelated crisis events, the chapter provides a mixed-methods account on the repercussions of the crisis for citizens in the EU member states. Ultimately, the criteria qualifying a *critical event* are applied to the findings of the extensive account on the Euro crisis. This analysis shall identify different *crisis contexts* for the subsequent empirical analyses on political attitudes and electoral behaviour.

Chapter 4 unites the theoretical models and the contextual analysis of the Euro crisis to lay out the further empirical agenda. The goal is to discuss the analytic strategy for all empirical analyses and to emphasize the specific features of each study. On the one hand, the relationships of main explanatory factors to the DV gathered from the state of research are formulated as expectations. On the other hand, I formulate hypotheses for those aspects of the respective studies that specifically

strive to contribute new knowledge to research on EU support and EP electoral behaviour. This especially relates to the changing relevance of established predictors dependent on the *crisis contexts* and other regional distinctions. Chapter 4 concludes with the presentation of systematic and consolidated explanatory models of the two dependent variables in this book—generalized EU regime support as well as EU-sceptical and EU-supporting electoral behaviour.

Chapter 5 comprises descriptive analyses on the level and development of generalized EU support and its determinants (study I). Relying on 19 repeated, cross-sectional Eurobarometer surveys, the entire period under investigation from 2006 to 2015 is covered. To give a comprehensive picture, means and developments are reported for the entire EU27, groups of countries, as well as for single EU member states.

Chapter 6 marks the begin of the explanatory analyses: Study II is the centrepiece of the empirical agenda since it pursues a systematic test of the effects of established predictors on the individual and the contextual level on generalized EU regime support. It takes the longitudinal perspective since it strives to compare results of 10 SEB survey waves from 2006–2015 relying on identical measurements of predictors and methodologies. Applying various estimation techniques, the purpose of the chapter is to identify the decisive factors driving generalized EU support and how their effects potentially change during the period under investigation. The heterogeneous and multidimensional repercussions of the Euro crisis can be modelled using multi-level models with cross-level interactions that account for the temporal and geographical structure of the survey data and allow for direct group comparisons.

Chapter 7 (study III) conducts both descriptive and explanatory analyses drawing from a more limited number of surveys conducted from 2011 to 2015 to the advantage of including more detailed and crisis-specific attitudes that were not available before the Euro crisis. These special analyses of selected SEB waves examine citizens' evaluations of crisis management of the respective national governments and the EU, issue orientations regarding the general strategy of crisis management and specific policy proposals for EMU reform, as well as subjective responsibility attribution to the EU for austerity. In doing so, study III seeks to answer the question of how citizens in crisis and donor countries differ concerning these specific attitudes towards the Euro crisis, and, whether the extra survey indicators contribute to the explanation of generalized EU support in addition to the established determinants (of study II) and, if so, under which conditions?

Chapter 8 (study IV) examines individual electoral behaviour in the 2009 and 2014 European Parliament elections before and after the climax of the Euro crisis. The act of voting and choosing an EU-supporting party is interpreted as a behavioural consequence of favourable EU support (*loyalty*). EU-sceptical behaviour manifests either in abstention (*exit*) or voting for an EU-sceptical party (*voice*). The purpose of this fourth study is to provide a behavioural corroboration for the expectation that the individual's stance towards European politics increasingly matters for the persistence of the EU regime during times of crisis. To provide behavioural evidence rather than only attitudinal is an ambitious extension of this book's research strategy but answers to the argument that the Euro crisis and its

repercussions had a significant impact on citizens' and reception of the EU in their everyday lives.

The concluding Chap. 9 begins with outlining the main findings of all empirical analyses on how the Euro crisis and its repercussions changed citizens' EU support and the underlying attitudinal mechanisms. Moreover, the chosen research design and the results give reason to discuss what contributions this book delivers to research on citizens' attitudes towards the EU and where future research might fill existing gaps and enhance the research strategy at hand. As a final aspect, Chap. 9 presents implications for policy-makers resulting from this book's findings and ponders to what extent the EU has been between *Scylla and Charybdis* in its relation to the European citizens in donor and crisis countries.

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Chapter 2

Conceptualizing Citizens' Support for the European Union



The second chapter of this book introduces the basic concepts and theoretical models that lay ground for the empirical analyses of attitudes and electoral behaviour during the Euro crisis. This chapter is divided into two parts: The first and main section focuses on the concept of political support, its origins in attitude research, its use in relation to the political culture paradigm and its adaptation to the supranational political system of the EU (Sect. 2.1). The second part examines system-critical electoral behaviour in European parliamentary elections, which is considered to be the most obvious manifestation of negative support/political alienation in the European context (Sect. 2.2).

2.1 The Concept of Political Support and Its Application to the EU

Key to the research programme at hand is the developed understanding of political support for the European Union. To adequately derive the concept, I start by defining political attitudes in general (Sect. 2.1.1). An introduction into the original framework of political support by David Easton and its reception in succeeding works will follow since it is the most general reference point of this book. Nevertheless, support for the national political system is fundamentally different than for a supranational or multilateral system. Therefore, I discuss thoroughly the particularities of the unique attitude object EU (Sect. 2.1.2). This includes a careful review of existing models for the explanation of EU support and its link to ambiguously related concepts such as EU scepticism, and an extensive discussion to develop a conceptualization of different types of EU support. In the following section, I will present the empirical state of research on EU support and its determinants to develop a differentiated starting point for later empirical analyses (Sect. 2.1.3). The final section (Sect. 2.1.4) brings us full circle to social psychology literature to discuss conditions for attitude

change during political and economic crises. Hereby, I differentiate between ordinary developments and extraordinary contextual events that quite possibly shape public opinion to prepare for later systematization of the European crises.

2.1.1 *Political Attitudes*

The term “attitude” is at the centre of vital discussions in social psychology, ranging back to Allport (1935) who first denoted the concept as “*our most distinctive and indispensable*” (1935, 798). Since then, it has become a major task to continuously adjust the definition of attitudes given ongoing progress in empirical research as well as deliberation on its theoretic dimensions. The goal of this section is to introduce key features of the attitude concept to prepare for later arguments evolving around conditions for attitude change (see Sect. 2.1.4).

The most memorable collection of conceptual works on the theoretical and empirical characteristics of attitudes, which are heavily cited in neighbouring disciplines, stem from social psychologists Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein (1980, 2005, 2008; Ajzen 2001). They define attitude as the “*evaluation of an object, concept, or behavior along a dimension of favor or disfavor, good or bad, like or dislike.*” Fishbein and Ajzen (2010, p. 78). Attitudes are considered one of three types of *internal dispositions* of individuals (Ajzen 2012, p. 367). There must be some evaluative orientation towards a psychological object to qualify an internal disposition as attitude, regardless of how an individual may have conceived it. Attitudinal objects vary in their level of generality: Evaluative orientations about values, social groups, the individual’s position in society, political issues and policies share a high degree of generality while any attitude towards behaviour is less general and universal (Ajzen 2012, p. 368). Given the variety of psychological objects alone, attitudes seem to exist in multiple shapes that most definitively have analytical consequences. Nevertheless, the defining emphasis lies on the *evaluative* character that differentiates attitudes from other psychological dispositions (see Campbell 1963).

The second type of internal dispositions are *cognitions*. They stand for knowledge about and the understanding of specific psychological objects without an evaluative component (Ajzen 2012, 367 f.). These might manifest in stereotypes, the skill to differentiate between ideological positions or beliefs about probable outcomes of social processes. The third type are *behavioural dispositions* such as the famous Big Five personality traits,¹ self-consciousness or accustomed habits of conduct (Ajzen 2012, 367 f.). In contrast to these types of dispositions, *affects* resemble emotions and mood-states that do not necessarily relate to a specific psychological object (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, 78 f.). Affects are considered specific patterns of the

¹The Big Five personality traits are considered to be openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (see Goldberg (1993)).

valence and the activation of an emotion (see Russell 1980). Attitudes, cognitions and affects are not independent of one another. Rather, the evaluative judgment about a psychological object can only emerge if an individual already possesses cognitions and affects towards it. Thus, an attitude with its evaluative nature can be considered a summary of cognitions and affects towards a psychological object (Crano and Prislin 2006, p. 347).

After having differentiated attitudes from the other types of internal dispositions, I now move to specific features of the attitude concept—the dimensionality, the strength, and the accessibility. First, an important debate about the attitudes' *dimensionality* has been carried out between empirical researchers and theorists: While the former preferred one-dimensional scales to measure attitudes, a large body of theoretical works conceptualize a three-dimensional approach that differentiates attitudes in their function for the individual.² Nevertheless, many attempts to systematically apply multidimensional attitude concepts in empirical research designs failed due to high correlations or a lack of validity (see Maio and Haddock 2015, 29 ff.; Schumann 2012, 81 f.). Therefore, scholars focus on more substantial differences that hold empirically (Eagly and Chaiken 1993, 13 f.). These prove to exist when attitude object and strength vary (Ajzen and Fishbein 2005, p. 177). Therefore, contemporary researchers conceptualize and measure attitudes on a “*unitary evaluative dimension [. . .] that ranges from negative to positive through a neutral point*” (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 76). Since attitudes are latent constructs that cannot be observed directly, scholars gather manifest survey responses and infer to the actual latent attitude behind it (Fishbein and Ajzen 2010, p. 76).³

Second, the *strength* of an attitude becomes an interesting feature when comparing multiple attitudes to another. Strength is considered to determine the intensity of favourableness to an attitude object (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980, 67). It is often associated with low ambivalence in an evaluation and with a small likelihood of being easily persuaded by new information (Crano and Prislin 2006). The definition of attitude strength has been widely contested given its important role in predicting a person's behaviour and the process of attitude change (Raden 1985). In addition, the inconsistencies in the conceptualization have produced a multitude of empirical indicators to measure attitude strength (Krosnick et al. 1993). While some measures are highly correlated in empirical studies, factor analytic approaches show that indicators of attitude strength are located on different dimensions (Crano and Prislin 2006).

Third, when interested in an individual's evaluative responses, an alternative suggestion to bypass the complexity of the strength concept is to focus on a more distinct feature: the *accessibility* of attitudes in an individual's memory (Ajzen 2012). The easier an individual can establish a link between a psychological object

²Three-dimensional attitude concepts differentiate between cognitive, affective, and conative components of attitudes. Cognitive responses consist of ideas and thoughts, affective ones of evaluations as well as affects, and conative ones point to intentions of behaviour Schumann (2012, p. 80).

³For a thorough discussion of this point of view, see for example Greenwald and Banaji (1995).

and an evaluation, the shorter the time she needs to form an evaluative response. The accessibility of an attitude depends on the role of the attitude object for the individual. Many direct experiences with the object and personal relevance increase the accessibility while conflicting information impedes it. High accessibility leads to stability of a specific attitude and thus facilitates its role on individual behaviour (Ajzen 2012, p. 371). When confronted with a certain situation, an individual tends to judge the environment by the available cognitions and attitudes. The more accessible an attitude, the more likely it is able to bias the decision process towards a specific behaviour (Ajzen 2012, p. 372; Fazio 1990).

Finally, I apply the presented state of attitude research to its use in political science and deliver a summarizing definition of the concept of political attitudes. In political science, the attitude concept is often applied without reaching the level of elaborateness of social psychology (Arzheimer 2008, p. 62). Nevertheless, the presented conceptualization can be easily transferred to attitudes towards psychological objects of political nature. Political attitude objects can be political ideas, ideologies, parties, politicians and their actions, policies, single institutions, and political systems as a whole. The variety of attitude objects implies different consequences for the characteristics of specific political attitudes concerning their formation, changeability, accessibility and power in shaping individual behaviour.⁴ Consequently, *political attitudes* are defined as latent evaluative dispositions towards political objects that may prime political behaviour and vary in their stability over time.

2.1.2 The Concept of Political Support for the European Union

The central attitudinal concept of this book is political support. In the following section, I will conceptualize political support in its general meaning. First, the original concept by David Easton will be subject of a thorough discussion (Sect. 2.1.2.1). Due to the analytical potential of his seminal works, the concept of support has been integrated into political culture research. In this strand of research, the original meaning, its theoretical range, and the empirical explication of political support has been widely discussed, criticized, and further developed. Therefore, the second step in this section is to review the continuing refinement of the conceptualization of support within political culture research (Sect. 2.1.2.2). The general concept of political support was developed against the background of national

⁴This overview on the primary features of the attitude concept merely scratches the surface of the whole research area in social psychology. To illustrate the variety of progress made in social psychology, see Hatemi and McDermott (2016) for a review on recent attempts to link neuroscience and genetic research with the explanation of attitude formation and change. Also, they provide considerations about the potential role of genetic factors for the prediction of attitude-driven behaviours.

political systems. In Sect. 2.1.2.3, I will discuss how the concept can be and has been adapted to the supranational level. Since the European Community and European Union have been transformed over time, this discussion needs to consider the different stages of European integration. Moreover, I shed light on the democratic status of the EU since political support has specific implications for democratically organized societies. Second, I will re-evaluate the assumptions and contents of the support framework in light of the context of European integration. This second step is decisive since it will deliver a thorough and systematic conceptualization of EU support (Sect. 2.1.2.4). Finally, I will take a closer look at the citizens' perspective on supranational politics in Europe. What implications does the varying relevance of European politics to citizens' everyday lives have for the analysis of attitudes towards more distant political objects such as the EU? (Sect. 2.1.2.5).

2.1.2.1 Easton's Original Conceptualization

Easton's seminal work takes the perspective of system theory to develop a framework for the analysis of the political system in general (Easton 1965a, b). All social interactions evolving around the political life are systematically connected to produce and implement "*binding or authoritative allocations*" (Easton 1965a, p. 50) for a society. The actors behind these social interactions remain abstract and refer only to the functional role within the system. Thus, Easton's framework can be considered one of the first functionalist approaches. Moreover, the political system does not imply a specific regime type although Easton was socialized in the world of Western liberal democracies. The normative component in his theory is negligible since it focuses more on the coherent analytic character of the systemization of political life.

In its purpose to deliver the "*authoritative allocation of values*" (Easton 1965b, p. 5) the political system is confronted by so-called *inputs* of the environment. This environment channels articulated proposals (*demands*) towards the authorities of the system that are responsible for implementing "*an authoritative allocation with regard to a particular subject matter*" (Easton 1965b, p. 38). The political system may produce decisions to answer to these demands. The *outputs* of the political system shall comply with the demands of the environment to a sufficient degree to keep the "*essential variables*" of political life within the "*critical range*" (Easton 1965b, p. 24). If it fails to do so, the environment may consider decisions of the system no longer binding. Consequently, the political system may ultimately fail to "*persist whether the world be one of stability or change*" (Easton 1965b, 14 f.).

The cycle between demands, the system's compliance to them through decisions, the resulting outputs and persistence of the system leaves a major gap that is to be filled to unleash the potential of Easton's framework: The second component of the inputs of the system is considered to be *support*—the central root concept of this book. Easton describes it "*as an attitude by which a person orients himself to an object either favorably or unfavorably, positively or negatively*" (Easton 1975, p. 436). This definition is clearly similar to the previously presented general understanding of attitudes being of evaluative nature.