

Acknowledgements

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One of the most contentious divides left by the recent European economic crisis is over the adoption of controversial economic policies, principally fiscal austerity. But despite this division and much research on the consequences of welfare retrenchment, we have little evidence about the nature of individual support or opposition to austerity policies as a response to economic crisis. To what extent are such preferences affected by the specific content of fiscal consolidation policies, or the fact that they are endorsed by international institutions such as the European Union (EU), or their potential consequences for the common currency? These questions remain as citizens of hard-hit crisis countries may not tolerate further fiscal cuts and tax increases. European economies are now recovering, but the dissatisfaction with the policy status quo persists, as indicated by the depressed Greek economy, the anti-austerity parliamentary majority in Portugal, and the ascent of new political parties in Italy and Spain that threaten longstanding political systems. From an international political economy perspective, better understanding societal preferences underpinning austerity politics is needed as austerity tolerance affects the political sustainability of contemporary supranational macroeconomic regimes such as the Eurozone.

Despite the conventional wisdom that austerity is unpopular, and that external imposition of these policies is responsible for some anti-EU backlash,ⁱ there has been little systematic evidence measuring preferences for austerity policies in the crisis context. The latest European economic crisis provoked much political division within the hardest hit countries about how their domestic governments should respond. Particularly divisive was the use of fiscal consolidation as well as the forms in which it was implemented. This division raises several immediate questions: are tax increases equally disliked as spending cuts? Does the supranational nature of the demands for these austerity packages (such as their promotion by the German government or

EU institutions) affect their domestic palatability? These questions are relevant given that domestic adoption of such policies was criticized or praised as “satisfying” the demands of the EU and foreign creditors.

We address these questions by presenting survey data from a large nationally representative sample in a crisis-hit country, Spain. We first present results from an experiment that asked about individual assessment of crisis-specific fiscal adjustment policies. We randomized both the *content* of the policy question (posing it as tax increases versus spending cuts), and whether the policy was *endorsed* by one of three relevant actors (the European Union (EU), other European governments, and the German government). We find little public support for austerity overall, and little effect of foreign or supranational authority endorsements on the acceptance (or opposition) to such policies. However, we observe that individuals exposed to austerity with any content of tax increases are far less likely to support it relative to austerity programs composed of spending cuts, regardless of who the external endorser of the policy is.

We then follow up on these initial results in two ways. We first test one reason why austerity support appears limited and whether stronger cues affect support for government spending during crises. To do so, we analyze how preferences for widely supported government programs—spending for the less well-off—change as we randomly make salient certain *negative* features of such spending, emphasizing the taxes needed to pay for such spending, and the potential damage that such spending could do to the country’s fiscal commitments to the EU. We find that the effect of emphasizing the negative outcomes in terms of higher taxes and breaking the country’s fiscal commitments towards the EU both reduce support of such a policy. Thus, while simple endorsements regarding the EU do not affect support for austerity, making salient costs associated with the EU standing of the country does affect support for government

spending. The drop in support is driven by theoretically relevant groups—individuals who have suffered greatly from the economic crisis (in the case of the tax burden treatment), and those who support the euro as a common currency (in the case of the EU fiscal commitment treatment). We corroborate these findings in a second observational additional test where we focus on measuring even more nuanced positions on austerity’s benefits or harms.

Our results suggest that a growing economic divide over euro-related policy preferences might have emerged in the aftermath of the great recession, pitting those who have been relatively isolated from the crisis and hold positive predispositions towards the euro and support austerity, against those more economically vulnerable who do not. The findings add to both substantive political debates about why austerity has been sustained, as well as to the theoretical discussion about correlates of support for fiscal adjustment and the limits and effectiveness of external endorsement cues, both of which remain underexplored questions in the political economy and political behavior literatures. They also indicate that despite the fact that austerity is thought to be unpopular, governments can frame the policy in certain ways to make it more palatable to citizens.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 1 gives an overview motivating the studies. Section 2 discusses the theoretical and baseline expectations from extant theory. Section 3 describes the design and results for the main experiment regarding endorsement cues and austerity content. Sections 4 and 5 present data that build on these findings. Section 4 describes the design and results of an experiment that examines the role of more powerful cues, and section 5 presents results regarding a more nuanced measurement of austerity taking into account euro support. Section 6 concludes.

Section 1. Background and Motivation

Given that austerity has been the modal fiscal policy response to the eurozone crisis and was the default prescription of EU institutions, understanding the conditions under which citizens prefer it is of obvious theoretical and normative importance.ⁱⁱ Spain is a particularly relevant case to examine regarding individual preferences regarding the crisis, because of the depth and duration of the economic recession, as well its economic importance to the viability of the Eurozone.ⁱⁱⁱ The immediate causes and events leading up to an asset bubble, its bursting and a major recession in Spain that began in late 2008, as well as the grim economic statistics between 2009 and 2017, have been well documented. Between 2007 and 2013, real Spanish GDP per capita fell by more than 10 percent, and the unemployment rate skyrocketed from 8 to 27 percent. While unemployment fell to “merely” 17 percent in 2017, Spanish youth unemployment remains over 40 percent, and many economic commentators have noted the difficulty in Spain’s capacity to recover from nearly eight years of recession with high unemployment and a debt burden at around 100% of GDP.^{iv}

The predominant fiscal response to the crisis since 2010 in Spain was austerity, with tax increases and spending cuts both contributing to the fiscal consolidation.^v After a brief policy response to the crisis of expansionary fiscal policy focused on “shovel-ready” infrastructure projects, the then Socialist-led government shifted to fiscal consolidation in spring 2010 in response to panic in peripheral sovereign debt markets. In May 2010, the Spanish government passed the first wave of austerity measures, including an average 5 percent cut of public employee salaries, a reduction in infrastructure spending, a freezing on pensions, and an increase in the value added tax (VAT) initially by two percent. The Socialist government was replaced by the conservative *Partido Popular* (PP) Party in the 2011 elections, which passed an income tax increase and spending reductions across all government departments right after taking office.

The government passed in 2012 a further increase of the VAT to 21 percent, and a new set of rules that forced reductions in regional budgets. Major social programs experienced sizeable cuts; from 2011 to 2014 public spending on education was reduced in real terms by 19 percent, on health care by 10 percent, and on social protection by 13 percent, despite increasing needs generated by the crisis;^{vi} the overall fiscal tightening approached 9 per cent of national income.^{vii}

Precisely mapping the economic crisis on to the political fallout is difficult, but trust in government in Spain declined substantially since the onset of the crisis. Perhaps the best illustration of the increasing dissatisfaction with the political and economic status quo is the sudden rise of the new parties *Podemos* (“We can”) and *Ciudadanos* (“Citizens”). The former party, rocketing to public salience in spring 2014 during the nadir of the crisis, campaigned against austerity and on the regaining of democratic sovereignty against the “technocratic” policy-making of current EU institutions, as well as highlighting corruption. On the other hand, the centrist party *Ciudadanos* has also increased in popularity and blamed the two dominant parties for the country’s situation and the lack of reforms in response to the crisis. This political fallout from the crisis and its policy response indicates the importance of the Spanish case.

Section 2. Literature and hypotheses for support for austerity and spending in crisis times

Our study is motivated by the literature on the determinants of support for welfare retrenchment.^{viii} While there is an established agenda on the structural or institutional conditions that facilitate retrenchment, beginning with Pierson’s classic studies on the difficulty of massive state cutbacks and on how governments engage in “blame avoidance” strategies, there has only recently been attention to when the public supports such measures. There are mixed conclusions about the causes of individual-level support for retrenchment.^{ix} One strand of this literature, mostly using observational survey data, is inconclusive as to whether retrenchment actually

politically hurts governments. For example, Schumacher et al. find that there is conditional punishment of incumbent parties after welfare cuts are implemented, because incumbent parties with pro-welfare images lose votes, but others do not;^x Giger by contrast finds using cross-national data that retrenchment is not generally unpopular except among those who are political engaged.^{xi} Giger and Nelson further find that voters who believe that social spending does not hurt the economy do punish retrenching governments, but that those who think such spending could harm economic stability do not do so.^{xii} One of the key lessons from these studies is that there is considerable heterogeneity in the population regarding support for retrenchment, and thus governments *can* implement retrenchment without necessarily suffering political costs.

Another strand of related literature on support for retrenchment that uses more experimental approaches argues that public support of government *spending* is sensitive to various trade-offs and costs of such spending. Generally, such costs are theoretically posed in terms of other programs that would be at risk if such spending is pursued. For example, some studies show in the case of pension reform that reform preferences are sensitive to information regarding demographic crises; opposition to increasing the retirement age can be reduced with relevant information about the costs of demographic change.^{xiii} Another large-scale study found that if citizens are confronted with realistic budget constraints, support for social investments like education drops when such spending is financed with cutbacks in social transfers.^{xiv}

While the above research programs identify general reasons as to why retrenchment is partially supported as well as specific costs that reduce the appeal of social spending, their focus is less on understanding recent austerity measures as a policy *package* and as a *crisis response in the context of the eurozone*.^{xv} These studies generally do not consider the separate impact of tax increases and spending cuts as a general policy response; the retrenchment literature generally

sensibly dwells on cuts on specific programs.^{xvi} But during the eurozone crisis, many responded with a mix of tax increases (which varied in visibility) and spending cuts. The above experimental studies focus on potential trade-offs and fiscal costs to austerity, but not on the different *components* of austerity. This omission is relevant because austerity is often billed as a policy package that appears to be “all pain” in return for prospective gains of continued membership in the EU. Second, we build on this literature by exploring why austerity programs might be supported *in the context of the eurozone crisis*, which poses different constraints for governments than retrenchment in relatively “more normal” economic times. With attention to different aspects that might affect broad support for austerity, one can disentangle the EU from the policy-specific aspects of austerity policies.

Even though we lack specific studies of austerity during the crisis, building on studies of support for both retrenchment and social spending, a reasonable expectation is that the correlations between individual-level correlates of support for spending and opposition to retrenchment should apply regarding austerity. Sensible predictions about austerity incorporate the roles of income and negative income shocks. Regarding income, because austerity is often posed as cuts in government social spending, income is hypothesized to be positively correlated with support for austerity (as it implies opposition to government spending). Additionally, given that austerity in the Eurozone has largely been implemented during times of economic crisis, another sensible prediction focuses on the role of negative income shocks; panel evidence from US and Dutch citizens who move in and out of employment supports this general intuition that negative income shocks and employment loss condition support for redistributive programs.^{xvii} Due to the severity of the recession in Spain, those who have suffered more economically during the crisis to be more supportive of social spending, and therefore, more opposed to austerity.

Austerity as a package in crisis times

We have provided only a cursory description of how these theories of redistribution preferences might apply to austerity, because a serious caveat to the above theoretical expectations, as well as the existing findings on retrenchment support, is that austerity is a package that includes tax increases. Individual views of austerity can differ depending on aversion to tax increases to pay for such spending. Individuals may support spending policies in the abstract but not the taxes used to finance them, or their support for spending cuts could be dampened by the inclusion of tax increases as part of the policy package. These conditions might be particularly relevant in the Southern European context, where the welfare state is more limited and redistribution and welfare state intervention tends to disproportionately benefit the middle-class.^{xviii} If individuals believe that government spending anyway does not benefit those who have suffered during the crisis, they may be even less supportive of such spending or more sensitive to tax increases used to pay for such spending.^{xix}

This *mix* of policies inherent in austerity has implications for how the above individual covariates affect preferences. The first implication is about how standard variables would matter, and therefore how a research design could accommodate this “package” aspect of austerity. For example, affluent individuals should generally support lower government spending, but, if this lower government spending is paired with overall tax increases, that might reduce their support for austerity overall. Similarly, low income individuals might view themselves as actual or potential beneficiaries of social spending and oppose cuts, but whether tax increases add to their opposition to the austerity package depends on beliefs about who bears the brunt of such tax increases.

We discuss more how to deal with this caveat of the “package” nature of austerity in the research design section, but we preview the main concern now, as previous literature on redistribution in the crisis focuses on retrenchment. But public approval of austerity may depend on whether support for the mix of spending cuts as well as tax increases to respond to the crisis. Hence in the research design, we compare preferences for austerity packages by simply separating these components and comparing individual evaluation of them to evaluation of the package as a whole. This allows us to causally assess which elements of an austerity package are more important to individuals.

A second caveat to the above theorizing is that in considering austerity as a policy package adopted to respond to the economic crisis, in the Eurozone context, views of austerity support may be greatly influenced by one’s views of the euro or EU. The growing literature on the challenges that the crisis has posed to the EU argues that its legitimacy problems are partially caused by austerity policies that were perceived as impositions from unelected EU technocrats; these policies are often connected to increasing levels of Euroscepticism,^{xx} lack of trust in democratic institutions,^{xxi} greater opposition towards the actual content of these policies, and beliefs in the EU’s lack of legitimacy.^{xxii} Following this conjecture, we hypothesize that support for austerity should be affected by whether individuals believe these fiscal consolidation policies are endorsed by the EU. Pro-EU or euro individuals should believe that compliance with these policy measures maximizes “good standing” with the EU and minimizes the risk of leaving the Eurozone. Therefore, we also posit that a strong correlate of supporting austerity should be orientation towards the EU and support for the euro.^{xxiii} A rich literature identifies strong correlates of such pro-European institution orientation; these are generally age, education and

income, although the precise mechanisms linking these covariates to EU support are still debated.^{xxiv}

While current studies note a strong correlation between factors such as education and support for the euro and the EU, as well as traditionally higher levels of support for and trust in the EU within Spain,^{xxv} one concern about this finding as it relates to austerity support is identifying a causal impact of the involvement of the EU on support for austerity. Individuals who are predisposed to trust or support the EU, or support the euro, and who strongly wish to maintain Spanish membership in the Eurozone and EU might also be those willing to pursue austerity.^{xxvi} As noted above, in the case of the European economic crisis, austerity could be viewed as a means of maximizing preservation of the euro, but the causal relationship between EU support and austerity would be unclear. Conversely, individuals who are skeptical of the EU or euro may also be those less supportive of austerity because they view it as a policy that serves those ends.

Disentangling the causal relationship is difficult, but below we propose a research design that addresses the role of EU in making austerity more or less palatable in two ways. First, we randomize the presence of a cue making the EU as well as other external actor *endorsements* of austerity salient. This design enables us to assess whether the presence of supranational or foreign political actor's endorsements make austerity packages less attractive. If, as has been frequently argued by critics of the EU's behavior during the crisis, it is the lack of political legitimacy by supranational institutions or foreign governments that makes austerity policies more contested by the public, we should expect austerity packages (either in the form of tax increases, spending cuts, or both) to be less supported whenever these external endorsements are present. While there is much literature in the US context on endorsement cueing, much less

literature in the European context experimentally looks at the impact of *external* or *international* endorsement cues on policy preferences.^{xxvii}

Separating the impact of the EU and related actors as endorsers of austerity from policy content is also important, as there is increasing media scrutiny and criticism of austerity, the EU's role in promoting it, and perceptions of EU lack of transparency.^{xxviii} Recent government turnovers and political uncertainty in Southern European states over the last several years have been linked to dissatisfaction with the economic outcomes since the turn to austerity. Given the economic shocks to southern Europe, individuals might be more skeptical of policies if they are perceived to be endorsed by the EU, or related actors such as the German government. We hypothesize that *ceteris paribus*, such endorsements should on average make policies *less* popular, as they might be perceived as policy impositions from outside actors lacking domestic democratic legitimacy. However, an obvious moderating variable should be pre-existing degree of EU or euro support; individuals who are particularly pro-euro or EU could be even more likely to support such policies if they are endorsed by the EU. We distinguish among different external actors (the EU, other European governments, and the German government), because it is plausible that individuals might be more or less responsive to cues based on the beliefs they hold about these actors; the EU might be perceived to be permeable to the influence of Spain's interests, while other EU governments (and Germany) might be more clearly identified as "foreign" actors.

In a second experiment, discussed in section 4, we explore an additional channel through which EU-related concerns could affect preferences for austerity. Instead of the legitimacy concerns raised by foreign actors' endorsements, views over austerity might vary as a result of the expected consequences of such policies for the Eurozone membership and, more generally,

for the country's viability as a member of the EU. To the extent that the public perceives austerity as a cost "worth paying" for the maintenance of the country's economic commitments, these economic policies might be more tolerated or accepted.

Section 3. Austerity Preferences, Content, and European Endorsement

Design

To test whether endorsement by the EU and other external actors matter for support for austerity, as well as whether policy part of an austerity package matters more, we fielded a web-based survey of a large nationally representative sample in Spain, of 6,000 respondents, in October 2015.^{xxix} The first examines support for austerity generally, and the second looks at the more standard question of support for social spending, a major component of why austerity packages are contentious.

For the first experiment, we assess support for austerity as a response to the crisis. We randomize two aspects of the austerity policy: a) whether austerity is defined as spending cuts, as tax increases, or both (the policy content), and b) whether the policy has no endorsement, is endorsed by the EU, other governments that are members of the EU, or the German government. For each question, the baseline condition that we are interested in comparing to is whether the austerity policy is defined as both tax increases and spending cuts. Thus, there are 12 possible conditions (three possible policy content options and four possible endorsements). The text of the austerity dependent variable reads as follows, with a "/" denoting separation of randomized text put in to alter the wording of the question. The only difference across questions is random assignment of the policy content and endorsement:

"As you may know, with the aim of reducing the public deficit during the current crisis, the Spanish governments have followed a policy of: {spending cuts and tax increases / spending cuts / increase taxes} {no text / consistent with the recommendations of the institutions of the European Union / consistent with the recommendations of other European governments / consistent with the recommendations of the German government}. What is your view of this

policy?” [Response options: strongly favor, somewhat favor, neither favor nor oppose, somewhat oppose, strongly oppose].

Therefore, the control group question mentions *both* tax increases and spending cuts and has *no* endorsement. The full list of treatments with all the question-wording combinations is listed in Appendix Table A1. The sample size for each experimental condition was 500.

We measure and code key demographic covariates at the conclusion of the survey. We collected data placing the respondent in an income decile. Education is coded on a four-point scale (some primary or secondary schooling only, completed secondary schooling, vocational training or exposure, and completed university and/or post-graduate training). Female gender is coded 1. Unemployment status is coded as 1 if respondent is unemployed, 0 otherwise. Age is coded on a five-point scale (18-30, 31-45, 46-63, 66 and above). The standard left-right ideology scale is coded 1-10, with higher values indicating more conservative self-placement. We code an individual as a labor market “outsider” if they are currently employed with a temporary contract.

We measure income loss by asking the individual to respond if her income has approximately increased, stayed the same, or decreased since the onset of the crisis. With both the increase or decrease categories, we then ask the individual to recall to her best capacity the approximate amount, with response options of 0-10 percent, 10-20 percent, etc. We code individuals who have suffered extreme negative shocks as those who have lost at least 50 percent of their income since the start of the crisis. We also assess support for the euro with a question that asks respondents if they believed overall that the euro has provided more positive than negative effects for Spain; this is coded binary with 1 indicating pro-euro orientation and 0 otherwise. Appendix Table A2 provides the descriptive statistics of the overall sample. Appendix tables A3 and A4 show that these covariates are not correlated with treatment assignment,

indicating successful randomization in the two experiments (this one and the experiment in section 4).

Support for fiscal adjustment as a response to the crisis

We first describe the control group results regarding support for fiscal adjustment as a mix of tax increases and spending cuts, as this is the most basic way to assess citizen support for the austerity packages that Spain has adopted since the onset of the crisis. These are presented in the bottom part of column 1 of Table 1. Only a small minority of individuals—15 percent—either favor or strongly favor this policy (and in fact, only two percent strongly support fiscal adjustment, while nearly 40 percent are very much against it). Thus, in the baseline control group, there is little support for austerity as a policy. Income decile, age, and right-wing ideology are all unsurprisingly positively correlated with support for such measures, consistent with previous models that examine attitudes towards redistribution and retrenchment (column 1 of Table 1 shows these results based on logistic regression models for the control group only). The marginal impact of each income decile is about 1.5 percentage points, and that of ideology is about 3.5 percentage points. Neither unemployment nor labor-market status correlate with opposition to such austerity measures. But, as previewed above, the lack of correlation for some of these variables could be due to sensitivity to tax increases. In terms of the other specific policy attitude measures in the model, being pro-euro strongly positively correlates with support for austerity. The marginal impact of this variable is quite large and precisely estimated at 10-11 percentage points. This is some preliminary evidence of the connection between expressing pro-euro views and supporting austerity.^{xxx}

We now turn to the first causal question of interest, which is, how does the emphasis of austerity as either spending cuts or tax increases compare to the control group “package” of

both? As it is cumbersome to present and discuss the means of all the other 11 treatment groups, we focus first on just comparing the control baseline to the groups that emphasize tax increases and spending cuts separately. For the group that receives the austerity question framed only as spending cuts with no endorser (group 5 in Table A1), support for austerity jumps to 32 percent (thus a minority, but a much larger one, supports austerity when defined this way). This difference from the control group is significant ($p < .001$). For the group that receives the austerity question framed only as tax increases (group 9 in Table A1), support remains similar to the baseline condition at around 16 percent. From these simple comparisons, emphasizing austerity as just spending cuts makes it more popular relative to mentioning both cuts and taxes (but still overall, the package does not get majority support). And presenting austerity as just tax increases does not make it *less* popular than the baseline condition. Overall, austerity is less unpopular when presented as spending cuts than as tax increases.

What about the effect of external endorsements on support for austerity? We find no evidence that the external endorser matters, regardless of who the endorser is. Across each of the endorsement treatments (the EU, European governments, the German government), and regardless of the austerity content, there are no significant difference in means across these groups. For example, if the German government endorses austerity (as defined as tax increases and spending cuts), support for the austerity package is 18 percent, but the difference is not statistically significant.

These results hold if we estimate a logistic regression with the dependent variable of support for the baseline mix of austerity with no endorsement (the control group), and a series of binary indicators for the different treatment assignments. The basic model thus has 11 coefficients (one for each treatment group). Columns 2 and 3 of Table 1 and Figure 1 show the

results.^{xxx} The striking pattern is that the coefficients for each of the treatments that frame austerity only as spending cuts are positive and precisely estimated, but none of the endorsement coefficients matter relative to the control group. Further, within each set of different policy content questions, the endorsement coefficient does not differ greatly. The estimated marginal impact of each treatment of framing austerity as spending cuts, relative to the baseline defined as the mix of spending cuts and tax increases, are 20 (no endorsement), 15 (EU endorsed), 16 (other European government endorsed), and 20 (German government endorsed) percentage points, respectively (all of these differences from the control group are precisely estimated at $p < .01$). No matter which external authority endorses spending cuts, such cuts are much more supported relative to the baseline question of austerity.

Is it the case that these treatment effects—particularly those of framing austerity as spending—are driven by many of the relevant moderators discussed above? To test the conditional impact of these covariates, we simply estimate a series of logistic estimations as above, interacting left-wing orientation, income decile, major income loss, and euro orientation (the covariates that are theoretically of interest and linked to austerity support in the control group). These null results are shown available in Table A5 of the appendix. We find little evidence that the treatment effects are heightened in any of these groups.^{xxx} In no cases are the interaction terms between treatment assignment and the demographic variable of interest precisely estimated at conventional levels. The large positive effect of framing austerity as spending cuts relative to other ways (that include tax increases) are thus not driven by particular individuals who have these specific demographic characteristics. Our conclusion is that while austerity remains unpopular, and support for it is higher among the wealthier, older, educated, and more pro-euro, it is much less unpopular when only its spending cut features are

emphasized. Framing austerity measures as originating from outside the domestic political arena (in the EU, other European governments, or the German government) does not cause these policy measures to be any less supported by respondents.

Table 1. Endorsement and content framing experiments and preferences for austerity.
Dependent Variable: Support for austerity programs, logit coefficients.

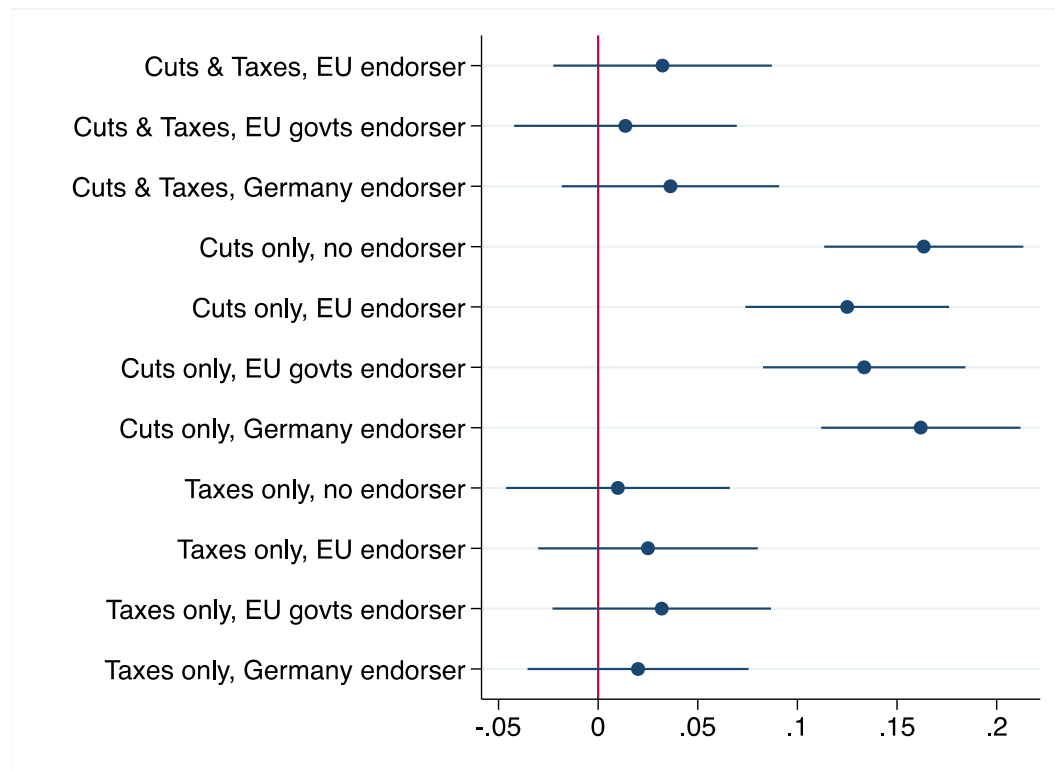
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Both, EU endorsed		0.20 (0.17)	0.23 (0.18)
Both, EU govts endorsed		0.084 (0.18)	0.13 (0.19)
Both, Germany endorsed		0.22 (0.17)	0.20 (0.18)
Cuts, no endorsement		1.00*** (0.16)	1.18*** (0.17)
Cuts, EU endorsed		0.77*** (0.16)	0.85*** (0.17)
Cuts, EU govts endorsed		0.82*** (0.16)	0.86*** (0.17)
Cuts, German endorsed		1.00*** (0.16)	1.09*** (0.17)
Taxes, no endorsement		0.061 (0.18)	0.063 (0.19)
Taxes, EU endorsed		0.15 (0.17)	0.18 (0.19)
Taxes, EU govts endorsed		0.20 (0.17)	0.27 (0.18)
Taxes, Germany endorsed		0.12 (0.17)	0.18 (0.19)
Decile	0.13** (0.059)		0.094*** (0.014)
Female	-0.074 (0.28)		-0.25*** (0.070)
Education	0.0065 (0.14)		0.16*** (0.037)
Age	0.39** (0.17)		0.20*** (0.041)
Ideology	0.32*** (0.063)		0.32*** (0.016)
Unemployed	0.27 (0.48)		-0.012 (0.11)
Outsider	0.50		-0.14

	(0.45)		(0.12)
Extreme inc loss	-0.038 (0.44)		
Euro positive	1.02*** (0.30)		
Constant	-5.33*** (0.74)	-1.74*** (0.13)	-4.66*** (0.23)
<i>N</i>	484	5988	5821
<i>Pseudo R</i> ²	.18	.02	.13

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Figure 1. Marginal effects of different treatments on support for austerity
(baseline: supports reduction in cuts and increases in taxes, no endorsement)



Section 4. The role of stronger non-endorsement cues on spending preferences

The results raise a few follow-up questions. First, why does austerity overall seem to be fairly unpopular (as indicated in the control group)? Second, does the fact that the EU is involved in negotiated austerity packages really not matter at all regarding views on austerity, as

suggested by the null effect of the endorsement cues? One sensible reason why respondents in the first experiment were overall fairly negative regarding austerity is that many individuals support redistributive programs and the preservation of social services. But, we hypothesize that such support could also be attenuated if potential costs to that spending are also made salient. To test this more systematically, we asked about support for social spending with a stronger cue related to the EU that is beyond “mere” endorsement (which was a minimal baseline), which is making salient how spending could risk *breaking EU fiscal commitments*. We also compare this cue to the standard cost of making salient *tax increases to pay for austerity*.

We divide the sample in three groups. To those in the control group, we ask a straightforward question of whether she supports increased government spending for the least well-off. In the two experimental groups, we made salient a) tax increases necessary to fund this program—an element that should reduce the support for such policy—and b) the fact that this policy could endanger fiscal commitments to the EU. Each treatment group primes a different potential cost to pursuing government spending during the crisis. Hence, we can recover a comparable measure of how “costly” individuals believe it is to pursue fiscal policies that could violate EU fiscal rules. This also helps assess whether these stronger cues regarding more specific negative consequences of pursuing government spending (against austerity) matter. The text of the question reads (again with a “/” denoting separation of randomly assigned questioned wordings):

“Are you in favor or against increased government spending targeted for the least well-off, {no text / even if it means raising taxes are increased / although this could endanger commitments with the European Union to reduce spending /?” [Response options are strongly favor / somewhat favor / neither favor nor oppose / somewhat against / strongly against]

Each respondent was assigned to each condition with one-third chance. For the dependent variable, we code strongly support/favor and support/favor as support (1) and the rest as 0. The demographic independent variables and attitudes regarding the euro are the same as described in section 3.^{xxxiii}

In the control group, and consistent with previous data on the propensity of Spanish individuals to support social spending, there is strong majority support for such redistributive programs. 76 percent either somewhat favor or strongly favor of increasing spending for the least well-off, and only 9 percent are strongly against such new spending. While we are less concerned with the impact of the standard individual covariates in this control group, Table 2 presents results from a simple estimation, where we estimate the coefficients for the covariates of income decile, female gender, age, education, left-right ideology, and labor market status. Column 1 in the table shows that in the control group, right-wing ideology, education and age are correlated with support for social spending, but income decile is not, consistent with previous research that finds the limited impact of income on welfare state preferences in Southern European countries. Individuals who have suffered large income losses (defined as greater than half of income lost since the crisis) are also more supportive of spending, by about eight percentage points.

We now turn to the simple difference of means tests across the experimental groups to assess the baseline impact of making different costs of social spending salient. The tax condition reduces support for social spending dramatically, by nearly 18 percentage points (.76 v .58, $p < .001$). The EU fiscal-commitment treatment also reduces support spending, by nearly eight percentage points (.76 v .68, $p < .001$). We note in both experimental conditions, support for increased social spending overall still remains above 50 percent. These results are robust if we

conduct a logistic estimation with the same outcome as the control group, with binary variables for treatment assignment. Columns 2 and 3 of Table 2 shows that both treatment coefficients are precisely estimated. The marginal effects for the tax salience and EU commitment are 18 and nine percentage points, respectively.

Table 2. Preference for increased spending on programs for the worse-off

	(1: control group only)	(2)	(3)
Decile	0.031 (0.023)		0.039*** (0.012)
Female	-0.056 (0.11)		-0.24*** (0.060)
Education	0.25*** (0.056)		0.18*** (0.030)
Age	0.32*** (0.066)		0.28*** (0.036)
Ideology	-0.25*** (0.025)		-0.25*** (0.014)
Unemployed	-0.063 (0.17)		0.0099 (0.089)
Outsider	-0.062 (0.17)		0.079 (0.094)
Large inc loss	0.47*** (0.17)		0.21** (0.090)
Taxes salient		-0.80*** (0.069)	-0.87*** (0.073)
EU commit. risk		-0.40*** (0.071)	-0.42*** (0.075)
constant	0.60** (0.27)	1.14*** (0.052)	0.98*** (0.15)
<i>N</i>	1932	5992	5816
<i>R</i> ²	.07	.02	.08

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

We also test whether these large treatment effects are more pronounced in groups that should be more sensitive to the treatments. In particular, we consider two theoretically important moderators, following from the discussion above: personal experience of the crisis, and support for the euro.^{xxxiv} Appendix Table A7 shows the results of interacting large income loss with each treatment and interacting support for the euro with each treatment; due to space constraints we present Figures 2a and 2b instead, which display the marginal effects of the two treatment conditions for different categories of respondents.

In the whole sample, when tax increases are linked to the pro-poor spending program, support for the policy drops by about 20 percentage points. This marginal effect is however significantly larger for those who have suffered a large income loss during the crisis than for those who have not. The effect of linking the pro-spending program to a conflict with the country EU's fiscal commitments reduces the support for the program by roughly half that amount, and there are no significant differences in the magnitude of this effect across respondents who have suffered different income shocks. When we compare treatment effects across respondents with different views of the euro (Figure 2b), we also note striking differences. Those holding less positive views about the euro are mostly unresponsive to the potential breaking of EU fiscal commitments (the effect of this treatment condition is barely significant), although they are sensitive to tax increases treatment. However, as figure 2b shows, pro-euro individuals are more sensitive to the EU fiscal treatment than anti-euro individuals, and the negative impact of the EU fiscal treatment is more driven by them. We note that pro-euro respondents are as sensitive to the EU fiscal commitment treatment as to the tax increases one, as confidence intervals for the two treatment conditions overlap for this group. These results indicate that while there is a baseline negative effect of simply making salient various costs of greater social spending, these

effects are larger in some sub-populations that we theoretically predict should be more sensitive to such concerns.^{xxxv} Our interpretation is that while simple EU endorsements do not appear to have a causal impact on austerity views, respondents do care about the costs of policies in terms of their implications for EU commitments.

Figure 2a. Marginal effects of different treatments on support for pro-poor spending, by income loss during the crisis (baseline condition: support for increased government spending targeted for the least well-off)

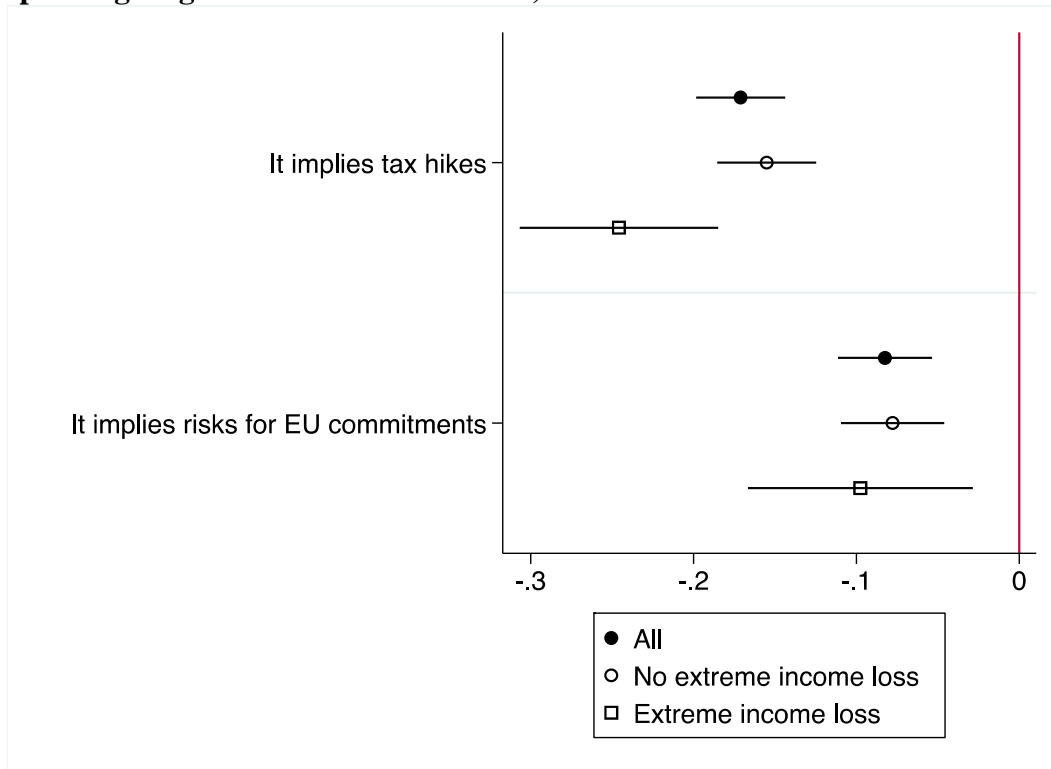
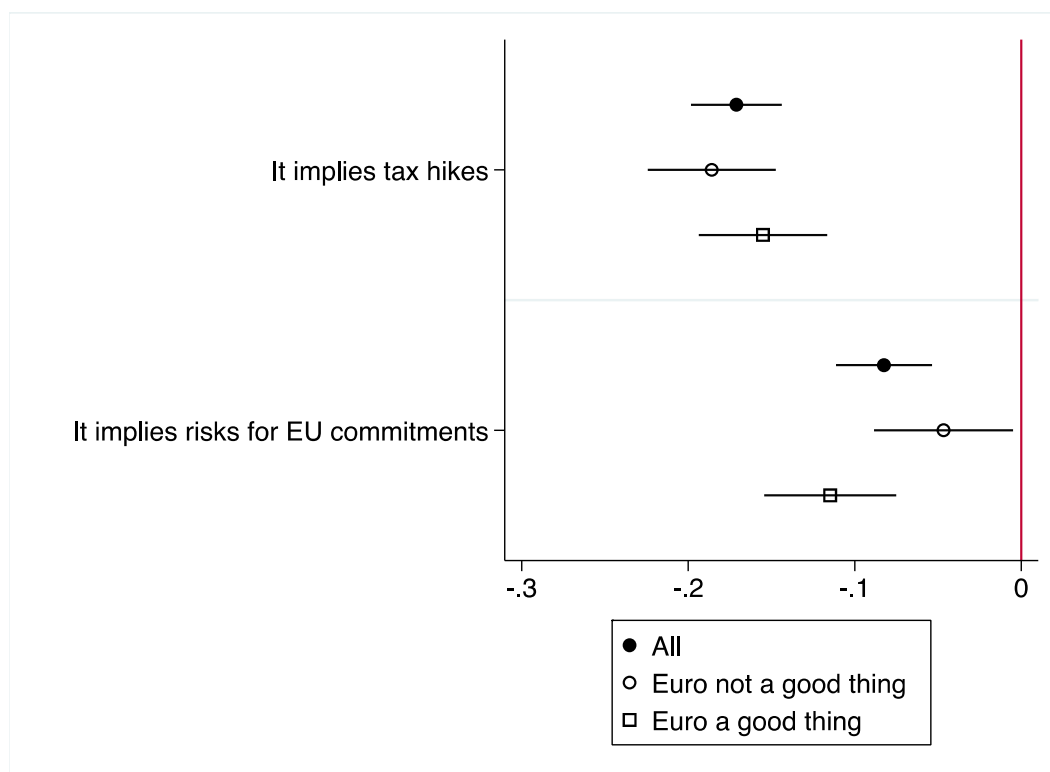


Figure 2b. Marginal effects of different treatments on support for pro-poor spending, by beliefs about the euro (baseline condition: support for increased government spending targeted for the least well-off)



Section 5. Blanket opposition to austerity? Further evidence

In this section we build on these results to test if austerity support changes if austerity is framed in other ways. The previous test establishes that opposition to austerity can be attenuated in the presence of negative consequences of breaking EU commitments, and that such effects are pronounced among those who have suffered the most from the crisis and those who are predisposed to the euro; in this final test we investigate more closely to what extent support for austerity depends on specific economic consequences. To do so we examine whether people hold the view that austerity has been economically painful but necessary to stay in the euro, taking into account the intuition that some citizens might have a mixed view of austerity. We use an alternative measure of attitudes towards austerity and assess whether the same moderators matter as in the previous section. The question reads

“As you might be aware, in the context of the economic crisis, the government has tried to reduce the public deficit by tax increases and spending cuts. What sentence best reflects your views towards these policies? {These policies are beneficial / These policies

are harmful, but are necessary because we would otherwise put our euro membership in risk / These policies are harmful, and we should have not adopted them.”}

Although the category selected by most respondents is that austerity has been harmful and should not have been adopted (47 percent), 43 percent believe that “austerity has been harmful but necessary not to put euro membership in risk,” and the remaining 10 percent believe austerity policies have been beneficial. When austerity is asked in this way allowing for acknowledgement of economic costs, we observe a slight *majority* of the sample express *some* degree of acceptance of austerity.

Using the same set of covariates as in the previous analyses, Table 3 presents the results of a multinomial logit model that investigates the determinants of individual choices for this three-category variable. We set the baseline category as the third option, “Austerity has been harmful and should not have been adopted.” As Table 3 shows, older and right-wing respondents have more positive views of austerity, relative to the reference category of preferring that austerity not being adopted. Consistent with the findings in the previous section, the table shows that those who have suffered greater income losses during the crisis are *less* likely to believe that austerity has been beneficial, and that austerity has been harmful but necessary. And consistent with the previous section’s results, assessment of the euro is highly positively correlated with views on austerity—such individuals are most likely to say that austerity has been necessary. Those who believe that the euro has been beneficial for Spain tend to hold more positive views of austerity.^{xxxvi}

Figures 3a and 3b display these results by plotting the predicted probabilities of the general assessment of austerity policies, for those who have suffered an extreme income loss during the crisis and those who have not experience any loss at all (Figure 3a), and for individuals with different views towards the euro (Figure 3b). Figure 3a shows that those whose

income has not been severely affected by the crisis are more likely to believe that austerity has been salutary in itself (by about four percentage points), and they are much less likely to believe that austerity should not have been adopted (by approximately seven percentage points). Figure 3b shows that those who have positive views of the euro are much less likely to choose the option that austerity should not have been adopted (relative to those who are euro-skeptics, by about 19 percentage points), more likely to choose the option that austerity has been harmful but necessary (relative to others by about 12 percentage points), and more likely to believe that austerity has been beneficial (by about eight percentage points). Of course, the belief in the positive consequences of the euro and support for austerity as a means of ensuring Spain's continued use of the euro capture the same general euro orientation, but it is still notable that those who support the euro are significantly more positive towards austerity, and the response options provided indicate that the reason for some continued austerity support is at least partly attributable to a desire to keep Spain in the common currency. While beliefs about the euro do affect the probabilities of believing that austerity is positive, the divide between euro-philes and euro-skeptics is much greater regarding the probability of choosing the other two categories, and is largest regarding the category of austerity being unequivocally negative.

Table 3. Assessment of austerity. Multinomial logit models (reference category: “austerity is harmful and should have been avoided”)

	Austerity beneficial	Austerity harmful but necessary
Income decile	0.024 (0.021)	0.028** (0.013)
Education	0.10* (0.054)	-0.017 (0.031)
Age	0.22*** (0.060)	0.15*** (0.037)
Unemployed	0.042 (0.17)	0.086 (0.091)
Ideology	0.57*** (0.024)	0.38*** (0.016)
Large income loss	-0.75*** (0.18)	-0.36*** (0.092)
Outsider	-0.19 (0.17)	-0.26*** (0.097)
Euro positive	1.56*** (0.11)	0.88*** (0.065)
Constant	-5.62*** (0.28)	-2.26*** (0.15)
<i>N</i>	5808	

Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Figure 3a. Evaluations of austerity by crisis suffering

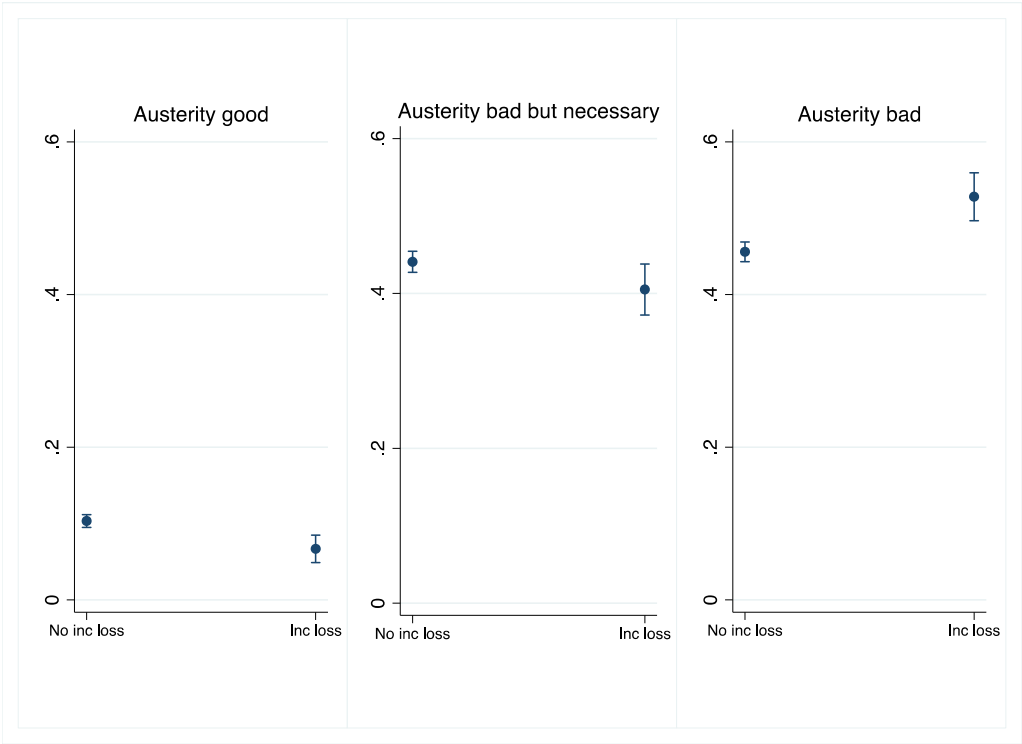
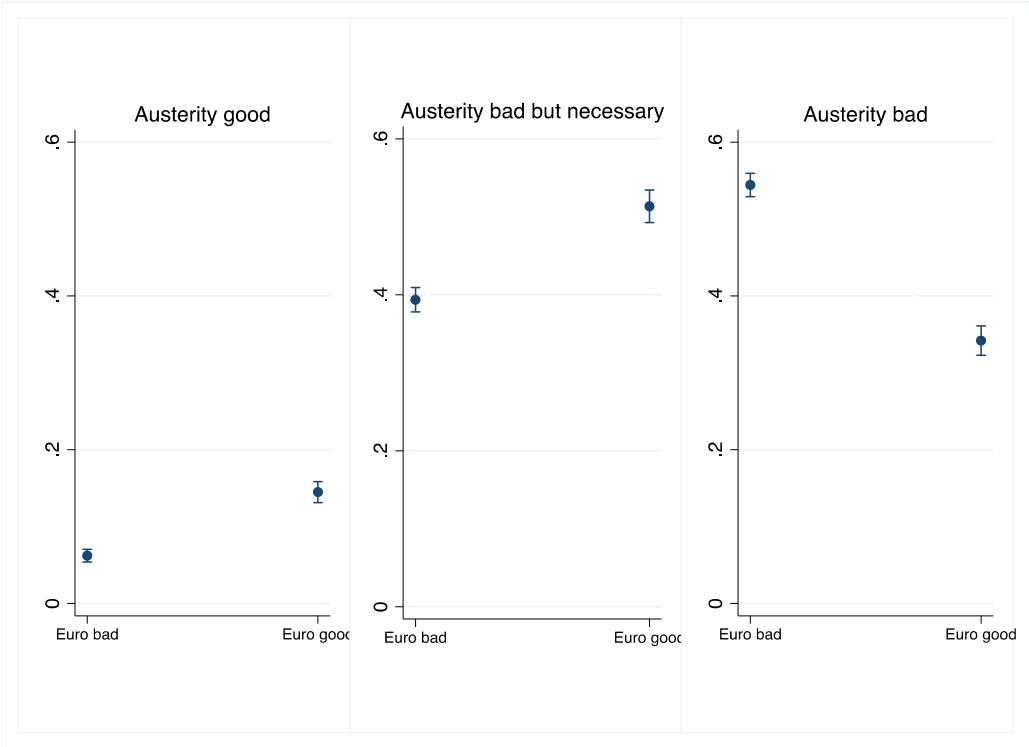


Figure 3b. Evaluations of austerity by views of the euro



Section 6. Discussion

We build on recent advances in the study of support for welfare retrenchment by focusing on the support for austerity policies during the eurozone crisis, which included both retrenchment and tax increases. While there is a wealth of literature now on attitude towards retrenchment generally and the public policies during the eurozone crisis, there is little research that considers these key topics jointly. Given the political divide over the EU's actions during the crisis, measuring austerity preferences with nuance is particularly important as such policies may easily be adopted again and concerns about EU legitimacy are now more salient.

We find generally low support for austerity, measured in a variety of ways, and a baseline high sensitivity to tax increases as a feature of austerity, whereas defining austerity as spending cuts alone makes it least unpopular. Making salient tax increases and EU commitments both reduce support for the anti-austerity measures of social spending. These reductions are driven by theoretically expected losers in both groups—those with large income losses who are tax-adverse and those who are pro-euro. These two groups are also more likely to have diverging views on whether austerity should have been pursued at all. We find overall fairly limited support for austerity and limited roles of minimal international endorser cues.

We emphasize that the division over austerity can be linked to individuals who have suffered large negative income shocks, and those who believe in the euro's positive consequences. Those who have suffered economically are less supportive of austerity, more supportive of government spending, and more likely to believe that austerity should not have been adopted, period. Those who are positively disposed towards the euro are more likely to be sensitive to the cue regarding breaking EU fiscal commitments, and more likely to believe that austerity is harmful, but still necessary (relative to other options).

One of the key implications of these results is that austerity can be politically palatable and perhaps marketable as long as there is a sufficiently pro-euro constituency. We think these effects indicate a potentially relevant political cleavage going forward, described above, and also indicate one reason (though certainly not the only one) for why austerity can be politically sustainable and thus adopted again in the future. Pro-euro individuals might not be enthusiastic about austerity, but they believe it is preferable to alternatives and worth the costs, particularly regarding maintaining the benefits of the EU and euro. And, as our second study showed, those who have economically suffered, while in abstract more supportive of government spending, appear to be particularly sensitive to taxes, to the point of completely cancelling this difference in support, if the need for tax increases to finance that spending is made salient. This set of results thus indicates one logic why a coalition to “overturn” austerity is difficult, given the upper constraint on supporting tax increases for social spending among those who might benefit from it the most. Our conjecture is that this could partially explain why despite perceived unpopularity of such policies in other countries as well as government turnover, governments in other hard-hit countries (Portugal, Greece, Italy, as well as Ireland) have been able to pursue such policies, albeit to varying degrees. Governments can potentially benefit from framing austerity as perhaps harmful in the short run, but necessary to avoid having to leave the euro. From the government’s perspective, aiming messages at the negative consequences for the EU towards more pro-EU citizens is another way to make austerity less unpopular.

Our results also lend themselves to extensions and other tests to address limitations of this study. One natural extension would be to do the design cross-nationally to test the extent of this divide in other countries where austerity has been pursued; one could measure the degree as well to which the EU has been blamed in the national media across countries. Second, in our first

experiment we found no effects of endorser cues, contra expectations from the political communication literature, but stronger cue effects occurred in the second experiment. Other studies might consider framing policies as “serving” EU interests in other ways or raise other negative or positive EU-oriented consequences for such policies (besides austerity). Researchers may consider more precisely measuring prior beliefs about the role of the EU as a reason why there were limited treatment effects. Finally, although much of the innovation of the first design was in the package content of austerity in crisis, the design did not distinguish among different types of tax increases, which vary in magnitude and salience (such as VAT versus income taxes). Further research should delve into which types of tax increases are supported (and by whom) during times of crisis.^{xxxvii}

Notes

ⁱ Klaus Armingeon and Kai Guthmann, "Democracy in Crisis? The Declining Support for National Democracy in European Countries, 2007–2011," *European Journal of Political Research* 53, no. 3 (2014).

ⁱⁱ We build on recent scholarship of the crisis that focuses on broad policy outcomes and mass opinion on select policies. See Nancy Bermeo and Larry M Bartels, eds., *Mass Politics in Tough Times: Opinions, Votes and Protest in the Great Recession* (Oxford University Press, 2014). For an intellectual overview of austerity see Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (Oxford University Press, 2013). For an overview as to when governments pursue painful internal versus external adjustment, see Stefanie Walter, "Crisis Politics in Europe Why Austerity Is Easier to Implement in Some Countries Than in Others," *Comparative Political Studies* 49, no. 7 (2016).

ⁱⁱⁱ Fernández-Villaverde, Garicano, and Santos and Neal and Concepción García-Iglesias discuss the events preceding the crisis. "Political Credit Cycles: The Case of the Eurozone," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 27, no. 3 (2013); Larry Neal and María Concepción García-Iglesias, "The Economy of Spain in the Euro-Zone before and after the Crisis of 2008," *The Quarterly Review of Economics and Finance* 53, no. 4 (2013).

^{iv} Francisco Martí and Javier J Pérez, "Spanish Public Finances through the Financial Crisis," *Fiscal Studies* 36, no. 4 (2015).

^v Ibid.; Antoine Bozio et al., "European Public Finances and the Great Recession: France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom Compared," *ibid.*

^{vi} José Ignacio Conde-Ruiz et al., "Sanidad, Educación Y Protección Social: Recortes Durante La Crisis," (FEDEA, 2016).

^{vii} Bozio et al.

^{viii} This literature is complementary to the large body of work on the correlates of support for government redistribution.

^{ix} This literature builds on a general question of the structural determinants of when governments engage in big retrenchment programs. See Barbara Vis, "Governments and Unpopular Social Policy Reform: Biting the Bullet or Steering Clear?," *European Journal of Political Research* 48, no. 1 (2009); Barbara Vis, Kees Van Kersbergen, and Tom Hylands, "To What Extent Did the Financial Crisis Intensify the Pressure to Reform the Welfare State?," *Social Policy & Administration* 45, no. 4 (2011).

^x Gijs Schumacher, Barbara Vis, and Kees Van Kersbergen, "Political Parties' Welfare Image, Electoral Punishment and Welfare State Retrenchment," *Comparative European Politics* 11, no. 1 (2013).

^{xi} Nathalie Giger, "Is Social Policy Retrenchment Unpopular? How Welfare Reforms Affect Government Popularity," *European Sociological Review* 28, no. 5 (2011).

^{xii} Nathalie Giger and Moira Nelson, "The Welfare State or the Economy? Preferences, Constituencies, and Strategies for Retrenchment," *ibid.* 29 (2012).

^{xiii} Elias Naumann, "Do Increasing Reform Pressures Change Welfare State Attitudes? An Experimental Study on Population Ageing, Pension Reform Preferences, Political Knowledge and Ideology," *Ageing & Society* 37, no. 2 (2017).

^{xiv} Marius R Busemeyer and Julian L Garritzmman, "Public Opinion on Policy and Budgetary Trade-Offs in European Welfare States: Evidence from a New Comparative Survey," *Journal of European Public Policy* 24, no. 6 (2017).

^{xvi} Many studies of social spending examine support for policies given salient tax increases, but these studies are not necessarily about welfare retrenchment. The classic study by Citrin was one of the first to consider whether citizens are aware of budgetary trade-offs. Jack Citrin, "Do People Want Something for Nothing: Public Opinion on Taxes and Government Spending," *National Tax Journal* 32, no. 2 (1979).

^{xvii} Yotam Margalit, "Explaining Social Policy Preferences: Evidence from the Great Recession," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 01 (2013); Jacob S Hacker, Philipp Rehm, and Mark Schlesinger, "The Insecure American: Economic Experiences, Financial Worries, and Policy Attitudes," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 01 (2013); Elias Naumann, Christopher Buss, and Johannes Bähr, "How Unemployment Experience Affects Support for the Welfare State: A Real Panel Approach," *European Sociological Review* 32, no. 1 (2016); Lindsay A Owens and David S Pedulla, "Material Welfare and Changing Political Preferences: The Case of Support for Redistributive Social Policies," *Social forces* 92, no. 3 (2014).

^{xviii} Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens, "Income Inequality and Redistribution in Post-Industrial Democracies: Demographic, Economic and Political Determinants," *Socio-Economic Review* 12, no. 2 (2014); José Fernández-Albertos and Dulce Manzano, "The Lack of Partisan Conflict over the Welfare State in Spain," *South European Society and Politics* 17, no. 3 (2012).

^{xix} Cavaillé and Trump distinguish between redistribution that distributes towards the poor and that which is perceived to tax the wealthy more. "The Two Facets of Social Policy Preferences," *The Journal of Politics* 77, no. 1 (2014).

^{xx} Sara B Hobolt and James Tilley, *Blaming Europe?: Responsibility without Accountability in the European Union* (Oxford University Press, 2014); Sara B Hobolt and Catherine E de Vries, "Public Support for European Integration," *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (2016).

^{xxi} Armingeon and Guthmann; Klaus Armingeon, Kai Guthmann, and David Weisstanner, "How the Euro Divides the Union: The Effect of Economic Adjustment on Support for Democracy in Europe," *Socio-Economic Review* 14, no. 1 (2016).

^{xxii} Matthias Matthijs, "Mediterranean Blues: The Crisis in Southern Europe," *Journal of Democracy* 25, no. 1 (2014).

^{xxiii} Polavieja notes that EU debtor states have becoming increasingly less trustful of the EU. Javier Polavieja, "Economic Crisis, Political Legitimacy, and Social Cohesion," in *Economic Crisis, Quality of Work, and Social Integration: The European Experience*, ed. Duncan Gallie (Oxford University Press, 2013).

^{xxiv} Kaltenhalter and Anderson and Banducci et al. discuss the cross-national correlates of euro support before the crisis. "Europeans and Their Money: Explaining Public Support for the Common European Currency," *European Journal of Political Research* 40, no. 2 (2001); Susan A. Banducci, Effrey A. Karp, and Peter H. Loedel, "The Euro, Economic Interests and Multi-Level Governance: Examining Support for the Common Currency," *ibid.* 42, no. 5 (2003).

^{xxv} Juan Diez Medrano, *Framing Europe: Attitudes to European Integration in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom* (Princeton University Press, 2003); Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, "The Political Basis of Support for European Integration," *European Union Politics* 1, no. 2 (2000).

^{xxvi} Hobolt and Tilley demonstrate how declining economic conditions have led to reduced trust in the EU and euro. . See also discussion of the link between the crisis and trust in the EU and euro in Hobolt and LeBlond and Hobolt and Wratil. "Economic Insecurity and Public Support for the Euro," in *Mass Politics in Tough Times: Opinions, Votes and Protest in the Great Recession*, ed. Nancy Bermeo and Larry M Bartels (Oxford University Press, 2014); Sara B Hobolt and Christopher Wratil, "Public Opinion and the Crisis: The Dynamics of Support for the Euro," *Journal of European Public Policy* 22, no. 2 (2015).

^{xxvii} Other research on European voters examines the causal of government cues in assessing support for integration, though not in the crisis context. Sara B Hobolt, "Taking Cues on Europe? Voter Competence and Party Endorsements in Referendums on European Integration," *European Journal of Political Research* 46, no. 2 (2007).

^{xxviii} Vivien Schmidt, "Forgotten Democratic Legitimacy: 'Governing by the Rules' and 'Ruling by the Numbers'," in *The Future of the Euro*, ed. Matthias Matthijs and Mark Blyth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Kathleen R McNamara, "The Forgotten Problem of Embeddedness: History Lessons For the Euro," *ibid*.

^{xxix} The Netquest survey uses opt-in panels, based on existing databases of nationally representative samples of residents of Spain. The panel is constrained to individuals of at least 18 years of age. The sample is stratified with representative quotas of the Spanish population by geographical area (seven geographical areas), age group, and gender. Netquest compensates economically all participants with vouchers that can be used later to purchase goods online.

^{xxx} Exclusion of the euro support variable does not change the estimates of the other demographic coefficients.

^{xxxi} We include covariates in some models to assess if the precision of the treatment effect changes.

^{xxxii} The appendix table shows a small negative effect of framing austerity as taxes only, for more conservative individuals, but only under select endorsements.

^{xxxiii} In Table A6 of appendix, we show that treatment assignment in one experiment is uncorrelated with responses in the other experiment (indicating no priming effects from the experiments on other outcomes of interest in the other experiment).

^{xxxiv} Of course euro support could be the result of austerity policy preferences. We argue that euro orientation proxies for a general disposition towards the currency arrangement, which we think is more likely to drive support for a specific policy, as opposed to the other way around. This relationship itself can be tested in future research.

^{xxxv} These results remain unchanged if we control for the other demographic covariates.

^{xxxvi} In Table A8 of appendix we show these results are substantively similar when we consider an ordered logistic estimation.

^{xxxvii} For a non-crisis context, see Cameron Ballard-Rosa, Lucy Martin, and Kenneth Scheve, "The Structure of American Income Tax Policy Preferences," *Journal of Politics* (2017).