

Do Citizens Have Views about Single Market Governance?

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To what degree do citizens hold structured views about the governance of openness in multi-jurisdictional markets? This article presents the results of a preregistered experiment that assesses public attribution of governmental authority with respect to five issues central to market integration. We fielded the survey in the world's two largest single markets, the United States and the European Union (EU). Across the nine sampled countries ($N = 17,304$), we find that EU residents are statistically more likely to make federal or geographic distinctions than American respondents, especially in the areas of goods regulations and standardized benefits for workers. We also find that certain subgroups are more likely to favor decentralized policy approaches to single market issues: those skeptical of regulation, those who are less trusting of government, and select partisan affiliates. Europeans' relatively greater responsiveness is most plausibly explained, we argue, as a result of institutional mobilization. The EU's single market project has fed back on European societies to attract citizens' attention to the EU's core goals of cross-border openness.

Key words: European Union; United States; internal markets; public opinion; comparative federalism.

The question of whether citizens of multi-governmental polities can make meaningful distinctions between different governments is deeply debated in both the United States (Jacobs 2017; Rendleman and Rogowski 2024), and the European Union (EU; Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Hobolt and de Vries 2016). Given generally low levels of political knowledge about institutional issues, existing research has looked mainly for broad attitudes about general divisions of policy or spending authority between governments.

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Studies of citizens' institutional views with respect to more specific policy areas are rare (cf Kuhn and Nicoli 2020), and practically nonexistent regarding the cross-border regulation of goods and services. Though scholars agree that internal-market governance is central to the history and structure of American federalism, the EU, and many other federations, they have tended to assume that citizens are largely uninterested in obscure, regulatory, and traditionally elite-dominated terrain. To the best of our knowledge, no previous research has directly tested whether citizens distinguish between levels of authority in the governance of internal markets. This is the attitudinal side of Europe's "democratic deficit" (Majone 1998; Schmidt 2013) and weak democratic responsiveness in an increasingly complex and fragmented American state (Mettler 2011; Achen and Bartels 2016).

This article suggests that under certain conditions, citizens can and do form attitudes about multi-level governance of internal markets, drawing from the results of a preregistered experiment that assesses public attribution of governmental authority in the EU and the United States within the context of five issues central to market integration: regulation of goods, license requirements, workers' benefits, banking regulation, and government procurement policies. These issues are closely tied to the four freedoms that explicitly underpin the EU's single market—free movement of goods, services, capital, and people—and which also represent the political terrain of market regulation in the US federal system. Among the eight sampled countries in the EU ($N=13,758$) and a comparison sample in the United States ($N=3,546$), we show that EU residents are statistically more likely to make multilevel distinctions or "think federally" than American respondents. Indeed, American respondents are largely ambivalent on questions about governmental authority in the context of single market issues. Our use of an experimental design helps correct for a large omission in the scholarly literature on mass attitudes and single market governance, distinguishing preferences for general market openness from preferences for state, national, or supranational control. Our comparative leverage also allows us assess the extent to which different political-institutional contexts help structure mass attitudes in federal systems.

We consider treatment heterogeneity among those skeptical of regulation, select partisan affiliates (e.g., Republicans and "Eurosceptics"), those with higher levels of state/national identity, and those who are less trusting of the central government. Confirming preregistered theoretical expectations, we find that these subgroups are more likely to favor decentralized policy approaches to single market issues. These findings highlight the importance of public opinion in shaping and responding to policies aimed at market integration and regulatory coherence in multi-governmental systems. Foremost, the marked ambivalence of Americans and the consistent finding of federal thinking among Europeans toward many of these issues confirms a central theme of this special issue: European institutions have successfully framed interstate openness as a key issue requiring EU intervention,

with deliberate attention paid to the role public opinion will play in sustaining the “completion” of the European single market. In the United States, by contrast, no federal actors are clearly mandated to reduce interstate regulatory barriers—of which many still exist, as shown in the other contributions—and public mobilization is low given this lack of institutional attention.

Finally, we further tease out this institutional–politics dynamic by considering how respondents evaluated alternative governing arrangements that exist to manage single market dilemmas—specifically, whether or not structured attitudes exist as it relates to policies of “mutual recognition.” Mutual recognition (also known as “country-of-origin” rules) allows goods or services marketable in one jurisdiction to be sold elsewhere without further requirements, and plays an important (if contested) role as a legal default rule in the EU Single Market. It is largely foreign to the US legal context, though substantively it resembles notions of regulatory competition with at least some resonance in elite American pro-market discourse. In line with our expectations, we find evidence that Europeans are more responsive to the possibility of mutual recognition, drawing meaningful contrasts between this alternative and policy approaches that are fully de/centralized. We do not find consistent patterns with American respondents, which further supports our core conclusion that the EU’s project of market integration for nearly seventy years has clarified its institutional objectives to such an extent as to affect how citizens perceive and attribute authority in their multi-governmental system.

These results amount to a qualified confirmation of one of the earliest hypotheses about European integration, from Ernst Haas’s “neofunctionalist” theory (Haas 1958). Haas theorized that construction of supranational European institutions would lead to an upward shift in citizen loyalties. As European-level policies brought new benefits, citizens would perceive the desirability of further integration and increasingly identify at the European level. While we do not find any sweeping shift in loyalties or identity, our results suggest that Europe’s single market project has meaningfully shaped citizens’ views about where governance should be located. The US comparison bolsters this claim because many non-institutional conditions seem relatively favorable to the formation of American public opinion on economic governance—higher internal trade and mobility than in Europe, more robust polity-wide democratic mobilization, shared language and identity—but Americans’ views on these issues remain inchoate. The difference maker, it appears, is institutional attention to the single market.

This article begins with a survey of existing research on federal attitudes in the United States and the EU. Drawing on Jacobs’ (2017) argument that assessing support for de/centralization is prone to conflate preferences over policy attribution with general preferences for policy outcomes, we use an experimental design to assess public support for single market governance. After describing the experiment and presenting average treatment effects, we turn to a set of

heterogenous treatment effects for each of our preregistered hypotheses, describing the measurement for each subgroup in turn. We then describe the measurement approach and design of the mutual recognition element of the study. We conclude with discussion of potential implications, given recent political developments in both polities.

Thinking federally and comparatively about single market governance

Scholars are increasingly attentive to the dynamics of mass public opinion in multi-governmental systems, challenging long-held assumptions that citizens are largely unable to distinguish between different levels of government. Our preregistered experiment tests whether citizens in the United States and EU hold structured attitudes about who should govern core areas of single market policy. We expect that institutional legacies and the visibility of market integration will help explain variation in governance preferences, both across polities and within key subgroups, namely those who are skeptical of regulation, in general, those with specific partisan affiliations, those who are more/less attached to their respective subnational governments, and those who are deeply distrustful of government.

In the United States, this debate over citizens' ability to assign responsibility within a layered federal structure speaks directly to foundational concerns about democratic accountability in complex systems. It is underscored by scholarship that has shown that while "intuitive" appreciations for federal divisions of power may not be as prevalent as commonly assumed (Jacobs 2017), individuals nevertheless "think federally" by relying on partisan heuristics (Dinan and Heckelman 2020; Jacobs 2021; Glaser, Berry, and Schildkraut 2023) and evaluations of government performance (Connolly et al. 2019; Rendleman and Rogowski 2024). Similar themes are prominent in literature on public opinion about the EU. Especially since the 1990s, the division of authority between national and supranational levels has been increasingly salient in public opinion (Gabel 1998; Hobolt and de Vries 2016). Attitudes about it are strongly structured by partisan cueing by national parties (Franklin, Marsh, and McLaren 1994; Hobolt 2009; De Vries 2018) and by individuals' comparative evaluations of governmental performance and responsiveness, especially those relating to economic issues (Kritzinger 2003; Kuhn and Stoeckel 2014; Gerhards et al. 2019; Foster and Frieden 2021).

This pioneering wave of scholarship on public opinion in multilevel arenas remains very broadly focused in policy terms, surveying overall attitudes about general policy and spending authority and only rarely on specific policy areas. In the US context we know of no research that attempts to identify public attitudes relating specifically to internal-market governance. Even in the EU, where the Single Market is far more salient in elite politics, research directly on citizens'

attitudes about this policy terrain is scarce. Some studies investigate attitudes about free movement of persons (Vasilopoulou and Talving 2018; Karstens 2020a, 2020b)—the aspect of internal markets that connects to the highly mobilized politics of immigration—but otherwise the literature focuses overwhelmingly on broad support for EU authority (Beetsma 2022; Reinl and Braun 2023), “integration” (Kuhn and Nicoli 2020; Leuffen, Schuessler, and Gómez Díaz 2020), or the creation of new central powers (Bremer, Genschel, and Jachtenfuchs 2020; Nicoli, Kuhn, and Burgoon 2020; Schäfer, Treib, and Schlipphak 2023). At the same time, this whole literature remains narrowly case-based in geographic terms, without comparison across different multilevel arenas. Attempts to compare federal attitudes are usually focused on broad “constitutional values” that undergird seemingly incomparable policy regimes (Brown, Deem, and Kincaid 2021). This is reinforced by the fact that EU studies are their own field, and federalism scholars focus on institutional or contextual variability in citizen assessments within single federations (e.g., Bauhr and Charron 2019; Schneider 2019).

Data availability is part of the reason that this literature is simultaneously broad in policy terms and narrowly confined within cases. Regular surveys rarely come in either policy-specific or cross-polity formats. Survey data on internal market attitudes in particular is very thin: European surveys like Eurobarometer do not pose questions specifically about support for internal market goals or related allocations of authority, nor do regular surveys in any national federation, let alone across them.¹ The deeper reason for the absence of such data relates back to plausible assumptions about citizen inattention to single markets. The multilevel law and regulation of market access for goods, services, labor, and capital is widely seen as arcane and far removed from the everyday concerns of most citizens. They may lack the awareness or understanding to form views on these complex issues (DeVries and Steenbergen 2013; Wilson and Hobolt 2015). Parties may also avoid such terrain in favor of simpler and more salient issue positions, leaving citizens without the partisan cues that they rely on to assess complex questions (Deslatte 2023).

Certain conditions might nonetheless make citizens more likely to develop views on internal-market issues. The more people do business or move across jurisdictions in a multilevel arena, the more internal market governance affects their lives. “Outgoing” people or firms presumably encounter border costs (or appreciate their removal) in tangible ways. More locally-oriented actors presumably encounter “incoming” competition or people to some degree. This expectation is the core of the more elite-focused theories that dominate overall explanations of the rise of the EU (and its Single Market in particular): businesses and individuals who make money across borders, or are competitively positioned to do so, provide the main support for building central powers and rules to promote openness (Haas

1958; Moravcsik 1998). The same basic liberal-economic theorem informs influential arguments about the growth of American federal authority (Beer 1973; Bensele 2000). Given that economic models of voter behavior are also influential in explanations of public opinion, including in questions of multilevel governance (e.g., Brown 2010) and support for the EU (e.g., Gabel 1998; DeVries and Kersbergen 2007), we could expect some echo of these patterns in public opinion—especially when posing newly direct questions about internal markets. Between the United States and the EU, this hypothesis clearly predicts that Americans should be more likely to form views on internal market governance than Europeans. The US interstate goods trade is roughly twice as dense as that across EU member-states, and the disparity is much greater in services.² Interstate mobility in the United States is higher than mobility *inside* most EU countries, and at least ten times greater than mobility across them (Molloy, Smith, and Wozniak 2011; European Commission 2020).

A more institutionalist hypothesis makes the opposite prediction. Even if internal-market governance is complex and rarely salient in electoral politics, citizens may be more likely to pay attention to it the more governing institutions and policy actors do so. Internal-market policy debates are constantly present in both the United States and the EU. American conflicts over federal and state environmental standards, labor laws, and health and safety regulations are debates over the regulation of interstate commerce, and often generate substantial public and political discourse. For example, the fragmented health care market in the aftermath of the Affordable Care Act (Jacobs and Skocpol 2016) and the widening gulf between states' more stringent vehicle emission standards (Carley, Evans, and Konisky 2018) highlight the ongoing tug-of-war between state and federal authority over regulatory standards. That said, EU institutional and policy-actor attention to internal-market governance is on a different level from the United States. The European institutions have been working on Single Market priorities for seventy years, with major efforts to educate and mobilize citizens about them. By contrast, as this issue's articles on the spirits and construction sectors develop, no American federal agency today understands interstate openness as a key part of its mandate; the closest analog is the Federal Trade Commission, but it focuses almost entirely on private sector restraints of trade, with only rare, tentative, and purely hortatory attention to state regulation. If we expect that mass opinion will differ across federal contexts for institutional reasons (Kelemen 2004; Brunell and Buchler 2009), and more generally that "policies determine politics" (Schattschneider 1935; Lowi 1972; Mettler and Soss 2004), EU citizens should be more likely to form views of internal-market governance than Americans.

These contrasting expectations can be tested as either side of a single hypothesis. We present it as a bet on institutionalist expectations because they seem especially plausible from existing research and an initial glance at empirics. We know that

Europeans have increasingly mobilized around distinctive views of the EU, and can see that EU actors have been working to mobilize them for decades. Findings are much more mixed about Americans' federal views, and despite internal-market policy conflicts, discourse and debate about internal-market openness is not immediately apparent in the US landscape. Thus, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1.1 (federalism attitudes): Compared to Americans, Europeans will be more likely to distinguish between levels of government when evaluating single market policies. That is, among Americans, preferences for government action will not vary, on average, depending on whether the implementing government is the federal or state government. In contrast, among Europeans, support for the same policy will vary depending on whether it is proposed by the EU or by national governments.

Within these overall patterns there are reasons to expect structured variation within subgroups. Single market policies can have varied consequences on different regions and social groups, as is hinted in the literature discussed above. Assessing citizens' opinions helps identify and address disparities and grievances, promoting social cohesion and preventing disenfranchisement or alienation of specific groups. Single market policies often intersect with issues of cultural and national identity. Citizens' opinions reflect their values and identities, which create conflicts over economic integration across diverse cultural and national contexts.

At a basic level, these policies profoundly implicate core values over the scope and size of governmental authority. But given the differences between US and EU political contexts, we expect variation in how opponents of government regulation respond to centralization. In the United States, where decentralization and state autonomy are core tenets for many, centralized regulation is often perceived as an overreach of federal authority (Bowler and Donovan 2016). This ideological skepticism toward federal power leads to stronger opposition to centralization primes, as American respondents are more likely to view such policies as infringing on state rights and local control. In the EU, by contrast, opponents of regulation are less likely to react as strongly to centralization for several reasons. First, the EU's long-standing institutional mobilization around the single market has framed centralized regulation as essential to the broader project of integration, making it more palatable even to skeptics (Maletić 2013; Schütze 2017). Second, pro-market conservatives on the European continent, while often critical of certain aspects of centralization, are receptive to this message because most have some connection to traditions of "ordoliberalism"—a political-economic tradition in which the state is understood as the robust guarantor of market openness (Hien and Joerges 2017). Lastly, the EU's multilevel governance system, which is organized more around "cooperative federalism" principles of collaboration between national and supranational authorities than American principles of side-by-side action in "dual

federalism,” softens resistance by framing regulatory policies as cooperative rather than imposed (Kelemen 2002; Eberlein and Kerweer 2004).

Hypothesis 1.2 (heterogeneity, market attitudes): Opposition to regulation will moderate preferences about governing authority differently across the two systems.

Among Americans, individuals who oppose government regulation will be more likely to prefer decentralization (i.e., favoring state-level over federal action). Among Europeans, regulation skeptics will show more mixed responses, and may even support EU-level authority in line with ordoliberal principles.

Moreover, while specific single market issues are seldom subject to fierce partisan contestation, developments in the American and European party systems nevertheless implicate general views on central and decentralized control. The extent to which these partisan positions translate to specific single market policy choices is an open question, but the stability of support for decentralization among American conservatives (Dinan and Heckelman 2020) and the systematic challenge to EU authority from “Eurosceptic” parties throughout Europe (De Vries 2018) suggest that:

Hypothesis 1.3 (heterogeneity, partisanship): Partisan affiliation will moderate preferences about governing authority differently across the two systems. In Europe, individuals who identify with Eurosceptic parties will be more likely to oppose EU-level governance. In the United States, Republicans will be more likely than other partisans to favor state over federal authority across single market issues.

Likewise, as the EU has further developed its competencies beyond trade liberalization, conflicts over national identity and symbolic attachments have become more pronounced in explaining general support or opposition to further integration (Carey 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2005, 2009; McLaren 2006). While contests over a national American identity are comparatively mild, recent research on emergent “state” and “place-based” identities suggests some heterogeneity within the United States (Jacobs and Munis 2022; Pears and Syndor 2022), leading us to hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1.4 (heterogeneity, attachment): The relative strength of attachment to the two governments will moderate preferences for decentralization. In both the EU and the United States, individuals who identify more strongly with their country or state (relative to the EU or the United States) will be more likely to prefer decentralization. Those more attached to the EU or the United States will be more supportive of centralized authority.

We also consider how attribution of policy responsibility maps on to trust. As a master concept, unifying individual beliefs about regulation, subjective interpretations of government performance, partisan identification, and national attachment (Hetherington and Husser 2012), we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1.5 (heterogeneity, trust): Relative trust in subnational versus central government will shape preferences for policy implementation. In both the EU and the United States, individuals who trust their national or state government more than the EU or federal government will be more likely to prefer decentralized policy implementation.

Finally, in order to more fully assess the source of these US–EU differences as rooted in institutional and political feedback, we consider how attitudes toward policies of mutual recognition vary between these two single market federations. Attitudes on mutual recognition offer a promising window for comparison. We might expect this principle to have some ideological appeal in the relatively pro-market American political culture, since it amounts to a regime for regulatory competition, but institutionally it is not prominent in the US context. A handful of examples of mutual recognition exist in the United States, like in corporate governance (where firms can choose a state to oversee their corporation, often Delaware, while operating in other states) or credit-card usury rules (where issuers often locate in permissive South Dakota to offer high-rate cards into other states), but the default rule is that states govern activities on their territory. Mutual recognition is far more institutionally prominent in the EU, where jurisprudence in the 1970s established it as the default rule for goods and services under the EU treaties: in the absence of “harmonizing” EU legislation, goods or services marketable in one member-state are marketable in others without further requirements. The Court of Justice of the European Union can (and does) authorize many exceptions, applying this principle in a conditional way (Weatherill 2018), and legislatively the trend in recent decades has been toward greater harmonization, but it holds a prominent role in Single Market discourse that should resonate with Europeans. We therefore hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2.1 (mutual recognition attitudes): Europeans will be more responsive to mutual recognition policies compared to Americans, with more Europeans inclined to prefer mutual recognition over fully centralized or decentralized approaches, reflecting their higher levels of engagement and clarity of institutional objectives. Americans, by contrast, will not exhibit consistent patterns, further supporting the conclusion that the degree of public engagement and the clarity of institutional objectives significantly affect how citizens perceive and attribute authority in their multi-governmental system.

Experimental design and survey data

To better distinguish preferences for policy outcomes from a preference for federalism, we measure attitudes toward a range of single market issues relying on an experimental design that resembles Jacobs' (2017) instrumentation for concrete policy proposals at the state and federal levels for US respondents. For EU respondents this translates to the national and European levels. Each respondent saw one of two possible treatment conditions and evaluated five policies within that treatment. They either saw the same policy proposed at the state/nation or federal/European level, with the question wording priming this level of government repeatedly throughout the prompt and question. In the United States general references to "the federal government" were replaced with a similarly general reference to "the state government" and words like "nation" or "country" were likewise replaced with a reference to "state." In the EU, the country government (i.e., Germany) was replaced with references to the European Union, with words like "German" or "Germany" replaced with "Europe" or "European." Policy proposals appeared in random order and respondents evaluated each policy using a five-point Likert scale of agreement. Table 1 lists two examples for a resident of Oregon (the United States) and Germany (EU).

Respondents considered policy interventions for regulating pesticides on food, license requirements for nurses, expansion of sickness leave, consumer-protection rules for banks, and government procurement policies that would prohibit favoritism for in-state/in-country firms. These policies were selected to maximize comparability between the United States and EU, as each is a plausible presentation of policy alternatives that could take place within both arenas. Substantively, the difference between the two treatment conditions capture how institutional variations in policy framing can influence public opinion, even in complex multi-governmental systems like the EU and the United States. In contexts where policy decisions hinge on public support, even small shifts in opinion can have substantial political and regulatory implications, influencing how policies are implemented, complied with, and sustained over time. Findings that such shifts emerge in response to changes solely in centralization or decentralization framing would underscore a significant role of institutional design in shaping public attitudes.

To collect responses, we fielded an original survey across eight EU countries (Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Spain) and the United States in May–June 2023. We contracted with IPSOS to identify 39,572 respondents over the age of eighteen across these countries, and established quotas on age and sex (non-interlocked), of which 18,000 adults completed the survey (conversion rate of 45.5 percent). Within the United States, we established quotas to achieve a geographic distribution across the four census-designated regions (Northeast, Midwest, South, and West). Security screening and data quality

Table 1. Example of experimental design, food safety, in the United States and EU.

Examples: Oregon resident, German resident	
Oregon [Decentralization/ centralization]	<p>As you probably know, all food sold in Oregon has to meet certain safety standards for pesticide content. But there is debate about how tough the standards should be.</p> <p>Some think that the [Oregon state/federal] government should insist on tougher standards. Others say that current standards are safe. They also warn that tougher standards could make food much more expensive, and limit the variety of food people can easily buy and sell across the United States.</p> <p>What about you? Would it be good if the [Oregon state/federal] government set tougher food-safety standards for food sold [in Oregon/across the country]?</p>
Germany [Decentralization/ centralization]	<p>As you probably know, all food grown in Germany has to meet certain safety standards for pesticide content. But there is debate about how tough the standards should be.</p> <p>Some think that the [German government/European Union] should insist on tougher standards. Others say that current standards are safe. They also warn that tougher standards could make food much more expensive, and limit the variety of food people can easily buy and sell across Europe.</p> <p>What about you? Would it be good if the [German government/European Union] set tougher food-safety standards for food sold [in Germany/across Europe]?</p>

features maintained by IPSOS excluded 4 percent of contacted respondents; in addition, we included two attention checks with the instrument, failure of which led to deletion of the respondent and resetting of quotas (5 percent of contacted respondents). On average, the survey took 15.4 minutes to complete for European respondents and 18.7 minutes for US respondents. The survey instrument was developed in English, translated by native speakers of the target country from our own team, and then additionally verified by IPSOS translators.

Our research team gave extraordinary care and attention to comparability of question wording and conceptualization across and within different market contexts. Given that our focus on multi-governmental decision-making adds considerable complexity to the study of attitudes in those contexts, we made sure that all questions and statements used actual names of governments, countries, and states when applicable. A full list of questions is available in the [Supplementary Appendix](#).

We re-weighted respondents to achieve balanced country-level estimates for interlocked age-sex distributions, as provided by Eurostat and US censuses.

Composite weights within markets account for the relative distribution of the country's population to the sampled countries' totals within the EU and the United States. It is well known that views of the EU vary substantially by country, and our sample in the EU includes original members and later ones, north-south and east-west divides, and economic "core" and "periphery." The composite weights, accounting for the probability of being selected within each country and within each market, were applied. While balance tests confirm random assignment to the two treatment conditions, we nevertheless estimate treatment effects alongside a set of individual covariates, including each of the variables we describe below for heterogeneous treatment analysis. Finally, we included an attention check midway through the survey, asking respondents to select a specific answer option. The analysis proceeds with only those respondents who correctly replied to that attention check (84.5 percent in the EU; 88.7 percent in the United States). A separate analysis testing for systematic variation in noncompliance shows that women and older respondents were statistically more likely to sustain attention with the survey.

The high levels of average agreement observed in [figure 1](#) raise a potential concern that respondents may simply support the policies regardless of who proposes them. However, this baseline agreement—while potentially shaped by confirmation bias or general support for prosocial policies—does not undermine the experiment's ability to detect differences in preferences over governing authority. On the contrary, such bias would tend to elevate support across both treatment conditions (or governments), thereby reducing the likelihood of detecting a treatment effect. If anything, the strong baseline support creates a conservative test: in the face of high substantive agreement, any differences observed between levels of government suggest meaningful variation in governance preferences. This reinforces the value of our framing of each question after the treatment prompt—"Would it be good if [the EU, national government, state government level]..."—because it isolates attitudes about the appropriate level of authority, not policy content. Likewise, any discernable treatment effects and heterogeneity of treatment effects should be viewed as evidence of a robust underlying pattern in public opinion.

Results: average treatment effects

Statistically distinguishable results between treatment groups show the difference that the geo-spatial variation in each policy proposal made in respondent attitudes. While general agreement or disagreement with each proposal has substantive interest, such summary statistics do not allow us to distinguish preferences for government authority from preferences for a specific outcome. For ease of interpretation, we present treatment effects derived from a logistical model that

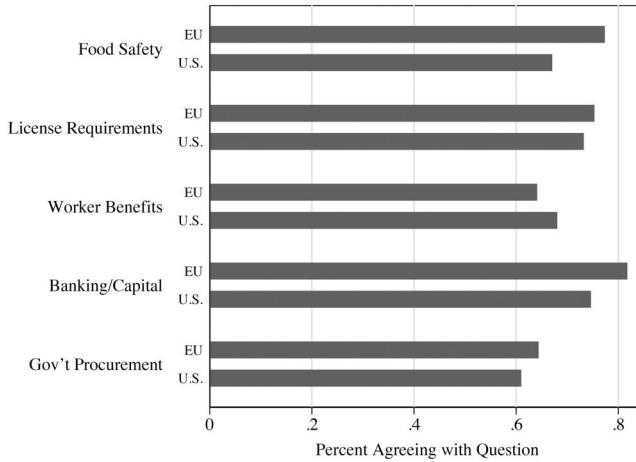


Figure 1. Distribution of agreement with policy proposals, EU and the United States.

estimates the positive or negative relationship of agreeing with a policy proposal (somewhat or strongly) after seeing the centralized treatment (US federal government/European Union) as compared to seeing the decentralized treatment (respondent state/respondent country); full model specifications and standard errors are available in the [Supplementary Appendix](#). Given that our primary analysis is a comparison of treatment effects between two single markets, akin to inclusion of an observed moderating variable to model heterogeneity, we control for the potential of non-randomized, individual-level characteristics, despite random assignment to centralized and decentralized treatment conditions within each of the sampled countries (Kam and Trussler 2017). We present here the marginal effects of our primary logistic model, in which a positive association indicates that, on average, centralizing the policy proposal increased aggregate support, holding known and unknown covariates constant.

As [figure 2](#) illustrates, there are substantial differences between American and European respondents in how centralized and decentralized policy proposals altered average opinion. Most notably, and in line with theorized, preregistered expectations, the experimental manipulation failed to produce any discernable change in average opinion across each of the single market issues among American respondents. While they display a general lean toward decentralization (centralization decreasing, on average, public support), these estimates are not statistically significant at conventional levels (95 percent confidence). On the other hand, in three of the five policy areas, changes in question wording substantively and significantly altered average European attitudes. Centralization increased support for workers benefits and government procurement regulations, and decreased

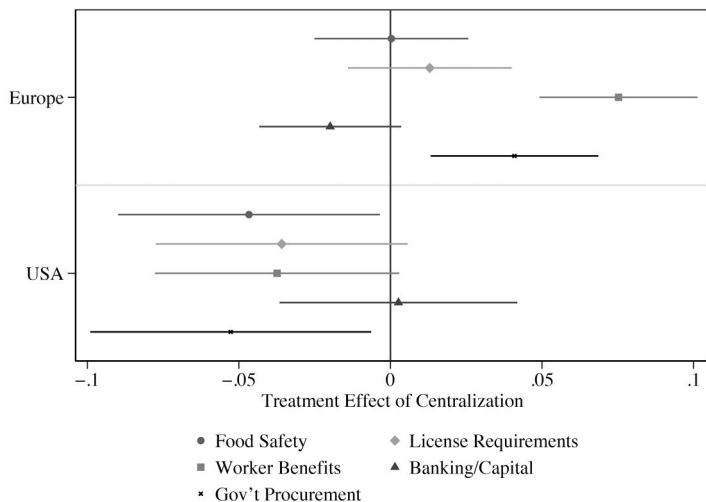


Figure 2. Average treatment effects between Europe and the United States.

support for financial sector regulation. A fourth proposal, concerning license requirements, is marginally significant at the 90 percent level.

On average, there is strong support for the first hypothesis. Americans were clearly more outcome-oriented for each of the five tested policy proposals, making no distinctions between the levels of government in how they thought about the desirability of the proposal. In contrast, Europeans, on average, made institutional distinctions in four of five policy proposals. Substantively, the average increase/decrease in support of a centralized policy averages around five percentage points, although centralization primes increased support by a far greater magnitude in some policy areas and in different countries. Moreover, the treatment amounts to a handful of words that could produce positive reactions among some respondents, negative reactions among others, and are statistically discernable instances of “thinking federally” at a country-level average.

As figure 3 shows, these European averages contain substantial variation across different countries within the EU. In the case of regulations for food safety, for example, average treatment effects show no effect of question wording across the European single market. However, respondents in Austria, on average and controlling for individual differences across Europe, were statistically more likely to favor the proposal for increased pesticide regulation when the EU was granted that authority; the same is true in Spain. Poles and Romanians were statistically less likely to favor the same regulation when proposed at the EU level, compared to the same regulation implemented solely within Poland and Romania. Other policy domains show similar variation across the European single market. Only the

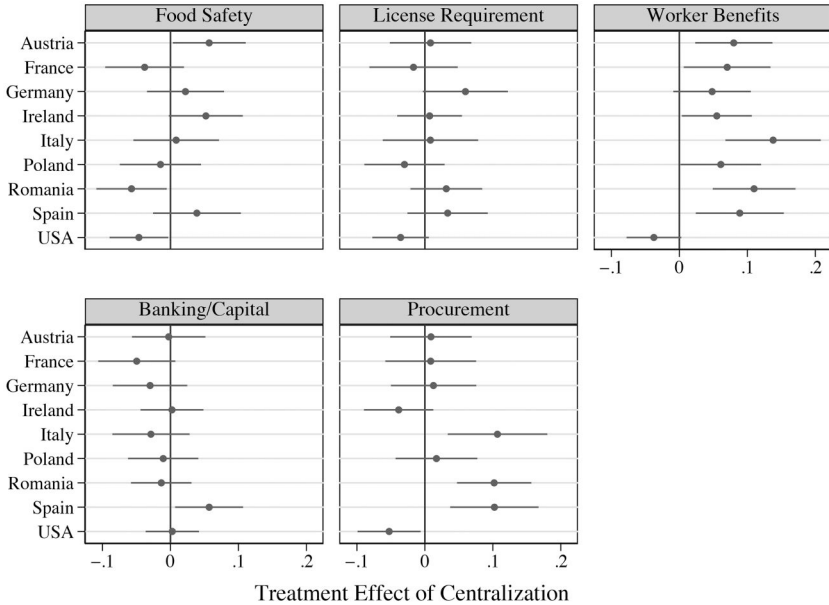


Figure 3. Average treatment effects across countries.

expansion of workers benefits had consistent support across every surveyed country for a more centralized approach.

Two notes apply to this alternative way of assessing average treatment effects by country instead of by membership in the overall single market. First, given the nature of the analysis, some statistically distinguishable results are likely produced by random error. We should not attempt to draw conclusions from any single data point, such as Poland's notable disagreement with a centralized license requirement or Spain's enthusiastic response to centralized banking regulations. No natural grouping of nations consistently replicated any meaningful differences between, for example, north-west and south-east European nations, comparatively "poor" and "rich" nations, or those who entered the single market more recently. Second, given the comparatively smaller sample size in the United States (4,000 respondents), we were unable to consider variability among the fifty states. However, a similar analysis produced no state-level contextual variation in the United States (e.g., "red" vs. "blue" states, regions, "rich" or "poor" states).

While these geographic differences remain important, and we do not mean to suggest that geographic context has no bearing on attitudes toward single market issues in either polity, for the remainder of our analysis, we confine the presentation of our results to a comparison of individuals living in the United States or EU markets overall, controlling for individual level differences that covary

with state and national characteristics. Heterogenous treatment effects by country are available in the [Supplementary Appendix](#).

Results: heterogeneous treatment effects

We now turn to various groups within the EU and the United States who we expect to respond to our treatment in different ways. We hypothesize four comparisons accounting for differences within each market as it relates to attitudes toward regulation, partisan identification, relative state/nation attachment, and trust in government.

First, we consider whether those more opposed to government regulation respond differently to centralization primes relative to those more prone to accept regulation, and how those differences vary between markets (i.e., heterogenous heterogeneity). Given the political feedback effects from institutional mobilization that appear to be present in the average treatment effects among EU respondents, we suspect that regulation opponents in the EU will not react as strongly to centralization primes as American respondents. To the extent that EU respondents are accustomed to a centralized regulatory regime on these issues, additional centralization may not provoke as strong a reaction as it might in the United States, where there is a stronger tradition of skepticism toward federal overreach and expansion into new policy domains. We further hypothesize that anti-regulation Europeans favor, on average, centralization over decentralization in more ordoliberal ways, when discernable governmental preferences exist. This would be demonstrated by a positive coefficient, distinguishable from the modeled estimate among non-skeptics. In the United States, we expect the opposite; those opposed to governmental regulation see a natural affinity between deregulation and decentralization. They are most likely to react to the centralization prime, but in a negative direction.

To test hypothesis 1.2 (heterogeneity, market attitudes), we identify pro-regulation and anti-regulation individuals by comparing those who agreed to the statement, “Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good” (anti-regulation), to the rest of the sample (pro-regulation). In the unweighted sample, approximately 42.6 percent of Europeans and 43.0 percent of Americans were classified as anti-regulation individuals; 19.3 percent of Europeans and 25.5 percent of Americans who disagreed with that statement are modeled as “pro-regulation.”

Using the same set of covariates as before, but modeling an interactive effect between market residency and a continuous measure of agreement with the regulation measure, we then calculated the marginal effect for the two subgroups described above. [Figure 4](#) plots those marginal treatment effects with respect to

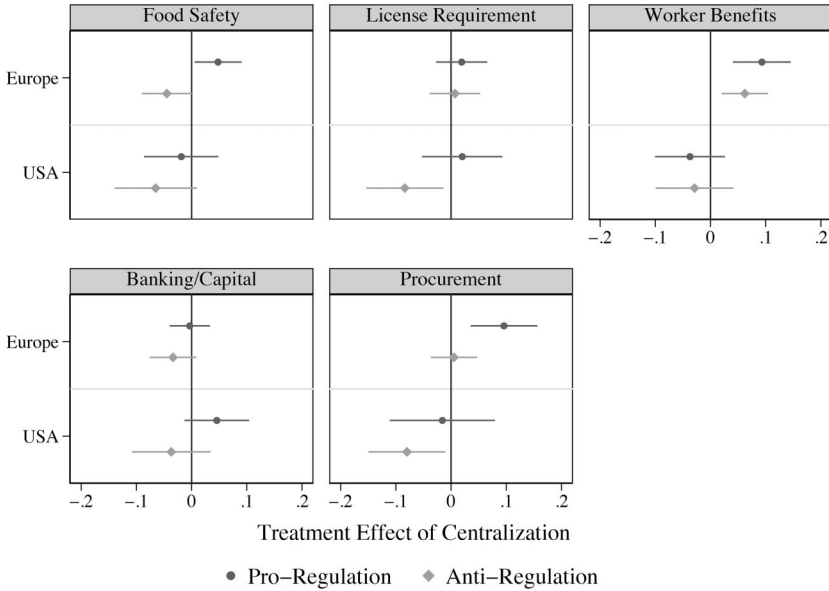


Figure 4. Heterogenous treatment effects by regulation attitudes, Europe and the United States.

regulatory attitudes and shows that across the five policy domains, there is some evidence to support hypothesis 1.2.

Looking first at the EU, pro-regulation individuals are generally responsive to the centralization prime in three of the five policy domains (food safety, worker benefits, government procurement). But there is mixed evidenced on how anti-regulation individuals are affected by the centralization prime. In the area of pesticide regulation (representative of the free movement of goods), those generally opposed to regulation were more supportive of regulation when they saw the same policy proposal at the national level. At similar levels to regulation-supporters, regulation opponents favored a centralized workers benefit, but were indifferent to the centralization primes in the three other policy areas at conventional levels of statistical significance.

European ambivalence toward centralization among many regulation opponents contrasts to how anti-regulatory Americans responded to the experiment. In two policy areas, and as hypothesized, regulation skeptics were more supportive of state-level approaches: government procurement and license requirements. An additional policy area—food safety—is marginally significant at $P=.085$, and support trends negative (but is not statistically significant) in the remaining two policy areas.

All in all, in the EU, pro-regulation individuals generally favor centralized approaches in several policy domains, while anti-regulation individuals show more

mixed responses, with some notable support for centralization in specific areas like worker benefits and pesticide regulation. In contrast, anti-regulation Americans are more consistently opposed to centralization, particularly favoring state-level approaches for government procurement and license requirements, with weaker but similar patterns in other domains. These results reinforce the idea that political context and ideological framing shape how individuals respond to centralization, with regulation-skeptical Americans demonstrating a stronger preference for decentralized solutions compared to their European counterparts.

To test hypothesis 1.3 (heterogeneity, partisanship), we calculate differences between those who identify with a national, Eurosceptic party in the EU and all other Europeans, including those without a clear party affiliation. In the United States, we consider partisan variation between Republicans and non-Republicans, given existing work that shows a stable Republican preference for decentralization (Dinan and Heckelman 2020). To identify Eurosceptic parties, we relied on the conceptual and operational definitions provided by The PopuList 3.0 (Rooduijn et al. 2023). In our sample, approximately 20.1 percent of Europeans identified with a Eurosceptic party, while 35.2 percent of Americans were either “weak” or “strong” Republicans on a 7-point party identification measure. Alternative measures for identifying Eurosceptical party affiliations (such as self-reported vote choice and scales from the Comparative Manifesto Project) produced very similar results.

We compute marginal effects after interacting that dichotomous indicator of partisan identity with residency in the US or EU markets. Figure 5 plots the heterogeneous treatment effects. Eurosceptics are strongly influenced by the decentralization treatments, but only in three of the five policy areas are their reactions opposed to centralization. With respect to the regulation of goods, licensure and finance, respondents identifying with a Eurosceptic party are strongly supportive of decentralized governance. Majorities of Eurosceptics supported the proposed regulation on pesticides if implemented at the national level, but were much less likely (about 10 percent) to support the same policy implemented by the EU. With respect to workers’ benefits, however, even Eurosceptics shared the general-population lean in favor of EU action relative to national action, with a similar but less pronounced lean on government procurement.

A clearer contrast emerges between Republicans and non-Republicans. Republicans were more likely to favor decentralized approaches in all five policy areas. Non-Republicans (including Democrats and independents) demonstrated more ambivalence toward multi-governmental authority. While they did not consistently favor centralization, they were less opposed to federal involvement than Republicans, reflecting a more nuanced or conditional view of federal authority that aligns with progressive support for regulation in areas such as worker benefits and environmental standards. Republicans, that is, display distinctively strong ideological coherence when it comes to decentralization.

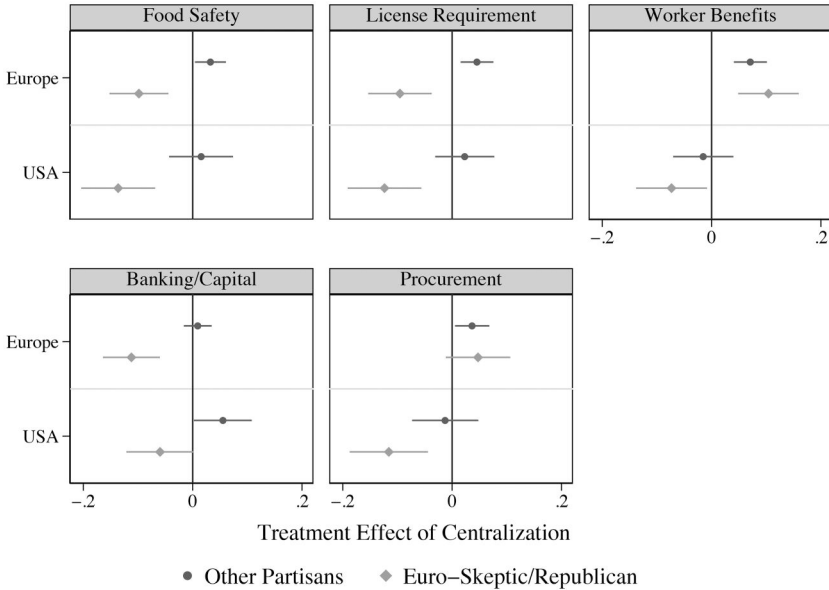


Figure 5. Heterogeneous treatment effects by partisan identification, Europe and the United States.

Thus, while we did not hypothesize a strong pattern of treatment heterogeneity between these two markets, we conclude that because partisan identity in the United States yields a more straightforward pattern in reactions to centralization—with Republicans showing a clear and consistent preference for decentralized governance—this points to deeper party-system opposition within the politics of the American internal market. The clearer delineation between Republicans and non-Republicans suggests that centralization is more firmly linked to partisan commitments in the United States, while in the EU, Euroscepticism interacts with a more complex array of national interests and policy-specific concerns, leading to less uniform responses across policy domains.

In contrast to our results on partisan identity, we find that relative levels of national attachment produce clear cut patterns of support and opposition for centralized governance in the EU, but—unsurprisingly—not relative levels of state attachment in the United States.

To test hypothesis 1.4 (heterogeneity, attachment), we consider attachment to state/nation relative to attachment to the nation/EU. For example, we asked European respondents to agree or disagree with two statements: “Being [R-Country (e.g., French, German)] is important to who I am,” and “Being European is important to who I am.” In the United States, we assessed levels of agreement to the following statements, “Being from [R-state (e.g., Maine, Texas)] is important to who I am,” and “Being American is important to who I am.” We combined

responses to account for respondents' *relative* degree of state and national attachment, such that scores were more negative the more attached respondents were to their US state or EU county compared to American-ness European-ness overall. On average and in line with previous work (Jedwab and Kincaid 2019), Europeans were more attached to their nation, with a subsample mean of -0.26 , compared to Americans who were more attached to their national identities, averaging a 0.78 on the -4 to 4 scale. Importantly, in both markets, the standard deviation was rather large: 1.3 in both the EU and the United States.

Relative territorial identity has powerful explanatory value among European's propensity to think about the federal politics of single markets issues. Both strong relative national identities and strong relative European identities shape the degree to which centralized and decentralized messages are approved. As figure 6 plots, those with strong national identities are much more likely to disapprove of a centralized food pesticide proposal, licensure requirement, and banking regulation compared to the same proposal when proposed at the country-level. Conversely, those with strong European identities are more likely to approve the policy when enacted by the EU than when enacted by their national government.

While relative territorial identities lean more national in the United States, there is still considerable variation. However, this variation does little to moderate the effect of policy centralization in four of the five policy areas. Only when evaluating a proposed banking regulation are strong state identifiers more likely to approve of the policy—by twenty points—when their state government proposed the policy.

As with our measure of relative attachment, to test hypothesis 1.5 (heterogeneity, trust), we devise a relative measure of political trust in state/nation and national/European political institutions. While political trust has multiple conceptual dimensions (Hetherington and Rudolph 2017), we focus on citizens' perceptions of institutional capacity at the state/national level in the United States and among their country and EU governments in Europe. We presented two statements at random and assessed respondent's level of agreement. In the United States: "Even when it tries to get things done for citizens, [R-state's] government usually makes things worse," and "even when it tries to get things done for citizens, the federal government usually makes things worse"; In the EU: "Even when it tries to get things done for citizens, [R-country's] government usually makes things worse," and "even when it tries to get things done for citizens, the European Union usually makes things worse."

We combined responses to account for respondents' *relative* degree of state and national trust, so that those with a negative score were more trusting of their states or nation. Values ranged from -4 to 4 . Among Europeans, relative trust measured 0.28 , indicating slightly higher levels of trust in the European Union, while among Americans, relative trust measured -0.28 , indicating slightly higher levels of trust in state governments. The middle ground is large in both contexts: 45 percent of

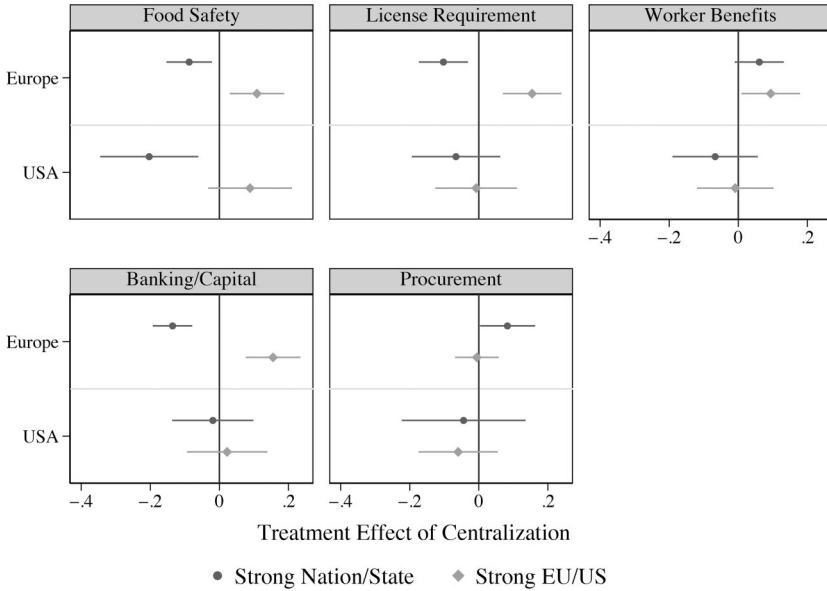


Figure 6. Heterogeneous treatment effects by relative state/nation identity, Europe and the United States.

Europeans and 44 percent of Americans trusted their governments to the same degree.

Figure 7 plots the results. Among Europeans, trust had similar explanatory power as relative national/European identities, although the treatment effects were slightly smaller in each case. That is, as with national identity, higher levels of national trust were associated with approving policies at the national level, with the exception of procurement regulation and workers benefits.

Trust proved to be a more powerful explainer in the US context, producing statistically significant treatment effects among those with high levels of relative state trust in four of the five policy domains. Those who were much more trustful in their state governments were about seventeen points less likely to approve of food pesticides when proposed by the federal government, sixteen points less likely to approve of a centralized license requirement, twenty points less likely to approve of federal banking regulations, and twenty-three points less likely to approve of a centralized government procurement policy.

Mutual recognition

The experimental results offer strong support for the preregistered theoretical expectations about single market governance and citizen awareness in the EU and

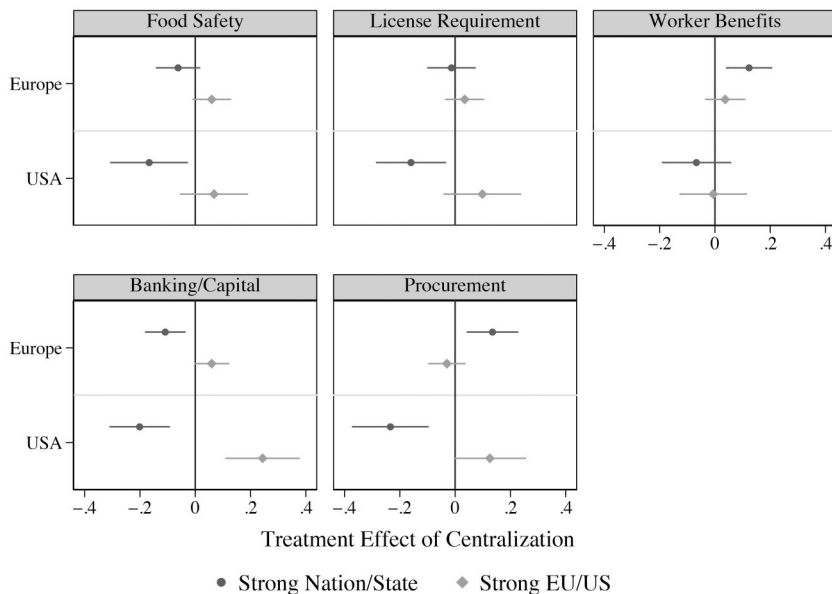


Figure 7. Heterogeneous treatment effects by relative state/nation trust, Europe and the United States.

the United States, confirming the distinct ways in which political and institutional contexts shape public opinion. Building on these findings, we now consider how respondents reacted when offered an alternative policy approach to single-market governance—mutual recognition. A key element of EU rules for cross-border openness, mutual recognition offers EU-wide access for firms and individuals while allowing each member-state to regulate its own citizens and established firms. As noted earlier, this arrangement is little-used in the United States, where states generally retain stronger control of access to markets on their territory. To further probe the institutional and political factors that influence citizen preferences for centralization and decentralization, then, we assess whether Europeans' greater exposure to institutional rules of mutual recognition encourages more support for such policies compared to their American counterparts.

Regardless of treatment condition (i.e., saw centralization or saw decentralization), we asked respondents a set of follow-up questions after evaluating all five policies. To limit survey length and complexity, we only raised two hypothetical scenarios about mutual-recognition alternative, in food safety and workers' benefits. We began by telling each respondent about an "alternative way to balance choices about food safety with economic openness across the [United States' national market/European single market]" and reminding them of their earlier approval/disapproval of the policy when proposed at the state/nation or federal/European levels. Then we explained how mutual recognition would work.³

Given the relative complexity of this policy, we asked respondents to self-evaluate if they understood it. In the EU 69.6 percent of respondents said they “completely” or “mostly” understood how mutual recognition would work for food pesticides, while 72.5 percent of Europeans said they understood how it would apply to workers’ sickness leave. Somewhat surprisingly, American respondents reported slightly higher levels of comprehension, at 72.1 percent for food pesticides and 77.9 percent for sickness leave. We confine our subsequent analysis to these parts of the sample.

To assist our interpretation of the results, we then developed a model of agreement, which accounted for whether respondents evaluated the alternative of mutual recognition against a centralized or decentralized policy, and whether they liked or disliked that alternative proposal. Figure 8 plots the predicted probability of liking the mutual-recognition alternative “somewhat better” or “much better” by those previous answers and experimental conditions. Where predicted probabilities are less than 0.5 (the solid vertical line), respondents were less likely, on average, to favor mutual recognition.

For food pesticides, European and Americans had similarly indecisive responses. To be clear about how to read figure 8, it shows that among Europeans who were shown a national food pesticide regulation and disliked that proposal, the likelihood of preferring the mutual recognition policy was 34 percent (top-left panel). For those who saw and disliked the EU-wide proposal, the likelihood of preferring mutual recognition was 43 percent, but is statistically indistinguishable from 50 percent. Those that liked a national-level pesticide proposal were similarly unpersuaded that mutual recognition was any better than stronger national regulation (top-right panel), while those who liked an EU-wide pesticide rule were marginally less likely (46 percent likely) to think mutual recognition was better.

For workers’ benefits, however, which asked about a policy to require more generous sickness leave, Europeans were more likely to favor a policy of mutual recognition in *both* instances if they initially liked the policy. That is, among those who favored more generous sickness leave requirements at either the country or European levels, they were about 60 percent likely (more than half) to think mutual recognition was better. In the United States, those that liked the policy at the state level were ambivalent about a policy of required reciprocity while those that liked a federal guarantee liked mutual recognition less.

While we were limited in the number of policies and issues we could test in a survey of feasible length, we think it plausible to interpret this difference between our respondents as meaningful. Again, mutual recognition in internal-market governance is an especially complex policy, making it notable to find any systematic variation in public views about it. The higher levels of support for mutual recognition among Europeans reinforce our other findings that citizens have internalized to some degree the goals and discourse of EU institutional

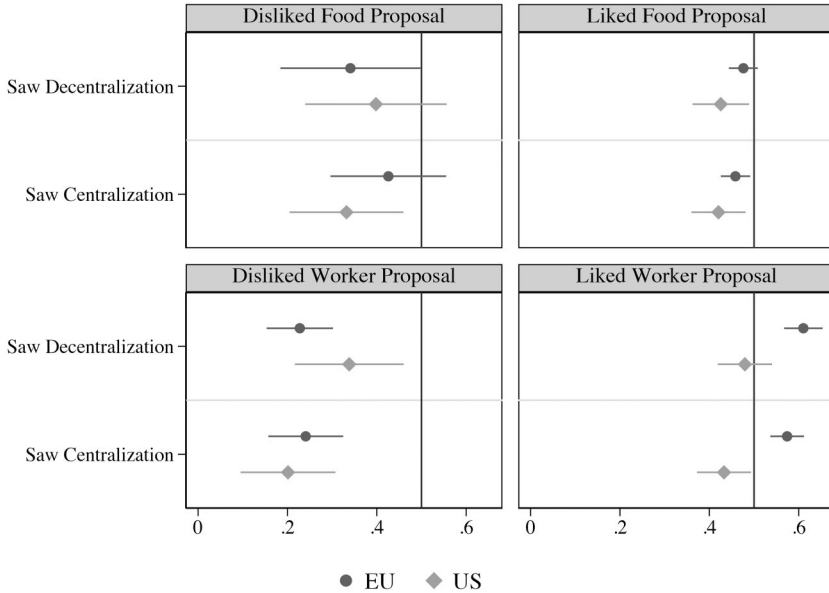


Figure 8. Support for mutual recognition, pesticide regulations, and sickness leave.

attention to the Single Market. Workers' benefits may stand out in this respect because they received policy attention in recent years in ways that involve mutual recognition: the EU's "posted workers" regime allows firms to employ workers from other countries while partly respecting their home-country rules—meaning partial mutual recognition of other member-states' worker benefits—and underwent a contested revision in 2017–2018. We certainly do not mean to claim that large numbers of Europeans fully understand and support mutual recognition, but they do show some awareness and positivity toward it. No similar institutional attention has familiarized American public opinion with this policy option.

Discussion and conclusion

Whether citizens recognize it or not, internal-market governance clearly matters in the lives of Americans and Europeans today. The US federation and the quasi-federal EU were both founded around central mandates to ensure market openness across their member-states, and over time those mandates have shaped wide areas of governance: safety and environmental requirements for goods, qualifications and authorizations for service providers, consumer-protection and supervisory rules for finance, rights, and obligations in labor markets, or eligibility for public contracts and subsidies. Major elements of political authority in both arenas, and tangible elements of daily life, turn on how much state or federal-level actors decide these rules.

It also matters politically, however, whether or not citizens pay attention to these regulatory issues. Scholars of these polities and of comparative federalism have tended to assume that political debates over such policies—let alone over the multilevel allocation of responsibility for them—are the province of elites, with few structured attitudes about them across the wider citizenry. The basic fact of their low salience cannot be denied: internal-market regulation is technically complex and almost never elicits the kind of broad contestation typically seen around taxation, welfare programs, immigration, or defense. Nonetheless, consistent with preregistered hypotheses, we show that Europeans are more likely than Americans to distinguish between levels of government when considering market integration policies, reflecting a greater degree of “federal thinking” on such issues. Americans exhibit more ambivalence, favoring decentralized approaches—especially among Republicans—but without the same engagement in governance distinctions. This experiment breaks new ground in demonstrating that coherent mass opinion can form even on this inhospitable terrain.

We explain these differences as rooted in the distinct institutional frameworks of American federalism and European integration that have shaped public attitudes toward single market problems and solutions. Non-institutional conditions appear to be less influential, since the most salient hypotheses built on them predict the reverse outcome of broader public mobilization around internal-market issues in the United States rather than Europe. Americans move and trade across internal borders considerably more than Europeans do. The prominent liberal-economic theoretical tradition in political economy, state-building, and comparative federalism suggests—very plausibly—that higher internal flows make internal-market impediments more irritating for more people, and should thus motivate broader responsiveness to these issues as well as more support for federal-level policies to address interstate barriers. In our view, the fact that the US–EU differences run against these expectations underscores the power of the contrasting institutional hypothesis. The EU’s concerted efforts to promote its single market project have contributed to a more informed and engaged public that is better able to distinguish between different levels of governance and their respective authorities. This highly visible institutional mobilization contrasts with the United States, where the federal system’s design and historical evolution have led to a more diffuse and less cohesive approach to market regulation, contributing to the observed public ambivalence. The comparison highlights feedback from elite-driven institutions and policies into public opinion that fits [Lowi’s \(1972\)](#) notion that policies determine politics.

The patterns illustrated throughout our data underscore that core institutionalist claim: authority structures and policy legacies not only shape governing outcomes, but the very contours of how people think about governance and what future outcomes could entail. With experimental data, this study helps demonstrate the micro-foundations for that larger institutional theory of multilevel governance, and is distinct

from the larger scholarly tradition that focuses on elite behavior or longitudinal analysis of policy uptake. This microfoundational evidence—observable patterns in how citizens attribute authority in different institutional contexts—provides rare evidence that larger institutional processes leave discernible traces in public opinion. In a domain as structurally complex as market integration, such evidence bolsters our confidence in theories that are often difficult to verify using conventional causal inference tools.

Not only do these results dovetail with a growing body of literature that shores up the relevance of public opinion in legitimizing new institutional arrangements, but they partly resurrect intuitions from early neofunctionalist theory. Although Haas famously argued that the formation of new European institutions was so dominated by elites that “it is as impracticable as it is unnecessary to have recourse to general public opinion surveys” (Haas 1958, 17), he also predicted that the delegation of authority to European institutions would eventually lead citizens to shift their loyalties toward the supranational level. We do not find that sort of dramatic change, but we do show that institutional mobilization around market integration—through regulation, treaty language, and political messaging—has had a discernible effect on how Europeans attribute authority. Even in obscure policy domains, the rules of governance matter, and they shape not only the behavior of political elites but the structure of public opinion itself.

That said, such effects are complex. The heterogeneity in treatment effects among subgroups in both the EU and the United States reinforces a need to better understand the complexity of public opinion in federal systems. While mass attitudes, in general, suggest a level of public ambivalence that might warrant concern, there are clear subgroups of both the European and American populations that “think federally” and whose interest and attentiveness in single market issues might exert disproportionate influence on the politics within these systems. The public side of internal-market politics deserves more attention on both sides of the Atlantic.

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Supplementary material

Supplementary data can be found at www.publius.oxfordjournals.org

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Conflicts of interest. None declared.

Notes

1. One-time Eurobarometer surveys addressed the Internal Market broadly in 2011 (Special Eurobarometer 363) and with a narrower range of questions in 2013 (Special Eurobarometer 398). Neither included questions clearly about support for internal-market goals or action to achieve them.
2. Thanks to economist Keith Head for sharing this estimate based on data in [Head and Mayer \(2021\)](#). No data exists on American interstate services trade, but all observers agree it is far higher than in the EU.
3. In the EU the full prompt read: “You know, there’s an alternative way to balance choices about food safety with economic openness across the European single market. It’s called ‘required mutual recognition,’ and is sometimes used in the European single market. [R-Country] could choose its own pesticide standards for food grown in [R-Country]. Other EU countries could choose the standards for their own production. But the EU would require that food that meets any EU member’s standards could be sold across Europe. Food could be sold in [R-Country] stores even if it met the lower standards of another EU country.” In the United States, the full prompt read: “You know, there’s an alternative way to balance choices about food safety with economic openness across the United States’ national market. It’s called ‘required reciprocity’ between states, and is sometimes used in the United States. [R-State] could choose its own pesticide standards for food grown in [R-State]. Other states could choose the standards for their own production. But the federal government would require that food that meets any state’s standards could be sold across the country. Food could be sold in [R-State] stores even if it met the lower standards of another state.”

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