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**Informing Europe**

*How news media shape political trust in the European Union*

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## Chapter 1



# Effects of the media information environment on trust in the European Union and cue-taking

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Trust is an important factor for creating and stabilizing support for political institutions. In recent years, however, many European citizens have lost trust in the European Union. EU trust levels are slowly recovering after a considerable decline following the European debt crisis. Yet, according to Eurobarometer trends, far less than half of all European citizens trust the EU or its institutions (European Commission, 2017). Pervasive levels of distrust threaten the EU's democratic legitimization. Not only does distrust inhibit political participation, particularly turnout (Levi & Stoker, 2000), and satisfaction with democratic processes (Hetherington, 1998), it may also further the crumbling of the Union, as exemplified by the British vote to leave the EU. Given these far-reaching potential consequences, understanding the determinants of political trust is essential. Previous research indicates that trust in the EU depends on emotional attachment and utilitarian considerations (Harteveld et al., 2013; see also Introduction). The most important predictor of trust in the EU, however, is not inherent in the EU itself. Due to a lack of actual knowledge about the EU, citizens extrapolate from trust in national institutions. That means, trust in the EU is heavily influenced by trust in national institutions (Harteveld et al., 2013).

However, these three determinants do not arise in a vacuum. Citizens receive most information about the EU from the media (Gattermann & de Vreese, 2017; Vliegenthart et al., 2008), which may influence attachment to the EU as well as utilitarian evaluations. Furthermore, the media may provide citizens with information that they can use to form (dis)trust in the EU instead of relying on cues from national politics. At this point, the role of media information for EU trust is unclear. Mere visibility of the EU in the media environment might increase trust, as citizens grow more familiar with it. On the other hand, visibility of an institution might not always reflect positively on it; increased negative reporting could decrease trust in the EU. We expect direct effects of media visibility and tone on trust in the EU. But media information may also moderate the impact of other factors, particularly by dampening the impact of extrapolation – i.e. relying on cues from national political institutions. The lack of knowledge and distinct opinions that causes extrapolation may in part be explained by a lack of media reporting on the EU – citizens have few opportunities to learn about the EU and how it functions. When there is more media coverage of the EU or when the Union is evaluated more positively or negatively, citizens may have more opportunities to form a judgment. Therefore, we hypothesize that the mechanism of extrapolation is weaker when media visibility of the EU is higher or when the coverage is more evaluative.

These assumptions are tested using a mixed effects multilevel approach, combining 23 rounds of Eurobarometer survey data (N=193,182) and an automated content analysis of EU and Euro coverage from ten European countries between 2004 and 2015. The results of this study contribute to a better understanding of media effects on the formation of political trust in the European Union.

## Determinants of trust in the EU

A certain extent of trust in political institutions is vital for a democracy in which citizens feel adequately represented (van der Meer, 2010). While a moderate amount of distrust can be healthy, too much causes dissatisfaction (Hetherington, 1998) and discourages citizens from political participation (Levi & Stoker, 2000). As van der Meer (2010, p. 518) puts it, “political trust functions as the glue that keeps the system together and as the oil that lubricates the policy machine”. Trust can be conceptualized as the evaluation of a social relation, based on violations of or compliance with certain expectations (Baier, 1986; Coleman, 1990; Kasperson, Golding, & Tuler, 1992).<sup>2</sup> This implies that trust is continually re-established in the light of new information. For *political* trust, evaluations can relate to, among other factors, the level of corruption, the degree of proportional representation in government, and macro-economic performance (van der Meer, 2010; van der Meer & Hakhverdian, 2017).

Harteveld and colleagues (2013) systematized the three main explanations for why citizens trust or distrust the EU. First, the “logic of rationality” assumes that citizens’ trust is based on the perceived performance of the EU. Second, the “logic of identity” conceptualizes trust as a consequence of emotional attachment to the EU. These two logics have also been identified as the central explanations of Euroscepticism in a broader sense (Hooghe & Marks, 2005). However, for trust in EU institutions, a third logic is particularly important: the “logic of extrapolation”, according to which citizens base their trust in the EU on their trust in more familiar national institutions. On the individual level, citizens who trust their own government also trust the EU more than those who distrust their government (Anderson, 1998; Armingeon & Ceka, 2014; Harteveld et al., 2013; Muñoz, Torcal, & Bonet, 2011); their trust in the national government functions as a proxy for trust in the EU. However, the pattern reverses on the aggregate level: Citizens from countries where the *average* trust in the

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2 The “trust-as-evaluation” approach is juxtaposed in the literature to trust as a stable disposition that exists irrespective of the object, but this latter approach has found less resonance in the political trust literature.

government is low tend to trust the EU more than those from countries where the *average* trust in the national government is higher (Hobolt, 2012; Muñoz et al., 2011). See Armingeon and Ceka (2014) for a number of arguments that support the *causal* effect of trust in national institutions on trust in the EU (and not vice versa).

One reason for using proxies is a lack of knowledge (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001). The relation between trust in national institutions and trust in the EU is weaker for individuals with greater knowledge about the EU (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014; Muñoz, 2017); knowledgeable citizens base their evaluations more on actual characteristics and developments of the EU (Harteveld et al., 2013; van der Meer & Hakhverdian, 2017).

### **Media effects on political trust**

In order to gain knowledge and form political opinions, citizens rely on the mass media, particularly when an issue is distant and abstract, such as the EU and how it functions (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2006; Vliegenthart et al., 2008; Mazzoleni, 2014). Yet, evidence on the effects of media content on political trust is inconclusive so far. In some studies, the consumption of online news (Ceron, 2015), newspapers and radio news (Avery, 2009), and news media more generally (Strömbäck et al., 2016) is associated with higher political trust. In others, media use is associated with decreased political trust (Pietsch & Martin, 2011), or reinforces previously held trust judgments (Ceron & Memoli, 2015). A third group of studies found no effects of media use on political trust whatsoever (Gross et al., 2004; Moy & Scheufele, 2000).

A possible explanation for these inconsistent findings is that most of these studies rely on self-reported media use and do not take actual media content into account. Media visibility (the sheer amount of coverage of a topic) and media tone (the evaluation of a topic) can have complementary effects on political attitudes and behavior (Geiß & Schäfer, 2017; Hopmann, Vliegenthart, de Vreese, & Albæk, 2010).

Mere exposure to an object can create a more favorable evaluation of the respective object, as long as it is not connected to negative cues (Zajonc, 2001). Increased media reporting about political institutions provides more transparency (Moy & Hussain, 2011). Transparency (Norris, 2001), familiarity, and knowledge about a political institution (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014; Karp, Banducci, & Bowler, 2003) in turn increase political trust. Especially in the case

of the rather distant EU, increased media reporting has the potential to increase trust. Higher media visibility of the EU is associated with increased knowledge about it (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Hobolt & Tilley, 2014), which in turn is associated with more support (Scharnow & Vogelgesang, 2010; Vliegenthart et al., 2008). Exposure to the EU can reduce Euroscepticism (de Vreese, 2007). Previous research showed that attitudes towards EU enlargement were influenced by the general media environment, rather than by individual media exposure (Azrout et al., 2012). We therefore assume that sheer increased visibility of the EU in the general media environment increases citizens' trust in the Union.

*Hypothesis 1: (a) Higher media visibility of the EU is associated with higher trust in the EU.*

However, not all publicity is good publicity. Besides visibility, tonality of media reporting can also change political attitudes (Balmas & Sheaffer, 2010). In line with the media-malaise hypothesis (Robinson, 1976), particularly negative information about politics (Ceron, 2015) and uncivil political discourse (Mutz & Reeves, 2005) decrease political trust. Like political news in general (Soroka & McAdams, 2015), the EU is often subject to rather negative media coverage, particularly in the older member states (de Vreese et al., 2006; Peter et al., 2003). Negative news has stronger effects on recipients than positive news (Soroka & McAdams, 2015); however, positive news has also been found to positively affect EU attitudes (Desmet et al., 2015). Based on this evidence, we hypothesize the following.

*Hypothesis 1: (b) More positive media coverage of the EU is associated with more trust in the EU, while (c) more negative coverage is associated with less trust.*

When the news environment provides citizens with more information about the EU, citizens might also rely more on it, and less on cues from national politics. As discussed, previous research found proxies from trust in the national government to be the strongest predictor of trust in the EU, but less so for individuals who are more knowledgeable about politics (Armingeon & Ceka, 2014; Muñoz, 2017). We hypothesize that citizens will rely less on proxies from the national government when forming their EU trust when the EU is more visible in the media environment, because they can acquire more information to base their judgment on. A similar mechanism is plausible for tonality: Very positive or negative information might make citizens rely more

on these media evaluations of the EU instead of extrapolation, seeing that more emotional information tends to have a stronger effect on attitudes than neutral information (Soroka & McAdams, 2015).

*Hypothesis 2: The impact of trust in the national government on trust in the EU is weaker when the EU is (a) more visible in the news and when the news coverage is (b) more positive or (c) more negative.*

## Method

We combined data from an automated content analysis with survey data. The content data are obtained from a newspaper archive for the following ten countries: Austria, Denmark, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Spain. For each country, we chose the broadsheet with the largest circulation that is also available in the archive (see Appendix 1A). We made this methodological choice for three main reasons. First, there is evidence that EU coverage in broadsheet newspapers reflects a diverse range of stances towards the EU (Conti & Memoli, 2017). Second, broadsheet newspapers often set the agenda for other news outlets, or are influenced by them in a reciprocal process, (Golan, 2006; Kruikemeier, Gattermann, & Vliegenthart, 2018; Picard, 2015), and therefore reflect how a topic is covered more generally (Vliegenthart et al., 2008). Third, by including country fixed effects, our analytical approach focuses on *changes* in trust over time within countries, while controlling for between-country differences, making the analysis less sensitive to the broadsheets' specific editorial stances. In sum, albeit not a comprehensive account, we deem the selection of one broadsheet per country suitable to the purpose of our study.

We collected two separate media corpora. The first one focuses on coverage about the EU as an institution and includes every article that mentions the words "European Union" or the abbreviation "EU" in the headline or subtitle. We developed this search string with the goal to only include articles in which the EU is the main topic. This enables us to conduct an automated content analysis without including articles that are only remotely or not at all related to the EU. However, one of the most important European issues of the last decade is not necessarily covered in this corpus. The Euro crisis made European integration a more important political issue (Otjes & Katsanidou, 2017) and had severe consequences for citizens' evaluations of the EU. Therefore, we

collected a second corpus of media coverage on the Euro, which includes articles with references to the Euro in headlines and subtitles.

The algorithm used to determine the tone of the headlines is SentiStrength (Thelwall, Buckley, & Paltoglou, 2012) in Python. This algorithm automatically estimates positive and negative sentiment in short texts in different languages<sup>3</sup>, based on keywords, taking negation and booster words into account. Given SentiStrength's purpose of analyzing short units of text, we focused only on the headlines and subtitles of the articles, which are also the most prominent and most read part of the newspaper and reflect broader changes in the media environment<sup>4</sup>. Positivity and negativity in our dataset reflect the average sentiment scores in the period between the survey waves, with 1 being a neutral sentiment and 5 being the maximum positive or negative sentiment possible<sup>5</sup>. Visibility is measured as the average number of articles per month between the survey rounds. In total, the EU corpus includes 53,378 articles, while the Euro corpus includes 52,141 articles. The distribution across newspapers is included in Appendix 1A.

The corresponding survey data were obtained from the biannual Standard Eurobarometer from 2004 to 2015 (23 time points). It is typically conducted in the first and the third quarter of a year. The total number of respondents in all ten countries and at all time points in our sample is  $N = 193,182$ . Trust in the EU and in the national government are dichotomous variables and consist of the answer to the question whether the respondent "tends to trust" or "tends not to trust" the EU or the government, respectively. Further control variables include age in years, education (measured as the age at which full-

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3 Danish is the only language in our sample that is not supported by SentiStrength. Therefore, we automatically translated the Danish headlines into English with Google Translate and used the English version of SentiStrength. Google Translate is useful and valid for translations that are analyzed using bag-of-words approaches like SentiStrength (de Vries, Schoonvelde, & Schumacher, 2018). However, it is of course only a proxy. We validated the approach by testing it for Dutch. Analogous to the Danish headlines, we translated a random sample of 100 Dutch headlines into English and compared the resulting scores to the ones obtained using the Dutch version. While the average sentiment for the original Dutch version is 1.02 positive and 1.51 negative, the average sentiment for the translated version is 1.10 positive and 1.42 negative. In order to ensure that the results do not depend on this deviation, all models were also run excluding Denmark. This robustness check showed that almost all results held, with the exception of direct effects of media positivity (see Appendix 1B). We take this deviation into account when interpreting the results.

4 Goldberg, Brosius, and de Vreese (2019) show that analyzing headlines of newspapers leads to highly similar conclusions about EU media content as analyzing full newspaper texts.

5 In Chapter 2, we assess the accuracy of the tone measurement of SentiStrength and an alternative approach, compared to human coding of tone, and find that SentiStrength performs at satisfactory levels.



time education was stopped), and gender. Respondents were excluded if they did not answer the relevant questions. Table 1.1 shows descriptive statistics of all variables.

Using the `lme4` package (Bates et al., 2015) in R (R Core Team, 2016), we estimated a two-level mixed-effects generalized linear model with random slopes and intercepts for the different survey waves, country fixed effects, and media information as a contextual moderator of the relation between trust in the national government and in the EU. Using this approach, we control for between-country variation in the newspaper coverage due to different editorial stances of the selected newspapers<sup>6</sup>. Individuals are at the first level and survey waves at the second. The predictor variable trust in the national government was group mean-centered and media visibility, positivity, and negativity were grand mean-centered (Enders & Tofighi, 2007; Kreft, de Leeuw, & Aiken, 1995). The results are visualized using the R packages `stargazer` (Hlavac, 2015) and `ggplot2` (Wickham, 2015).

## Results

Figure 1.1 displays the development of EU and Euro visibility over time, while Figure 1.2 shows the development of tonality. EU visibility decreased over the last decade, which is in line with research on election campaign statements, in which salience of the EU decreased in the 2000s (Hoeglinger, 2016). Euro visibility skyrocketed during the Euro crisis (see also Chapter 2, which shows that economic EU coverage increases considerably between 2010 and 2011). There was some fluctuation in the positive sentiment, but in general, there is little positivity in EU and Euro coverage. The tone became increasingly more negative over time, particularly around the Euro crisis.

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6 Since this approach can induce artificially low standard errors, we also replicated our results using survey- and country fixed effects in a multilevel-model with a random intercept at the country-wave level and random slopes for the variables in cross-level interactions. This more conservative approach results in highly similar substantive conclusions.

**Table 1.1** Descriptive Statistics

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Trust in EU	0.45	0.50	0	1
Trust in national government	0.36	0.48	0	1
Education	18.88	4.93	0	83
Age	50.55	16.77	15	99
Gender	0.48	0.50	0 (female)	1 (male)
Visibility EU	38.51	21.89	0.67	111.71
Positivity EU	1.13	0.09	1.00	1.57
Negativity EU	1.44	0.23	1.00	1.98
Visibility Euro	38.95	36.55	0.25	166.43
Positivity Euro	1.17	0.10	1.00	1.50
Negativity Euro	1.42	0.29	1.00	2.33

**Figure 1.1** Development of EU and Euro visibility over time

**Figure 1.2** Development of positive and negative sentiment in EU and Euro coverage over time.

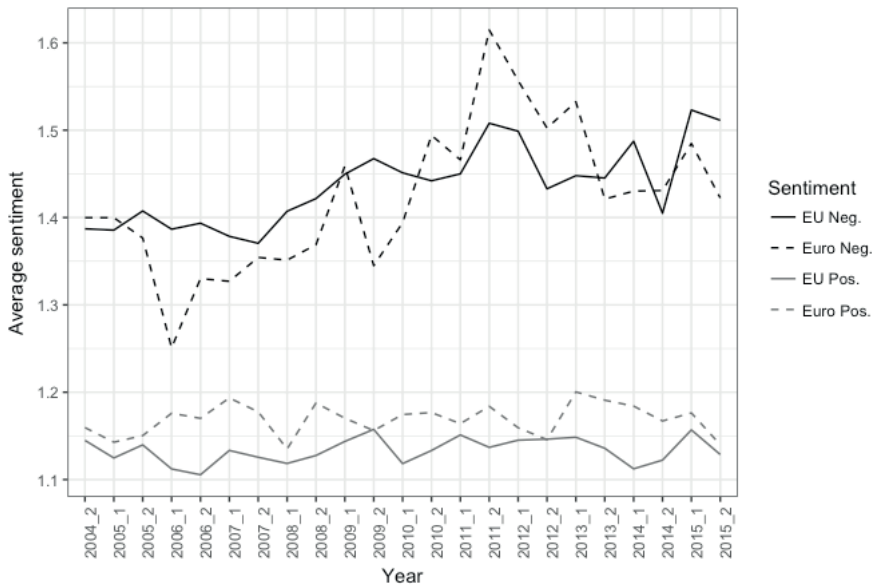


Table 1.2 shows the results of the stepwise specification of our model. Model 1 is the baseline model without any predictors. In Model 2, we added education, age, gender, trust in the national government, and country dummy variables, with fixed slopes and random intercepts at the survey level. In Model 3, we added the group predictor variables EU visibility, positivity, and negativity and freed the slope of trust in the national government, allowing the impact of trust in the national government on trust in the EU to vary over time points. In Model 4, we added cross-level interaction terms for trust in the national government and all media variables. Model 5 and 6 replicate Model 3 and 4 for the Euro coverage variables. Given that it is not possible to compare higher-level variances and regression coefficients across logistic models, because they are rescaled in each model (Browne, Subramanian, Jones, & Goldstein, 2005; Hox, 2010, pp. 133-134), we calculated predicted probabilities for statistically significant media effects, based on Model 4 for the EU coverage and Model 6 for the Euro coverage, using the effects package (Fox & Hong, 2006, 2009) in R (R Core Team, 2016), which averages over all other terms in the model.

The control variables influence trust in the EU as expected: Younger and more educated people trust the EU more, while gender has no effect. Trust in the national government exerts a strong positive influence on trust in the EU, which replicates previous research on the importance of national heuristics (Anderson 1998; Hartevelde et al. 2013). Turning to the hypotheses, media visibility of the Euro and the EU has a statistically significant, but small, positive relation to trust in the EU: If Euro visibility increases from no visibility to high visibility (100 articles per month), the predicted probability to trust the EU increases from 41.9% to 47.8%. For EU visibility, it increases from 43.0% for no visibility to 45.7% for high visibility (100 articles per month). This supports Hypothesis 1a: Higher media visibility of the EU is associated with higher trust in the EU when media tone is held constant (see also Chapter 3, in which we find similar results for the effect of EU visibility on trust, using data from a manual content analysis and different survey data). We also find direct effects of the tone of media coverage. For the Euro coverage, the predicted probability to trust the EU increases from 43.5% in a neutral media environment (positivity score 1) to 45.6% in the most positive media environment (positivity score 1.5). However, positive EU coverage does not exert statistically significant effects in Model 4, and a negative effect in Model 3. Furthermore, the effects of positive EU and Euro coverage did not hold up in the test excluding Danish respondents (see Appendix 1B). These results offer only limited support for Hypothesis 1b, and the effect size is marginal. Negative Euro coverage has a significant negative effect on trust in the EU in Model 5, but not Model 6; the predicted probability to trust the EU decreases from 45.6% in a neutral media environment (negativity score 1) to 42.0% in the most negative media environment (negativity score 2). However, the effect is not replicated for the EU coverage. Hypothesis 1c is therefore also only partly supported. Overall, the main effects remain either small or statistically insignificant and offer no consistent support for Hypothesis 1a - c.

Turning to the interaction effects, visibility of the Euro strengthens the relation of trust in national institutions and trust in the EU. For those that trust their national government the least, the probability to trust the EU only increases from 19.6% to 20.9% when Euro visibility increases (from 0 to 100 articles per month), while it increases from 76.7% to 89.2% for those that trust their national government the most. This indicates that, with increased coverage, people rely more on cues from national politics when forming their EU trust judgment. EU visibility has a similar effect, which, however, only approaches statistical significance. Hypothesis 2a is therefore not supported.

**Table 1.2** Trust in the EU

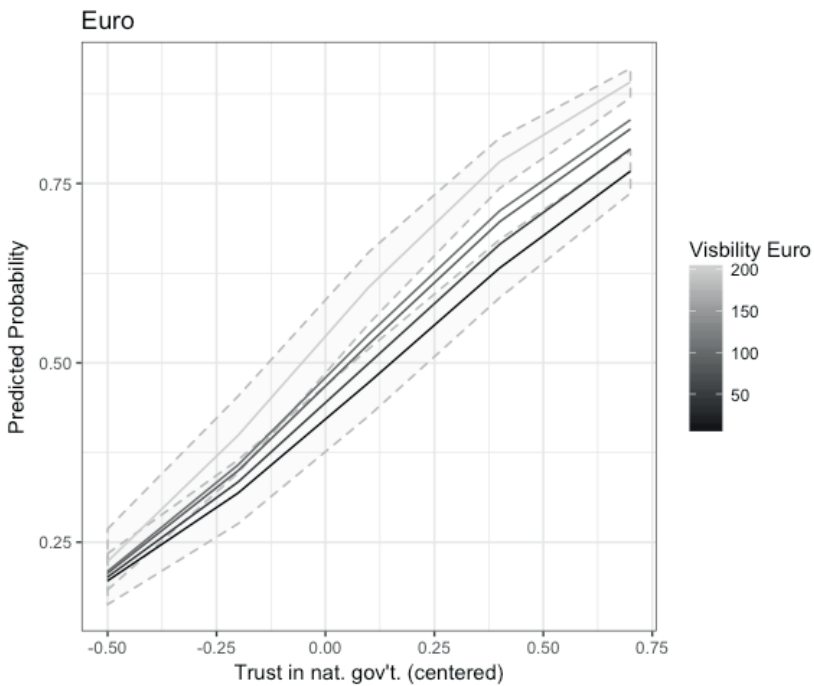
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Trust in nat. gov't.		2.28*** (0.01)	2.28*** (0.05)	2.29*** (0.05)	2.28*** (0.05)	2.29*** (0.05)
Education		0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)	0.04*** (0.00)
Gender (male)		0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Age		-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)
EU visibility			0.00 (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)		
EU positivity			-0.33* (0.14)	-0.21 (0.14)		
EU negativity			-0.05 (0.06)	-0.14** (0.05)		
Trust (nat.) * EU visibility				-0.00 (0.00)		
Trust (nat.) * EU positivity				1.69*** (0.17)		
Trust (nat.) * EU negativity				-0.92*** (0.06)		
Euro visibility					0.00*** (0.00)	0.00*** (0.00)
Euro positivity					0.18* (0.13)	0.18* (0.13)
Euro negativity					-0.09** (0.03)	-0.07 (0.03)
Trust (nat.) * Euro visibility						0.00*** (0.00)
Trust (nat.) * Euro positivity						0.70*** (0.13)
Trust (nat.) * Euro negativity						-0.42*** (0.05)
Constant	-0.21** (0.07)	-1.33*** (0.10)	-1.39*** (0.11)	-1.48*** (0.11)	-1.33*** (0.10)	-1.33*** (0.11)
Log Likelihood	-129,864.99	-104,205.84	-104,055.22	-103,886.18	-104,035.80	-103,892.30
Akaike Inf. Crit.	259,733.97	208,441.69	208,150.44	207,818.37	208,111.60	207,830.50
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	259,754.31	208,594.26	208,353.87	208,052.31	208,315.00	208,064.50
Variance: Survey (Intercept)	0.13	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.22	0.22
Variance: Survey (Slope)			0.04	0.05	0.04	0.05
N (individuals; surveys)	193,182; 23	193,182; 23	193,182; 23	193,182; 23	193,182; 23	193,182; 23

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . SEs are in parentheses.  
For presentational clarity, country dummies are not displayed in the table.

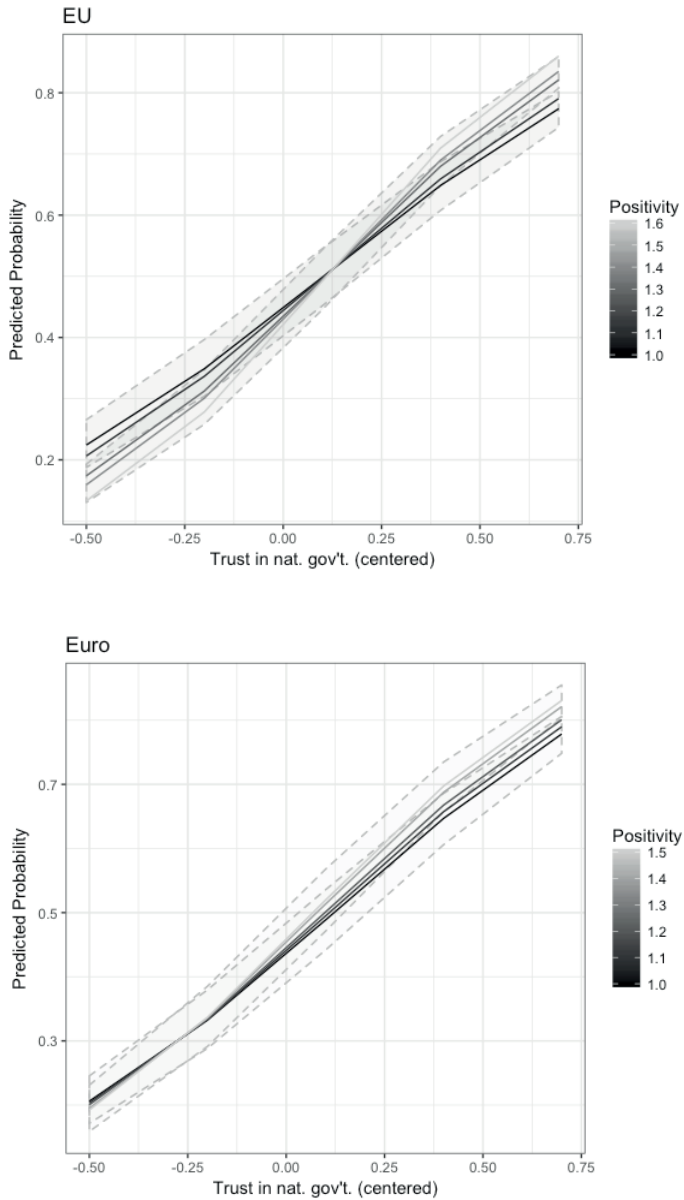
Positive information also strengthens the relation between trust in the national government and trust in the EU: For the EU coverage, positivity decreases the probability to trust in the EU for those that do not trust their national government from 22.3% to 16.2 %, while it increases it from 77.1% to 84.0% for those that trust their government.

For the Euro coverage, positivity does not change the probability to trust the EU for those who do not trust their national government, while it increases it from 77.9% to 83.1% for those that do trust their government. This means that positivity reinforces the relationship between trust in the national government and trust in the EU, which does not support Hypothesis 2b (see Figure 1.4).

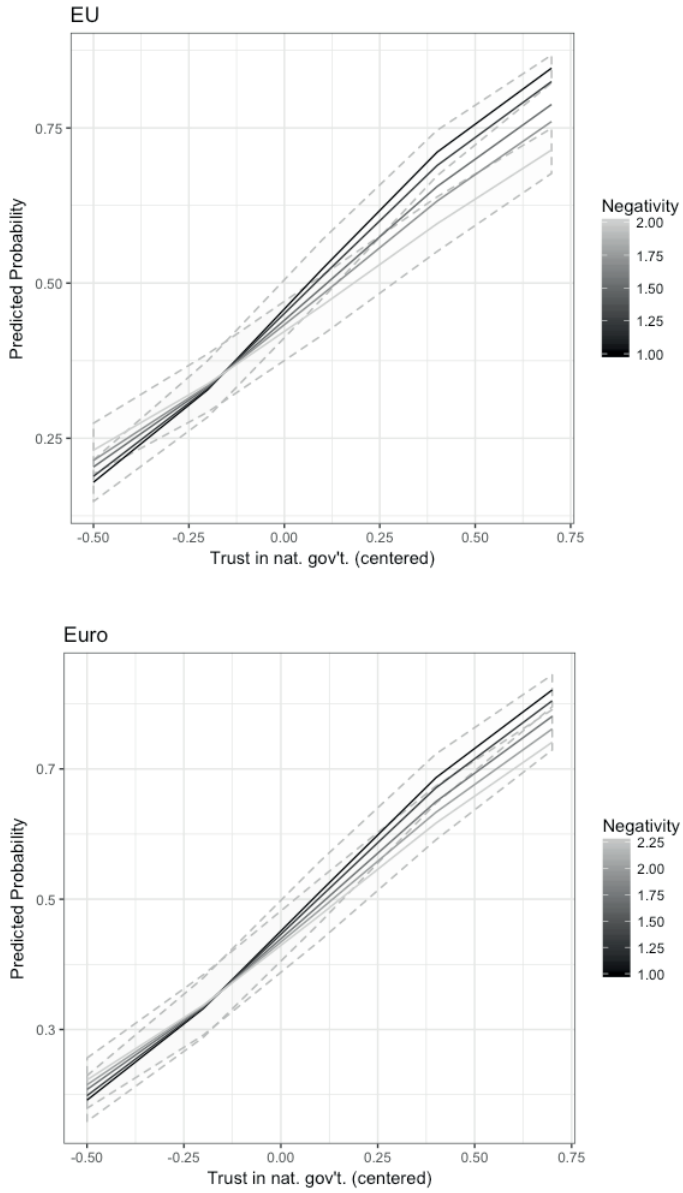
**Figure 1.3** Interaction effect of Euro visibility and trust in the national government on trust in the EU



**Figure 1.4** Interaction effect of Euro and EU positivity and trust in the national government on trust in the EU



**Figure 1.5** Interaction effects of Euro and EU negativity and trust in the national government on trust in the EU





Negativity, on the other hand, weakens the relationship between trust in the national government and trust in the EU. For those that do not trust the national government, negativity changes the probability to trust from 17.7% to 23.4% (EU coverage) or 19.1% to 22.3% (Euro coverage), while it decreases the probability to trust much more substantially for those that do trust from 84.2% to 72.2% (EU coverage) or 82.1% to 74.1% (Euro coverage). This means, negativity weakens the relation between trust in the national government and trust in the EU, which supports Hypothesis 2c (see Figure 1.5).

## Discussion

This chapter investigated how media coverage of the EU and the Euro contributes to the formation of trust in the EU among citizens. It is the first study to investigate the effects of media content on EU trust. While previous studies on media effects on political trust have often relied on self-reports of media use (Avery, 2009; Moy & Scheufele, 2000) or estimated proxies for media content based on political positions (Ceron & Memoli, 2015), the present study uses an alternative approach by analyzing actual media content and connecting it to survey data in different country contexts and over a period of 10 years. The results show that trust in the Union is higher when the EU and the Euro are more visible in the media. Negative EU and Euro coverage dampens the relationship between trust in the national government and trust in the European Union, while positive EU and Euro coverage and higher visibility of the EU amplify this relation.

This study contributes to the extant literature in multiple ways. It shows that media coverage and EU trust are related, even though direct effects are limited (but see Chapter 3, in which we find more consistent effects of EU visibility and positive valence of EU coverage on trust in the EU). Previous research found mixed results that suggested positive, negative, and no effects of media use on political trust. The results of the present study suggest that these differential effects on trust could be explained by differences in both media visibility and tone. This is in line with recent findings that media tone and visibility can have complementary effects on political attitudes and vote choice (Geiß & Schäfer, 2017; Hopmann et al., 2010).

The interaction effects are particularly interesting. Citizens use proxies “when in doubt” (Anderson, 1998). The extent to which they doubt, however, may be reduced by media information. Concerning negativity, citizens rely less on cues from national politics if there is more negative information about the EU available. There are two possible explanations for this. First, citizens might gain knowledge through the negative information in the media, for example about how the EU handled the European debt crisis. In this case, the implication would be that media coverage helps citizens make more informed judgments about political institutions and prevents “blind trust”. Especially seeing that citizens generally have little knowledge about the EU, it seems plausible that media coverage provides citizens with information to educate their political stances. However, not everyone learns from the media under all circumstances. A second explanation is that citizens do not actually gain knowledge, but that they use the negative media climate as a new proxy for their judgment. In that case, citizens would not necessarily make more informed judgments, but rather use a different proxy to extrapolate from.

Positive media information and visibility, however, have the opposite effect and strengthen the relationship between trust in the government and in the EU. While the likelihood to trust the EU did not increase for those that do not trust their government, it increased for the citizens that do trust their government. In that sense, positive information and visibility of the EU rather had a polarizing function, creating a bigger divide between those that trust a number of institutions and those that do not trust any institution. This finding is in line with some previous research (Ceron & Memoli, 2015) and has two interesting aspects. On one hand, it supports our expectation that, when there is more positive or neutral information available, some citizens (who already trust their own government) are more likely to also trust the EU. This means that positive media coverage may strengthen the cues that they get from national politics. For these citizens, “to know it is to love it” (Karp et al., 2003). On the other hand, there are many citizens who distrust both institutions and whose opinions are very unlikely to be changed by media information, regardless of whether it is positive or negative. Positive EU coverage cannot outweigh the cues to distrust. Does this mean that some citizens have a syndrome of distrust in political institutions that cannot be changed? This conclusion may seem unwarranted, given that trust is a complex construct, influenced by many factors (van der Meer, 2010) - and only one of them being media information.

Several limitations underlie the interpretation of these findings, mostly regarding the data used. While the Eurobarometer offers representative survey data from different European countries and over time, the questionnaire design also imposes certain restrictions. In particular, the trust variables are measured on a dichotomous scale, which does not allow for analyzing varying degrees of trust. Furthermore, the lack of some relevant individual-level control variables could conceal hypothesized media effects. For example, it is possible that effects of the media environment are stronger for individuals who use more news media. Future research could overcome these problems by employing surveys that offer more nuanced measures of political trust and individual media use. The country-level media data also have certain limitations, as we only analyzed one newspaper per country. Even though changes in broadsheet newspaper coverage reflect general developments in the media landscape, a more inclusive analysis of multiple news media outlets could paint a more comprehensive picture of the available information about the EU. This is particularly the case in a time in which people increasingly lose trust in the mainstream media (Edelman, 2017) - possibly, new media sources exert a stronger or different influence on EU trust than broadsheet newspapers. Finally, the use of longitudinal data offers a dynamic perspective on media coverage and EU trust, yet repeated cross-sections do not allow for establishing causal relationships. And while it is intuitive that public opinion is influenced by the media, especially when most citizens receive information about the EU through the news, it is also possible that the media merely imitate societal trends (Cappella, 2002).

Taken together, the present research suggests that trust in the EU is associated with the amount of media reporting about the EU and its tonality in national news media. It opens up new perspectives on antecedents of EU trust and EU evaluations more generally, highlighting the role of news media in the recent decline of trust in the EU. This is particularly important in a time in which pervasive levels of distrust could threaten the democratic legitimization of the EU, which is now dubbed a "crisis of trust" (Foster & Frieden, 2017). More neutral and positive information may increase transparency, knowledge, and trust and thereby reduce the EU's democratic deficit. Increased trust could go hand in hand with higher turnout rates, which were historically low in the elections for the European Parliament in 2014 (European Parliament, 2014). And while it is not possible to change the news at one's will, this study could help inform how the EU communicates its activities to journalists. This is particularly relevant, given the EU's notorious "communication deficit" and

the fact that the EU typically only becomes visible in the media during crises (van Noije, 2010). However, the results also show that there are some citizens whose opinions can hardly be swayed by media content.