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The Clash of the Policies: The Joint Effect of EU Cohesion Policy and Common Agricultural Policy on the Public Support for European Integration

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Abstract

A vital element of the European Union (EU) political system is the idea of further European integration. Whilst most existing works investigate the effects of the Cohesion Policy (CP), only a handful of studies consider the effects of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) on citizens' support for European integration. In this contribution, I argue that these two largest EU redistribution policies neutralise each other in their effects on the citizens' support for European integration: the CP improves public support due to its positively perceived redistributive nature and positive externalities, whilst the CAP decreases public support due to a limited target audience, somewhat elitarian distribution of resources and bureaucratic complexities. Using regional-level CP and CAP data for 2017 and Eurobarometer surveys for 2018 and 2019, the empirical findings of multilevel regressions show that the CAP counteracts the positive effects of the CP on citizens' support for further European integration. The findings are robust to including a wide range of control variables, sample size change and alternative specifications of key independent variables. These findings also hint that policy evaluations should not disregard the differences between various policy instruments.

Keywords: European integration; Cohesion Policy; Common Agricultural Policy; multilevel analysis; Eurobarometer

Introduction

The European Union's (EU) political system is fundamentally based on the concept of European unification and the ongoing process of further integration (Gross and Debus, 2018). However, EU integration alone produces unequal results, exacerbating economic inequality between poorer and wealthier member states, fuelling Euroscepticism and empowering anti-globalist parties in economically disadvantaged areas (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Stockemer, 2017; Vasilopoulou and Talving, 2023). Moreover, the past two decades, marred by the global recession, sovereign debt crises, refugee influxes, a pandemic and energy crises, have increased economic and political polarization, questioning the rationality of further integration (Bürkner, 2020; van Erkel and van der Meer, 2016). The integration came also with increased regional inequalities across Europe (Bouvet, 2010) and within countries (Lipps and Schraff, 2021). Euroscepticism arises not only in poorer regions facing persistent underdevelopment and rising unemployment (Dijkstra et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018) but also in wealthier areas experiencing economic stagnation (Vasilopoulou and Talving, 2023). So far, the victory of the 'Leave'

campaign in the 2016 Brexit referendum was probably the most noticeable and politically relevant outcome of these trends (e.g., Clarke et al., 2017; Hobolt, 2016).

To address unequal integration outcomes, the EU allocated €351.8 billion in the 2014–2020 period for job creation, business competitiveness, economic growth, sustainable development and enhancing citizens' quality of life in its regions and cities. This investment, primarily through the Cohesion Policy (CP), is channelled via the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund,¹ supporting economic, social and territorial cohesion whilst promoting regional (cross-border) co-operation (Bürkner, 2020; Dąbrowski et al., 2019; Gross and Debus, 2018). Meanwhile, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), constituting 39% of the EU's budget, focuses on agricultural and rural development. The CAP, split into Pillar I (85%–90% of the budget) and Pillar II, is co-managed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Pillar I provides direct support payments and market measures, whilst Pillar II, through rural development programmes, aims at broader economic measures, rural development, agricultural competitiveness and sustainable resource management.

In this contribution, I investigate how both EU transfers, comprising over two-thirds of the EU budget, influence citizens' support for further European integration. I argue that the CP is likely to promote support for European integration due to its positively perceived redistributive nature favouring lagging behind regions, jointly with the positive externalities it is assumed to produce (for instance, in the case of infrastructural investment). On the other hand, I propose that the CAP is likely to decrease public support for European integration due to its focus on a specific sector (agriculture) jointly with the highly unequal distribution of resources and bureaucratic complexities, which may generate effects on societal well-being not so trivial to perceive.

This work represents the first attempt to assess the joint effect of the two largest redistribution policies of the EU: the CP and the CAP. Unlike previous studies that examine the public support implications of these two policies in a separate context (see, e.g., Eichenberg and Russell, 1997; Hartnett and Murray, 2018; Osterloh, 2011; Rodríguez-Pose and Dijkstra, 2021), this article contributes to the existing literature by analysing their combined effect and whether they tend to neutralise each other in the context of public support for further integration. Using regional data on CP and CAP payments from 2017 across 186 regions in 26 EU member states and Eurobarometer (EB) data from 2018 and 2019, my findings robustly demonstrate that (a) the CP enhances citizens' support for European integration, (b) the CAP negatively impacts this support and (c) when combined, the CAP neutralise positive effects of the CP.

This study confirms the findings of the recent studies on the positive effects of the CP (see, e.g., Capello and Perucca, 2018; Rodríguez-Pose and Dijkstra, 2021) and negative effects of the CAP (see Hartnett and Murray, 2018) on the various aspects of public support for the EU. Moreover, this article contributes to the existing high interest in the CP and the CAP, which extends beyond academia due to these policies' engagement with economic, institutional and political actors, whose decisions often diverge from policy paradigms because of limited absorption capacity and learning processes (Mikuš et al., 2019). Moreover, differences in implementation criteria and tools also amplify this

¹Together with the EAFRD, CP is part of the European Structural and Investment Funds.

interest (Esposti, 2007). Whilst largely single-sector CAP focuses on subsidizing agriculture, CP funds use a spatial, multi-sector approach aimed at regions meeting specific criteria. Such differences in instruments and implementation strategies often raise questions in the public discourse on their combined effect. Do they complement or conflict with their outcomes (Esposti, 2007; Shucksmith et al., 2005)?

The remainder of the article is divided into four sections. Section I discusses previous work, outlines the theoretical background and formulates hypotheses. Section II presents data and variables. Section III presents the empirical strategy and discusses the results. The article closes by summarising the study's findings and outlining policy implications and avenues for further research.

I. EU Transfers and Public Support for European Integration

The relationship between EU transfers and public opinion has been a prominent research topic for almost three decades. Early studies by Eichenberg and Russell (1997) and Duch and Taylor (1997) found little to no positive impact of economic benefits on political support. However, later studies concerning the CP following its 1988 reform suggest a positive relationship between these transfers and support for the EU (Brinegar and Jolly, 2005; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Medrano, 2003; Osterloh, 2011) or reduced support for Eurosceptic parties (Rodríguez-Pose and Dijkstra, 2021) especially amongst those directly benefiting from these funds (Capello and Perucca, 2018) due to tangible improvements in the local labour market conditions (Crescenzi et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the direct link between the CP and public support for the EU based on the economic benefits is questioned in the presence of other factors such as the strength of the European identity, education and socio-economic factors and policy awareness (Chalmers and Dellmuth, 2015; Verhaegen et al., 2014). The Brexit referendum further complicates this understanding, with studies like Fidrmuc et al. (2019) questioning the direct linkage between the CP and political support.

On the other hand, the effects of the CAP has been more elaborated in the economics literature with mixed and inconclusive evidence of the CAP's impact on employment, development and regional growth (Galluzzo, 2018; Garrone et al., 2019; Mantino, 2017). Only a few studies assessed the synergies between the CP and the CAP, again with mixed findings: the CAP may exhibit conflicting effects with EU structural policies (Crescenzi et al., 2015; Shucksmith et al., 2005), whereas some studies suggest the presence of positive synergies between the CP and the CAP (Crescenzi and Giua, 2016; Montresor et al., 2011), or the CAP has almost no additional impact on regional growth (Esposti, 2007). In the context of the effect on public support, the evidence is scarce and has limited spatial coverage. The reason for such limited attention may be that the CAP exhibits its most considerable effect on agriculture, which is considered a low-productive sector concerning the overall regional economic development (Calegari et al., 2021). However, this approach ignores the considerable occupational impact of the agricultural sector, especially in the most remote areas in the EU (Calegari et al., 2021; Kuokkanen and Vihinen, 2006). The sole example of such examination is the study of the CAP effects on Eurosceptic voting in Poland by Hartnett and Murray (2018), which finds that the CAP boosts Eurosceptic voting, that is, support for the Law and Justice party (PiS).

The CP and Public Support for the EU

The effect of the CP on support for European integration can be understood through economic benefits, institutional effects and identity attachments. Perceived economic benefits such as infrastructure development, job creation and improved public services that further integration can offer are key in shaping public EU support (Chalmers and Dellmuth, 2015; Crescenzi et al., 2020; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000), especially amongst ‘losers of globalization’ (and) in lagging regions (Díaz-Lanchas et al., 2021; Vasilopoulou and Talving, 2023). Whilst some studies do not focus primarily on economic factors, their significance is acknowledged, especially in contexts of noticeable economic costs (De Vries, 2018; Díaz-Lanchas et al., 2021; Foster and Frieden, 2021). Redistribution policies like the CP have a multifaceted impact, offering both direct and indirect benefits at various levels (De Vries, 2017).

At the macro level, the CP enhances public support through both direct and indirect economic benefits. Directly, the CP enhances public support through direct economic benefits like fiscal transfers improving economic conditions (Anderson and Reichert, 1995; Mahler et al., 2000), positive impacts on industry location and agglomeration that unlock dormant development potential in lagging regions (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018) and by propelling growth and reducing EU-wide regional disparities (Becker et al., 2010; Beugeksdijkm and Eijffinger, 2005; Kyriacou and Roca-Sagalés, 2012).

Indirectly, the CP enhances public support through compensation mechanisms, correcting the side effects of a liberalized single market and thus protecting less competitive countries or regions (Bauhr and Charron, 2020; Muñoz et al., 2011). Therefore, citizens may view funds as a solution for domestic underperformance and a reference point for comparing national performance with the EU level (De Vries, 2017; Harteveld et al., 2013).

At the micro level, public support depends on perceived personal benefits from European integration, varying based on income, education, gender and occupation (Anderson and Reichert, 1995; Biancotti et al., 2017; Gabel, 1998; Verhaegen et al., 2014). Wealthy citizens benefit from capital liberalization, whilst low-income citizens suffer due to wage dependence (Frieden, 1991), making them ‘losers of globalization’ (Díaz-Lanchas et al., 2021). EU budget transfers can particularly improve public support for the EU amongst those low earners reliant on social welfare spending by delivering concrete benefits via tangible improvements in local labour market conditions and creating new local opportunities for them (Crescenzi et al., 2020; Díaz-Lanchas et al., 2021; Gabel, 1998).

Beyond utilitarian considerations, institutional perceptions, such as democracy satisfaction and institutional trust, can be relevant in explaining EU attitudes (Díaz-Lanchas et al., 2021). The CP shapes public support for further integration through its institutional effects by reflecting the effectiveness and legitimacy of the EU supranational institutions (Dellmuth and Tallberg, 2015). Redistribution policies like the CP influence trust by signalling a commitment to social cohesion and equalizing outcomes to reinforce trust (Armingeon and Ceka, 2014; Scharpf, 1999). The transparent, fair implementation demonstrates institutional capacity and procedural legitimacy (Börzel, 2002). Successfully achieving policy goals also contributes to performance legitimacy (Schmidt, 2013), further enhancing trust and support (Harteveld et al., 2013). CP funds may improve integration support by

compensating for domestic institutional deficiencies (Muñoz et al., 2011; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000). Highly visible EU implementation makes citizens more likely to credit and support the EU (Dellmuth and Tallberg, 2015). In summary, by shaping trust and legitimacy perceptions, the CP indirectly affects public support through institutional effects.

Another factor to consider is how identity influences the impact of redistributive policies on support for the EU. The impact of the CP on EU support is influenced by the strength and nature of national identity (Chalmers and Dellmuth, 2015; De Vries and Van Kersbergen, 2007; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; McLaren, 2004). Individuals with strong, exclusive national identities may perceive EU funding as intrusive and oppose EU integration. Conversely, those with inclusive national identities, which accommodate regional or supranational identities, often view EU transfers as a symbol of cross-regional solidarity (Chalmers and Dellmuth, 2015) and are more likely to support the EU and its policies (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Risse, 2010). Furthermore, the CP can enhance regional identity and solidarity by promoting cross-border cooperation, joint projects and knowledge sharing, counteracting the adverse effects of rising nationalism or Euroscepticism (Ploszaj and Sarmiento-Mirwaldt, 2014; Revilla et al., 2013).

Finally, the visibility and attribution of redistribution policies are crucial factors in determining their impact on public support for the EU (Borz et al., 2022; Capello and Perucca, 2018; Osterloh, 2011). Visible projects, such as EU-funded infrastructure developments, are more likely to be attributed to the EU and positively influence public opinion, unlike less visible projects that may not be so successful in establishing a direct association with the CP (Borz et al., 2022; Dąbrowski et al., 2019). Informed citizens, aware of EU policies and outcomes, are more likely to form nuanced opinions about the EU (Aiello et al., 2019; Capello and Perucca, 2018). Additionally, the issue of policy attribution may be enhanced by the fact that the effects of the EU fiscal transfers may not be easily disentangled from the effects of similar national policies in place (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000).

Following the theoretical expectations regarding the effects of the CP on the citizens' support for European integration, I propose the following hypothesis:

H1 The CP payments increase citizens' support for European integration.

The CAP and Public Support for the EU

The negative effect of the CAP on the public support for European integration and the rise in Euroscepticism seems driven by the perception of the limited target audience, bureaucracy, compliance procedures and complex regulatory frameworks associated with the CAP (Hartnett and Murray, 2018). The impact of these factors on public opinion is evident in the criticism and perceptions of the CAP, which has implications for both small and large farms across the EU.

First, the negative impact of the CAP stems from the perceptions of a limited sectoral approach, leading to reversed utilitarian calculations compared to the CP. Since the CP and the CAP consume approximately equal shares of the EU budget, the general public, who are not direct beneficiaries, may perceive these payments as unfair subsidies

benefiting a small sector accounting to only a fraction of the total economy, thus leading to reduced support. Figure S1.1 (see Appendix S1) shows that the share of the agricultural sector in the regional GDP in 2017 does not exceed 4.7%. Such an approach may counteract the objective needs of the regions (Capello and Perucca, 2018). Each region has objective needs and unexploited potential across various sectors and industries, which require carefully tailored policies to address them (Camagni and Capello, 2015).

Moreover, the CAP has been criticized for inefficiency and perceived favouritism towards large agricultural producers (Crescenzi et al., 2015), leading to views of wasteful spending and bureaucratic complexity (Ciaian et al., 2010; Hartnett and Murray, 2018; Nicholas et al., 2021). The CAP funding criteria, which require adherence to various standards, disproportionately benefit larger farms due to their ability to meet complex requirements. This bias hinders smaller farms as they struggle to receive support, leading to reduced small farming viability and increasing polarization in farm structures (Hartnett and Murray, 2018). As shown in Figure S1.2 (see Appendix S1), most regions exhibit high Gini coefficients, reaching up to 0.94.² Consequently, this situation fuels political discontent, particularly amongst disadvantaged farmers who perceive an inequitable distribution of resources.

Evidence from Poland suggests that the implementation of the CAP coincided with a decline in small farming and a surge in land prices, exacerbating discontent amongst small farmers. This discontent is illustrated by the shift of small Polish farmers from the Peasants Party to the Eurosceptic PiS party (Cienski, 2016; Hartnett and Murray, 2018). Taking these considerations into account, I theorize the following hypothesis regarding the effect of the CAP on citizens' support for European integration:

H2 CAP payments decrease public support for European integration.

II. Data

I analyse preferences for European integration across 186 NUTS2³ regions in 26 EU member states, focusing on the impact of 2017 policy payments on support for European integration as reflected in four EB waves (89.1, 90.3, 91.5 and 92.3) from March 2018 to November 2019. The use of EB enhances sample size, compensates for missing data and provides broader country/regional coverage, enabling the inclusion of additional, theoretically relevant controls. In the following, I present the operationalization of the variables used in this study.

Dependent Variable

The primary focus of this study is *Preferred unification speed*, which measures individual support for further EU integration. I use responses to the EB survey question on preferred

²The Gini coefficient measures inequality in a distribution, such as income or wealth. It ranges from 0 (perfect equality) to 1 (perfect inequality – one entity/person holding all income or wealth).

³NUTS2 refers to the second level of the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics. NUTS2 covers areas larger than cities (equivalent to NUTS3) but smaller than states (NUTS1) with a population typically between 800,000 and 3 million.

unification speed: ‘In your opinion, what is the current speed of building Europe?’ and particularly ‘(...) and which corresponds best to the speed you would like?’ Responses are coded on a 1–7 scale, with 1 indicating no integration and 7 supporting fast unification.

I use this operationalization over the possible alternative EB questions asking respondents about the *EU image* and *Decisions at EU level*⁴ due to its nuanced approach, which better captures the intensity and direction of support for European integration. It focuses on respondents’ desired pace rather than decision-making locus or broader sentiments about the EU. This operationalization ensures a clearer and more targeted understanding of support for the integration process.

Independent Variables

My independent variables are *Cohesion policy* and *CAP (Pillar I)*, representing per capita payments for 2017 at current prices. The choice of 2017 data is based on its extensive coverage concerning CAP payments, minimal need for imputations and successful data validation. Moreover, using a 1-year lag seems appropriate following the recency effect in psychology (Murdock, 1962) and economic voting research (Bailey, 2021): a 1-year lag of policy payments can more accurately capture their influence on public opinion, as individuals seem more responsive to recent events or economic conditions (Healy and Lenz, 2014; Stiers et al., 2020). CP data are sourced from the European Commission’s Cohesion database, whilst CAP payment data are obtained from the Farmsubsidy.org database, a project of the Open Knowledge Foundation Germany (Open Knowledge Foundation, n.d.). After separating Pillar I and II payments using the Description of Measures from the European Commission (Agri, 2018) and the work of Nicholas et al. (2021), I excluded Italy and Finland due to data processing challenges and imputed values for Slovakia, Romania and Hungary.⁵ The Farmsubsidy data accuracy was validated against the European Commission country-level figures with 99.7% accuracy (European Commission, 2022). Both variables are collected at the regional NUTS2 level, except in Germany and the United Kingdom, where NUTS1 level data are used, in line with EB reporting standards.

Control Variables

I incorporate a variety of variables into the analysis to account for the demographic, socio-economic context as well as political knowledge of the respondents. More detailed description of the variables, their operationalization and measurement is available in Table S1.1 in Appendix S1.

⁴EU image = ‘In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image? 1-very negative, ..., 5-very positive’; Decisions at EU level = ‘To what extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: More decisions should be taken at EU level? 1-totally disagree, ..., 4-totally agree’.

⁵Farmsubsidy data for Slovakia and Romania in 2017 (and for 2015 and 2016) reported unusually low figures. These values were imputed using the mean of annual payments from 2014 and 2018–2021, aligning well with EAGF reports and showing low variability over time. Hungary had no data for 2017 (and for 2016 and 2018) – LOCB imputation using 2019 data was done.

Assessing EU policy effects on public support for further integration is contingent upon respondents' awareness of EU policies (Capello and Perucca, 2018; Osterloh, 2011) and understanding of the EU itself (Harteveld et al., 2013). To capture EU knowledge, I construct a variable *Overall EU knowledge* that combines responses from three true/false questions about basic EU facts and five questions on awareness of major EU institutions.

Next, I introduce binary variables *CP awareness* and *CAP awareness* as proxies for policy awareness, utilizing two EB questions. These questions assess recognition of the EU's solidarity with poorer regions and perceptions of the CAP as a positive EU outcome. This approach marks an advancement over prior research, addressing the issue of a direct link between EU transfers and public opinion, a topic highlighted by Chalmers and Dellmuth (2015).

Following the benchmarking and counterfactual imaging literature (De Vries, 2017; Kayser and Peress, 2012), I use a series of EB questions to account that citizens dissatisfied with national performance are likelier to favour transferring sovereignty to the EU (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000), whilst those satisfied with their national democratic institutions tend to show less EU support, perceiving the EU as democratically deficient (Díaz-Lanchas et al., 2021; Rohrschneider, 2002). I employ *National economic situation* and *EU economic situation* variables from EB to compare satisfaction levels with national and EU economies. Additionally, I incorporate the binary variable *Trust in national government* and the *EU image* variable to control for national government trust and EU perception. Further, addressing the democratic deficit and legitimacy issues support (Rohrschneider, 2002), I include *Satisfaction with democracy in EU* and *Decisions at EU level* variables to account for the satisfaction with EU democracy and preference for EU-level decision-making.

Next, with *European identity* from the EB, I measure an individual's sense of attachment and belonging to Europe, an important factor in predicting support for EU integration (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Risse, 2010).

I also control for the respondents' socio-economic characteristics that can confound the effects of the CP and the CAP on support for European integration. *Personal job situation* and *Insolvency* capture EB respondents' self-assessments of their personal job situation and difficulties in paying bills in the previous year. These variables help identify perceived 'winners' and 'losers' of integration, with economic struggles potentially leading to opposition. Additionally, I incorporate *Age* and *Education* from the EB to acknowledge that younger and more educated individuals are generally more supportive of the EU (Anderson and Reichert, 1995; Dijkstra et al., 2020; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010). I also include EB respondents' self-perceived *Left-Right placement* following the arguments that Euroscepticism is more prevalent amongst left-wing respondents (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2010).

Finally, to capture temporal dynamics, I incorporate *Previous unification support* as a proxy of the lagged dependent variable reflecting regional-level preferred unification speed in 2017. This accounts for opinion inertia and unobserved regional characteristics potentially influencing views (Ioannou et al., 2015) and the influence of prior regional sentiments on current support for EU integration.⁶

⁶Following Annoni and Dijkstra (2013) and Bayerlein and Diermeier (2022), I used two EB waves in 2017 (87.2 and 88.3) to construct regional aggregates with an average regional sample size of 264.

III. Empirical Analysis

In this section, I will test my theoretical expectations outlined above. I first present some descriptive information on the individual support for further European integration and payments within the CP and the CAP. After this, I present the results of a multivariate regression analysis evaluating the impact of the CP and the CAP on the citizens' support for further unification.

Descriptive Information

EB data indicate a general preference amongst respondents for moderate EU integration speed (58.1%), with a significant proportion favouring rapid integration (37.23%). Only a small minority (4.67%) believe integration should be stopped. However, there is considerable variability at the regional level. The highest support is amongst regions in the southern and eastern EU members, whilst the lowest support is amongst the regions in some of the economically most developed EU members (Austria, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) (see Figure S1.3 in Appendix S1).

In 2017, the CP distributed over 24 billion EUR across 191 EU regions. Following regional needs and funding acquisition capacities, payments range from almost zero in Scotland to 313 EUR in Central Moravia, Czech Republic. Concurrently, the CAP allocated nearly 40 billion EUR to over 15 million recipients. Due to rural population differences, payments vary widely, from over 500 EUR per capita in regions like Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Greece, to almost zero in metropolitan areas. This prompts considerations of whether regions benefit more from the CP or the CAP. As shown in Figure 1, most regions, over two-thirds, receive higher CAP than CP payments. CAP surplus in some regions, like Crete in Greece, exceeds 400 EUR per capita. In contrast, predominantly in metropolitan regions, CP payments surpass the CAP by over 260 EUR per capita in some cases.

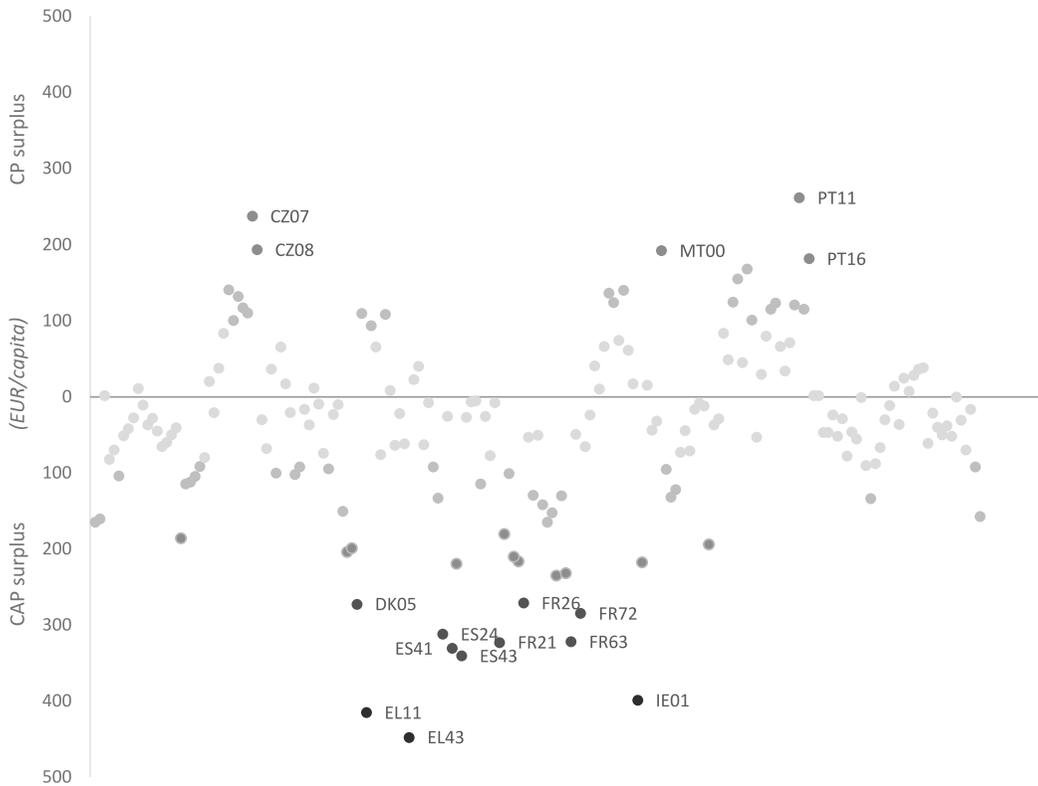
Multivariate Analysis

I use multivariate regression analysis to investigate the effects of two EU policies on the support for further integration across five models. Models 1 and 2 assess the individual effects of the CP and the CAP on support for integration, testing hypotheses H1 and H2. Finally, Model 3 summarizes both hypotheses to examine the combined effects of both policies.

The data have a hierarchical structure: individual-level observations (level 1) are nested within regions (level 2) and countries (level 3). Due to regional and country variations in CP and CAP payments and economic and institutional performances, I use multilevel mixed effects with random intercepts at the regional level. The dependent variable is treated as continuous, a common approach despite its categorical and ordered nature (Borin et al., 2018; Bürkner and Vuorre, 2019; Dąbrowski et al., 2019; Robitzsch, 2020). I log-transform CP and CAP payments to address right-skewness and heteroskedasticity (Gross, 2022). The results are presented in Table 1.

Corroborating H1, the regression analysis shows that the CP payments have a positive and statistically significant effect on the support for further integration. Each percentage increase in per capita payments leads to a rise in public support of approximately

Figure 1: Balance of Payments Between the CAP and the CP. Notes: Colour gradient refers to surplus ‘intensity’; the regions with the highest CP and CAP surplus are labelled.



Source: Farmsubsidy.org, European Commission and own calculations.

0.081. More illustratively, a 10% increase in CP payments boosts public support for further integration by about 0.81 units on the 1–7 scale. These findings align with the exiting literature suggesting the positive effects of the CP on the various aspects of public support for the EU (see, e.g., Capello and Perucca, 2018; Rodríguez-Pose and Dijkstra, 2021). Next, Model 2 confirms H2, showing that CAP payments reduce support for EU integration: each percentage increase in per capita CAP payments leads to a 0.065-unit decrease in integration support. Therefore, a 10% increase in payments results in a 0.65-unit drop on the 1–7 support scale, which confirms the trend outlined in the previous work of Hartnett and Murray (2018) concerning the relationship between the CAP and the public support.

The asynchronous effect of the CP and the CAP on the citizens’ support for integration, measured on a 1–7 scale, remains upon the simultaneous presence of both policies in Model 3. Namely, a 10% increase in CP payments boosts support for further integration by 0.78 units with constant CAP payments. In contrast, a similar 10% hike in CAP payments diminishes support for integration by 0.62 units, keeping CP payments constant. The combined effect is linear (see Model 4 in Table S2.1 in Appendix S2). This

Table 1: Effects of the CP and the CAP on Citizens' Support for the Unification.

	<i>Model 1: Hypothesis 1</i>	<i>Model 2: Hypothesis 2</i>	<i>Model 3: Hypotheses 1 and 2</i>
Cohesion Policy	0.0809*** (0.0294)		0.0777*** (0.0296)
CAP (Pillar I)		-0.0646*** (0.0163)	-0.0624*** (0.017)
Overall EU knowledge	0.0191* (0.00994)	0.0187* (0.00985)	0.0183* (0.00985)
CP awareness	0.0880*** (0.0278)		0.0886*** (0.0278)
CAP awareness		-0.0712** (0.0291)	-0.0724** (0.0289)
Control variables	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constant	3.147***	3.368***	3.177***
<i>N</i>	49,210	49,210	49,210
<i>N</i> (countries)	26	26	26
<i>N</i> (regions)	186	186	186
Pseudo- <i>R</i> ²	0.569	0.569	0.57
Log-likelihood	-81,152.9	-81,159.6	-81,141.9
BIC	162,521.9	162,535.3	162,521.5
AIC	162,345.8	162,359.3	162,327.8

Note: Dependent variable: Preferred unification speed. Robust standard errors are in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$.

demonstrates the counteraction effect between the CP and the CAP following the similar expectations probed in the economic literature (e.g., Crescenzi and Giua, 2016; Esposti, 2007; Shucksmith et al., 2005).

This study is the first to include proxies for policy awareness and informedness of the citizens about the EU in estimating the effect of fiscal transfers on their support for unification. *Overall EU knowledge* positively influences public support for EU integration, aligning with prior research that links citizens' knowledge about the EU to their support (Capello and Perucca, 2018). Similarly, *CP awareness* positively impacts support for unification, confirming earlier findings that policy awareness fosters favourable EU opinions (Aiello et al., 2019; Crescenzi et al., 2020). In contrast, *CAP awareness* appears to reduce support for unification. This could be due to citizens viewing the CAP positively and having high expectations from it, leading to greater criticism when its goals and outcomes diverge. More detailed information on the effects of all control variables is available in the Table S2.1 in Appendix S2.

Robustness Checks

I check the reliability of my results by changing the sample size, alternative specifications of my independent variables, as well as introducing additional controls. More information on variable operationalizations is available in Table S1.1 in Appendix S1. To understand how the CP performs in the presence of agricultural investments in general, I integrate Pillar II payments with existing Pillar I payments, using EAFRD data from the European

Commission. Table S3.1⁷ in Appendix S3 confirms that the effect of the agricultural payments, regardless of their form (investments or direct payments), remains negative and statistically significant when controlling for the CP, with their effect sizes also very similar.

Next, I verify the reliability of the recency effect of single-year CP and CAP payments, using their 5-year (2014–2018) cumulative payments.⁸ To create cumulative CAP data, I first calculate the regional shares of 2017 country-level payments using Farmsubsidy data. Then, I apply these shares to estimate regional cumulative payments based on country-level figures in the European Commission's EAGF reports.⁹ Table S3.2 reaffirms the effects of the CP and the CAP on support for integration.

Regarding policy awareness controls, I assert the findings using alternative operationalizations (*CP knowledge* and *CAP knowledge*) similar to (Bayerlein and Diermeier, 2022), employing data from special EB waves (452 and 480 for the CP; 84.2 and 88.4 for the CAP). Table S3.3 indicates robust findings.

Next, following the theoretical arguments on the impacts of large inequalities in farm allocations and favouritism towards large farms (Hartnett and Murray, 2018), and a limited target audience, I control for the regional GINI in CAP *per farm* subsidies, average farm economic size and the share of agricultural production in the regions' GDP. Gini figures are the result of my own calculations; average farm economic size and share of agricultural production in the regions' GDP data come from Eurostat. The results in Table S3.4 remain robust.

Furthermore, I inspect the results upon dropping NUTS1 regions and small member states where NUTS2 corresponds to the entire state. The results (Table S3.5) confirm the neutralising effect of the CAP on the CP. Similarly, the results remain consistent when dropping the United Kingdom (because of Brexit), Hungary, Slovakia and Romania due to imputations for the CAP (Tables S3.6 and S3.7). Similarly, accounting for the difference between regions in the new (post-2004) member states and old ones by using a binary variable NMS yields robust findings (Table S3.8).

Additionally, I also control for regional growth, country inflation, old-age dependency ratio and regional votes for Eurosceptic parties by 2017 to account for the general economic,¹⁰ political and demographic situation, as well as the level of urbanisation to account for the differences between citizens in rural, suburban and urban areas (see, e.g., de Dominicis et al., 2022). Nevertheless, accounting for the broader context does not alter the asynchronous effect of the CAP and the CP on the support for EU integration (Table S3.9).

Lastly, I test the sensitivity of my results to different treatment of my dependent variable. Following Liddell and Kruschke (2017), I perform an ordinal logistic regression and obtain robust findings, as shown in Table S3.10.

⁷Tables S3.1 to S3.10 are available in Appendix S3.

⁸Whilst the 2014–2018 funding data may seem temporally disconnected from early 2018 survey data, this approach is reasonable since the regional funding variation is generally stable and predetermined early in the funding period (Schraff, 2019).

⁹A 2014–2018 extrapolation seems valid, as both the country-level CAP amounts and recipient numbers show minimal variation during this period. However, this approach is not warranted for 2007–2018 extrapolations.

¹⁰Regional GDP per capita was not included due to high correlation with both independent variables ($r > 0.81$) to avoid multicollinearity. Thus regional growth rates and country inflation are used as proxies for economic conditions.

Discussion and Conclusion

Do we have a clash of policies? That becomes a legitimate question when two (re)distribution policies with different target groups and instruments consume nearly two-thirds of the EU budget. In this contribution, I explored whether the CP and the CAP counteract each other in influencing public support for EU unification. Utilizing regional 2017 CP and CAP per capita payments and individual responses from four EB waves between March 2018 and November 2019, I conducted multilevel regression models to examine the individual and combined effects of these policies on public opinion.

The findings indicate that the EU's two largest policies, the CP and the CAP, have opposing effects on support for European integration. The CP enhances public support, whereas the CAP, whether as agricultural investments or direct farmer payments, negatively impacts it. This pattern persists even with a broad array of control variables and robustness checks. The results align with theoretical expectations about how different implementation mechanisms of these policies influence public support.

Nevertheless, there are several caveats of the study. One challenge is related to the use of single-year CAP data from Farmsubsidy.org and required supplementary sources for robustness checks employing cumulative payments. Next this study could also benefit from including time-series effects to account for the changes over time. However, such approach is not possible, since the dependent variable is only present in EB waves from 2017. Additionally, standard EB questions about individuals' awareness of the CP and the CAP are somewhat superficial, not fully capturing policy awareness. This especially holds for CAP awareness, as this question only captures whether respondent sees the CAP as a good result of the EU, excluding the possibility of accounting for those that are aware of the CAP but do not see it as a good result of the EU. Whilst I validated findings using regional aggregates from Flash EBs, more precise individual-level questions would enhance the research. Moreover, there is a potential social desirability bias in EB questions, where respondents might affirm familiarity with EU institutions or policies due to agreement bias or to avoid appearing uneducated (Bayerlein and Diermeier, 2022; Hurd and Kapteyn, 2000). Lastly, future research should also explore the role of regionalist parties in shaping regional support for European integration, considering their nuanced stance: whilst generally more supportive of economic integration, these parties tend to be less enthusiastic about political integration (Masseti and Schakel, 2021). This is due to the EU's increasing involvement in regional affairs, particularly at key constitutional junctures, which regionalist parties might find unappealing (Masseti and Schakel, 2021).

Whilst further research is needed, the demonstrated conflict of policies in this article might hint at the possible flaws in both the CP and the CAP since they seem to fail to account for regional differences and needs, leading to dependency on redistribution transfers and weakening territorial cohesion (Nicholas et al., 2021; Scown et al., 2020). Moreover, the current system of redistribution appears to reinforce the urban–rural divide (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Namely, whilst the CAP seems to benefit large farm producers, the CP appears to be too focused on the urban areas, which are not necessarily the main engines of regional growth (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). This creates a policy vacuum, where most rural areas, small farm producers and secondary cities (de Dominicis et al., 2022) are neglected. In turn, these people and 'places that don't matter' may fuel political and

economic challenges, including rising support for populist parties and Euroscepticism (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Whilst the 2021–2027 reforms of the CP and the CAP acknowledge most of the abovementioned issues, future policy adjustments should (jointly) promote growth in rural and suburban areas (de Dominicis et al., 2022). This could prove substantial for supporting European integration as well, as the socio-economic channels seem to yield the most noticeable effects of the redistribution policies in those areas (de Dominicis et al., 2022). Moreover, place-based policies should not neglect middle-income regions that are often subject to development traps (Vasilopoulou and Talving, 2023). The redistribution policies should combine people-based with place-based strategies, maximizing the development potential of each territory and empowering local stakeholders (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018).

This study advances previous research in two ways. First, it extends the literature that predominantly focuses on the CP impact on EU support (e.g., Capello and Perucca, 2018; Chalmers & Dellmuth, 2015; Dąbrowski et al., 2019; Eichenberg and Russell, 1997; Fidrmuc et al., 2019; Medrano, 2003; Osterloh, 2011) by being the first to assess the effects of the CAP from the European-level perspective (i.e., not focusing on a single country), using direct payment data instead of proxies (Borin et al., 2018; Hartnett and Murray, 2018). Second, it uniquely examines the concurrent effects of the CP and the CAP, exploring their potential counteraction, a concept touched upon in economic interaction studies (e.g., Crescenzi and Giua, 2016; Esposti, 2007; Shucksmith et al., 2005). Additionally, this research differentiates itself by controlling for individual awareness of the CP and the CAP, addressing policy awareness and attribution issues (Borz et al., 2022; Osterloh, 2011).

In sum, this work speaks to the ongoing debate on the future of the EU integration process, which depends on citizens' support. Concerning the political implications of EU (re) distributive policies, the empirical results challenge the idea that EU transfers do not play any role in shaping public attitudes towards Europe, a view that has gained in popularity after the Brexit referendum. Furthermore, these findings from the European setting add to the broader debate on how public transfers from various levels of government (such as supra-national, national and regional) can influence the support-buying dynamic (Borin et al., 2018). This contribution shows that policy evaluations should not disregard the differences between various policy instruments.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Farmsubsidy.org data (for the CAP) is subject to limited availability (only regional-level figures) pursuant to the data-sharing agreement with the Open Knowledge Foundation.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix S1: Variable descriptions.

Appendix S2: Baseline regression results.

Appendix S3: Robustness checks.