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An Analysis of the Public's Personal, National and EU Issue Priorities

Shaun Bevan, Will Jennings and Christopher Wlezien

ABSTRACT   Scholars characterize decision-making in the European Union (EU) as increasingly dispersed across different levels of political authority. This has implications for political representation. Yet, little is known about whether and how public opinion differs across levels of governance. In this paper, we consider evaluations of issue priorities. Specifically, we use data from the Eurobarometer to evaluate the degree of correspondence between issues that citizens consider important to them personally, to their country and to the EU. We find generally weak relationships between different levels of governance, which suggests national issue priorities are distinct from both personal and EU priorities. The results indicate that more careful research is needed to understand how public priorities at different levels affect politics and policy in the EU.

KEYWORDS   European Union**,** issues, measurement, most important problem, public opinion, surveys.

Word Count: 7,995

INTRODUCTION

The importance of political issues to citizens is central to the study of politics. At the individual level, the importance (or "salience") of issues has long been considered an important factor in vote choice (e.g. RePass 1971; Miller et al. 1976; for an overview see Behr and Iyengar 1985). Collectively, the set of issues on the public agenda at a particular moment in time has ramifications for policymaking (e.g. Cobb and Elder 1972; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Kingdon 1995; Jones et al. 2009; Jennings and John 2009; Chaqués Bonafont and Palau 2011; Bevan and Jennings 2014). In a system of multi-level governance subject to growing integration (see Marks et al. 1996), with multiple institutional and societal agendas (Cobb and Elder 1972), the issues that are considered of importance to different spheres of political authority are of consequence for the making of public policy. Further, the linking of particular issues with particular levels or spheres of decision-making has implications for the attribution of blame for institutions and electoral punishment (Hobolt and Tilley 2014).

To date, studies of the public agenda have largely focused on the national sphere. To measure the importance of political issues, researchers traditionally have relied on responses to a survey question asking about the "most important problem" (MIP) or "most important issue" (MII) facing the country or nation. These responses have been used in voting models to indicate the weight attached to particular issues by individual voters (RePass 1971; Miller et al. 1976).[1] Aggregate MIP and MII responses have also been used to measure the broader salience of issues to the public in analyses of agendas and policy outputs (e.g. McCombs and Shaw 1972; MacKuen and Coombs 1981; Jones, 1994; McCombs and Zhu 1995; McCombs 1999; Soroka 2002; Jones and Baumgartner 2004; Soroka and Wlezien 2010).

Despite widespread use of MIP and MII measures in individual- and aggregate-level analyses, there has been little consideration of whether issues or problems deemed important to the nation are the same as those that are important to people personally and to their families. Johns (2010) represents the exception in considering whether MII responses reflect

"personal" or "contextual" concerns, where the latter reflect what other people consider to be important. (Of course, personal and contextual problems can be the same.) The lack of research is surprising given the extensive debate over egocentric and sociotropic models of economic voting (e.g. Fiorina 1978; 1981; Kinder and Kiewiet 1979; 1981). That is, an individual might think an issue is of national importance but vote based on personal concerns.[2]

The conventional MIP and MII measures focused on the country level provide a sociotropic evaluation of the importance of political issues to the unit of "the nation" or "the country." It also is possible for sociotropic assessments of issue salience to relate to other political units – such as to subnational regions and governments or to international regions and transnational institutions such as the European Union (EU). Indeed, we might expect this to be increasingly important in the context of multi-level governance and integration in Europe (Marks et al. 1996). An issue that is considered to be important for regional government might not be seen as a big issue for national government, and vice versa. The pattern of MIP and MII responses may be informative about which issues are viewed as legitimate issues of concern for a given polity. They might also indicate, by omission, issues that are considered to be outside the authority of a particular government. They might ultimately impact on how voters attribute responsibility for policy-making in EU governance (e.g. Hobolt and Tilley 2014).

Much research examines the use of MIP and MII responses as indicators of importance (Wlezien 2005; Johns 2010; Jennings and Wlezien 2011; Bartle and Laycock 2012). We have learned that there are problems with using responses as indicators of importance, at least over time, and that this applies equally to MIP and MII responses. We know little about whether and how egocentric and sociotropic responses differ, however. How do people respond when they are asked about issues that are important to them

personally and to their country as a whole? How do these responses differ to those offered when asked about the EU? These questions are the focus of our analysis.

We consider MII responses to Eurobarometer surveys in 27 countries over the period between 2011 and 2013.[3] The data cover seven issue categories (the economy, immigration, environment and energy, law and order, pensions, terrorism and international relations) as well as an eighth "other" category. Before turning to these data, we conceptualize important problems and issues. We then consider how important problems/issues might vary depending on whether these are egocentric or sociotropic. We further differentiate between sociotropic evaluations of priorities that are focused on at the level of the country/nation and those that are focused at the level of the EU. Finally, we introduce the MII measures and compare responses using (1) graphical analyses, (2) correlations and (3) multivariate analyses of variance. The results indicate that there is substantial difference in priorities at different levels and that distance between levels matters, i.e., the difference between personal and EU priorities is much greater than the difference between personal and national priorities. Perhaps most importantly, national and EU priorities are also very different, which may have important implications for policymaking and representation in Europe.

PUBLIC PRIORITES AND MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE

Despite the relevance of public priorities for understanding attention to policy issues at different levels of European governance, surprisingly little is known about whether issues or problems deemed by citizens to be important at the national level are the same as those issues that are important to them personally or to the EU. Survey organizations routinely ask people about the most important issue or problem facing the country/nation. Most research assumes that respondents are thinking of things that are important to the country as a whole or some broad subset of the population. The discussion to date of the MIP and MII measures has predominantly focused on the impact of the "most," "important," "problem" and "issue"

components of the question wording. While some scholars (Johns 2010) have considered the possibility that national responses about the most important issue facing the country may reflect personal and contextual aspects, nobody has sought to examine how responses vary depending on whether the question asks about personal, national or supranational concerns. Of course, it may be that there is no difference in responses. One possibility is that people's personal concerns drive their assessment of national and supranational problems. Another, seemingly less likely, possibility is that people's national (and/or supranational) concerns determine their evaluation of personal problems. There also is reason to suppose that responses are at least partly independent. This might be especially pertinent in situations where political authority is increasingly dispersed across different levels of political authority, as in the EU. Let us consider how these responses might differ.

Important issues to you personally

In theory, important issues facing people personally are things that affect their everyday lives. These might be household issues, such as being unemployed, the cost of living and health insurance, or issues about which respondents hold strong convictions, e.g. morality, abortion, even if they are not salient issues for national government or society in general. It thus is possible for there to be considerable divergence between an individual's personal focus of attention and the set of issues facing other people, or the country as a whole. The degree to which this is true depends on how similar people's values and circumstances are. If people care about and are experiencing the same things, we not only would expect responses about the issues important to them personally to be highly correlated, but also that these responses relate, though to a lesser degree, to those about the country more generally. Of course, this depends on what determines people's assessments of important issues or problems facing the country.

Important issues facing the country

Issues that are important to the nation or the country are things that are of concern to the population or the national government in general. As discussed, these need not be the personal concerns of respondents, as people's circumstances differ and for idiosyncratic reasons. Consider that a person might lose her job for reasons completely unrelated to other people's economic circumstances, for instance, incompetence or an arbitrary employer. In addition, all issues are not equally relevant to the personal and country levels. Some appear to be more explicitly nationally focused, and people may be more likely to mention them as country level problems, e.g. foreign affairs. Finally, national MIP/MII responses might simply be the ones people recognize as being on the national political agenda. Indeed, there might even be a process of issue expansion (Schattschneider 1960, also see Jones 1994), where polarizing issues, e.g. immigration, are considered by respondents to be *important* on the country level because they recognize that other people in society consider the issue to be important.

Of course, some important issues facing the country directly affect individuals too. The national economy clearly impacts individuals; indeed, it is the sum of personal economic conditions. The same is true for many other things, e.g. crime, unemployment, housing, and so on. As such, personal experience can influence sociotropic evaluations of the importance of political issues. This means that there is a basis for convergence between issues of personal and national importance, i.e. people who think something is a personal problem are more likely to name it as a national problem. For instance, people without a job are more likely to consider unemployment an important issue to the country. This has aggregate implications. Where unemployment is high, we expect many individuals to name it an important personal and national problem. Nevertheless, there is reason to suppose that a sociotropic evaluation of issue salience is based on the overall state of the nation, whether that refers to economic welfare, public health, environmental resources or national security.

Important issues to the EU

Important issues facing the EU represent an *extra-sociotropic* assessment of the salience of political issues by citizens. These may be issues that are perceived as facing the member states collectively, e.g. an economic crisis or climate change, and/or issues that are recognized as specifically within the "competencies" of the EU (areas in which it has either exclusive or shared powers to act). The latter may differ considerably from important issues facing the country if they relate to policy areas where the EU has direct responsibilities, such as customs union, common fisheries policy, or problems that require coordinated solutions across member states. There may be more overlap where the EU is seen to exert strong influence over national government policy, as on immigration policy. Of course, issues considered as important to the EU may also be important to people personally, where collective problems impact directly or indirectly on citizens' lives, such as fallout from the Eurozone crisis. The strength of this relationship should vary with how closely an individual's personal situation matches the situation facing citizens across the EU. For example, one might expect the link between the importance of unemployment to people personally, to the nation, and to the EU to be closer in countries like Spain, Italy and Greece that have experienced serious economic problems, and where there is a great deal of personal hardship. By comparison, people in other countries, say, Germany, where unemployment has not been a national issue have faced less hardship, but might still recognize unemployment as an important issue facing the EU more broadly.

Multi-level public priorities

Peoples' personal, national and EU priorities are clearly different in theory. They are also interrelated. We expect the degree of correspondence to be greatest for issues that are of importance to people personally and to the country. This is because it is likely that issues that

affect people personally may overlap substantially with those issues affecting the country as a whole, as is the case with the economy. We also expect a fairly high level of correspondence for country and EU priorities, though less than for the personal and country due to differences in policy responsibilities. That is, an issue may be important for one level of government but not another, and this will vary across issues. The environment is an example of an issue which is important at both levels of governance. Finally, we expect the lowest level of correspondence between issues that are considered of personal importance and to the EU. This is because some policy issues that affect people personally are not generally the responsibility of the supranational level of governance of the EU. Pensions are one such example where an issue might be perceived as important to people personally, but considered of little importance to the EU. In summary, then, we expect higher levels of correspondence between country/personal issue priorities, middling levels for country/EU priorities and lowest of all for personal/EU priorities. These expectations reflect the distance between the different levels of European governance. The greater the distance, the greater we expect the difference in priorities. Table 1 summarizes of our expectations concerning the relationship between each pair of levels of governance.

[insert Table 1 about here]

On the consistency of MII responses as a function of temporal context

As Johns (2010) points out, MII responses can tap personal or contextual evaluations; that is, respondents might indicate issues that are important to them personally or issues that they perceive as being top of the country's political agenda. How closely the personal, national and EU contexts align is not fixed, and may vary over time as well. For example, a major economic shock might lead to a high level of congruence between issues of importance to people personally, to the nation and to the EU. As the effect of that economic shock

dissipates, however, there might be less consistency in MII responses, where the dominant issue disappears and the agenda expands to cover a wider range of concerns, as we observed during the economic boom of the 1990s. This requires us to be cautious about the degree to which observed relationships between evaluations of personal, country and EU importance reflect general patterns. This clearly is relevant for this study, where survey data from the Eurobarometer covers the period between 2011 and 2013, which coincided with the Eurozone crisis, a period during which the economy dominated the political agenda. We consider this possibility in the analyses that follow.

MEASURING MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES

Survey organizations have been asking about the most important problem (MIP) or most important issue (MII) facing the country for many years (for a discussion, see Jennings and Wlezien 2011). They do not commonly ask respondents to provide assessments of the importance of issues or problems to people personally or to other political units – such as to regional or transnational governments. Between 2011 and 2013 the Eurobarometer survey simultaneously included three formulations of the MII question across 27 countries, referring to the importance of political issues facing people personally, facing their country and facing the EU. This provides an opportunity to better understand how egocentric and sociotropic responses on the importance of issues differ; indeed, it allows us to compare sociotropic-national and sociotropic-supranational responses.

The questions are closed-ended, with the possibility of respondents choosing from seven issue categories -- the economy, immigration, environment and energy, law and order, pensions, terrorism and international relations -- and an additional "other" category. The use of closed-ended questions may induce greater consistency in responses across personal, country and EU levels by limiting choice and thus variation. Indeed, the categories are not equally relevant across the different levels even though each category is asked at each level. [4]

While open-ended responses thus would be preferable, we have no choice but to use the close-ended responses collected by the Eurobarometer surveys. By implication, our results most likely overstate the degree of correspondence in priorities across levels. Respondents were permitted to provide up to two answers.[5] The wording of the questions was as follows:

1. Personal MII: "…Personally, what are the two most important issues you are facing at the moment?"

2. Country MII: "What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment?"

3. EU MII: "What do you think are the two most important issues facing the EU at the moment?"

For our analyses we aggregate responses to these MII questions according to country, issue and year. In other words, each observation is the percentage of respondents in a country indicating that a particular issue (e.g. the economy) is the "most important issue" for a particular level of governance in a particular year. This matches the common usage of MIP and MII data in aggregate studies. Our findings concerning the relationship between the MII at the three levels in the aggregate are also supported at the individual level, as demonstrated with the supplemental correlations reported in Online Appendix A. However, it is worth noting that the strength of the relationship between measures is expectedly weaker on the individual level ranging between 0.27 and 0.03 (see Table A1), which indicates that individuals offer different answers for each level of governance as the norm rather than the exception. Now, let us see how aggregate responses to the different questions compare.

COMPARING THE IMPORTANCE OF ISSUES ACROSS LEVELS OF GOVERNANCE

Issue rankings and scatterplots

To begin our investigation of the congruence between issues that are considered to be of importance to people personally, to the country, and to the EU, we first present the ranked mean response for each level in Table 2.

[insert Table 2 about here]

In the table, the order of prioritization clearly differs from measure to measure. For example, the pensions category is, on average, the second most frequent response for those issues of importance to people personally, while it is the seventh of issues considered important at the EU level. Terrorism, on the other hand, is the fifth most frequent response for the EU, but seventh for people personally, receiving less than one percent of responses. Substantial variation in the ordering of issue importance across levels of governance is evident in Table 2. While the economy is the most important issue at each level, i.e. it is the most frequent response, the order of the remaining issues differs substantially across levels and in understandable ways. Consider that the second most important issue for people personally is pensions, for the country as a whole it is law and order, and for the EU it is the environment and energy. In fact, the only other match in the rank ordering across levels is that mentions of "other" issues, terrorism and international relations are the sixth, seventh and eighth most frequent responses for people personally and the country.

To further understand these differences and how they affect the relationship between levels we next turn to scatterplots for each pair of measures in Figure 1. This provides a visual representation of the relationship between aggregate MII responses for issues facing people personally, the country and the EU. Each plot shown in the top row of Figure 1, marked as All Issues, represents the correspondence between a pair of MII measures (country-personal, country-EU, and personal-EU) across the eight issue areas and 27 countries.

The scatterplots for All Issues in Figure 1 reveals substantial covariation in MII responses. This can be seen in the lines of best fit, which match the data rather well. The associated regression statistics in each frame reveal coefficients of around 1.0 and R-squared values equal to 0.90 or above. The differences between regression coefficients and R-squareds across frames are small, but it appears that personal-country and country-EU responses are most closely related and personal-EU responses most weakly related. This comports with our expectations.

It is also clear from that there are substantial clusters of aggregate MII responses in the bottom-left and upper-right corner for each pair of comparisons and also a missing middle. This indicates that some issues consistently receive a high proportion of responses, while others receive very few. Based on research showing that the economy is a powerful contextual determinant of MIP responses (Wlezien 2005; Jennings and Wlezien 2011) and the economic circumstances for EU member states during the time period we investigate, discussed above, we separate the non-economic and economic mentions in middle and bottom rows of Figure 1 marked as No Economy and Economy respectively.[6] Not surprisingly, economic issues receive a higher proportion of responses (in all cases more than 50 percent) and non-economic ones receive a much lower proportion (less than 50 percent for all issues).

The results for MII responses excluding the economy in show a different pattern than the scatterplots for all issues. This is indicated by the lines of best fit. The plots with No Economy still do reveal a similar structure to All Issues, with the congruence being greatest for country and personal responses and then country and EU responses. But, the relationships are weak and there is a lot of noise as well, e.g. the regression coefficient is no greater than 0.54 and the R-squared no higher than 0.30. Although these pairs of measures tap some of the same things, they are fairly distinct. There is a weaker relationship between personal and EU

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non-economic MII mentions, as the coefficient is 0.25 and the *R*-squared a trivial 0.06. Responses to these (personal and EU) items *are almost completely distinct.*

In the bottom row of Figure 1 we consider the congruence between MII measures for the economy marking it Economy. Country and personal MII responses are most closely related, with both the regression coefficient and *R*-squared greater than 0.6. The same is not true for the country-EU or personal-EU comparisons, especially the latter. The reason for these differences is apparent from visual inspection of the plots in the bottom row, which reveal a substantial dispersion of responses for each of the MII measures. Given variation in the economic circumstances of individuals in each country during the time period we investigate there is far less of a match for EU MII responses to both country and personal MII responses, consistent with our expectations. While the economy therefore dominates the issue agenda for people personally, the country and the EU, how much attention is given to other issues is far more varied.

By-issue correlations

We now extend our investigation by considering the relationship between measures for each issue area. Table 3 presents by-issue correlations for each pair of MII measures (country-personal, country-EU, personal-EU) for all 27 EU member states included in our dataset from 2011 to 2013. Specifically, we want to assess whether and how the relationship between the three levels of responses varies across the eight issues.[7]

[insert Table 3 about here]

The correlations reported in Table 3 reveal even more about the relationship between public priorities at different levels of governance. To begin with, the measures are positively and significantly correlated in most cases—18 out of 24 are positive and significant at the 99

percent confidence level. As we would expect based on our earlier analyses (in Figure 1), however, there is considerable variation in the pairwise comparisons of measures. The strongest and most consistently significant correlations are found between country and personal MII responses, where all eight correlations are positive and significant ($p \leq 0.05$). For country and EU responses, by comparison, only six correlations are positive and significant; for personal and EU responses, the number drops to four. The average correlation across issues follows a similar pattern, as it is 0.60 for country-personal responses, a more modest 0.49 for country-EU responses, and a lower 0.29 for personal-EU responses.

Although the MII measures tap different things, we can see in Table 3 that the degree to which this is true varies across issues. The three pairwise correlations between the measures are positive and significant in only three areas – the environment, immigration and law and order. The different measures thus capture much of the same things in these areas, especially for the environment, where the average correlation is just below 0.80. This is less true for immigration, where the average correlation is 0.68, and law and order, where the mean correlation is a modest 0.43. Things are even worse in the other five issue areas, as there no more than two of the pairwise correlations are positive and significant – in one area, "international relations," only one – and the averages are all below 0.34.

To some extent these differences across issues are not surprising. Consider the weak relationships in "international relations" responses. Given that foreign affairs are unlikely to be a personally important issue even if it is considered to be an important issue for the country, we might expect there to be a weak association between the personal and country measures in this area. Interestingly, the relationship is not even significant for country and EU mentions of international relations. Respondents do not necessarily consider this to be an important issue facing the EU at times when it is also considered an important issue facing the country. This might be due to international affairs being perceived as a concern for national governments, rather than EU institutions, whereby the level of concern for foreign affairs has

greater impact on the former than the latter. The similarly weak correlations across the three measures for "terrorism" also point towards this explanation.

That correlations are higher in the other areas thus may not be surprising. At the same time, it is not clear why the environment and immigration should demonstrate a comparatively high level of structuration while pensions and the economy reveal only a middling level. It is tempting to conclude that there is something special about the environment and immigration as issues. This would make it more justifiable using different measures to tap the same things. It may not be the issues as much as the context, however. For example, despite the occurrence of the Eurozone crisis during this period and the high level of importance of the economy across all measures (as shown in the bottom row of Figure 1), it is possible that variation in national context could lead to reduced correspondence of economic (and non-economic) MII responses, in this case due to variation in the economic performance of EU countries. At the same time, while the environment was pushed down the list of priorities due to the Eurozone crisis, there was substantial coordination by governments on climate change, which may have produced greater correspondence between national and personal assessments of the issue, based on the results in Table 3.

Multivariate analyses of variance

To complete our investigation of the relationship between the personal, country and EU MII measures we next turn to a set of three multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) models. A MANOVA model is a general version of the analysis of variance (ANOVA) model, which tests whether the means between series are equal. The MANOVA version of the model is used when there are two or more dependent variables, in this case the different MII response categories. These models, presented in Table 4, test the strength of association between each of the measures across all issues and countries.

[insert Table 4 about here]

The results presented in Table 4 assess the level of shared variation for each model for the three pairs of MII measures—from top to bottom, country/personal, country/EU and EU/personal. The interpretation of the results here is similar to a difference in means test, with a stronger relationship between the measures indicated by a lower Wilk's lambda and by a higher Lawley-Hotelling trace and Pillai's trace.[8] In the table we again see that the strongest relationship is observed between personal and country MII responses with the lowest Wilk's lambda and highest Lawley-Hotelling and Pillai's trace test statistics. The weakest relationship is found between the personal and EU measures, with modest correspondence between country and EU measures. This provides further support for our expectations. We conduct additional tests of robustness of the MANOVA models to exclusion of the economy, and these exhibit the same pattern (see Online Appendix C, Table C1). Although there is a substantial correspondence between the personal and country measures, it is imperfect, and there is less covariation between the country and EU measures, and less correspondence still between personal and EU measures. This confirms our expectation that the greater the distance between levels – between people personally and levels of governance – the greater the difference between priorities.

CONCLUSION

Does the public consider the issues that are important to them personally and to their country as a whole in distinct ways? Are different issues considered important to the EU? We have sought to assess differences between the importance of issues at different levels – personal, country and EU - as commonly measured with the "most important issue" question. While the usage of MII and MIP measures in both aggregate and individual-level research continues to grow, we understand relatively little about them. Whether or not questions about

the most important issue facing the country also tap assessments of the importance of issues to people personally and on the EU level has not been fully explored, that is, until now. Our study reveals substantial differences in the importance of political issues across levels, but considerable correspondence too. The strength of the relationships between MII responses at personal, country and EU levels follow directly from our expectations. More specifically, our findings show that personal, country and EU measures of MII are related, but also that they are not perfect substitutes for one another. In the aggregate there appears to be a substantial degree of correspondence between each of the measures (see Figure 1 top row), but inspection of the pattern for economic responses compared to all other categories (see Figure 1 middle and bottom rows) reveals a significant disconnect. While the relationship between the personal and country MII measures is the most consistent, they are still clearly different measures.

As we have shown, a large part of the basis for congruence between personal and country measures is that they both tend to differentiate between high mentions of the economy and low mentions of non-economic issues. This almost completely accounts for the relationship between country-EU and completely accounts for personal-EU congruence. The strength of the relationships between personal, national and EU priorities are not fixed; more importantly, the ranking of issue priorities clearly differs. Country responses also display some commonality with EU responses, though to a lesser degree. That is, the match between the two is weaker and the relationship more variable across issues. The differences are greatest for personal and EU mentions—these just are not the same or even similar, especially for what may be the most politically important issue, the economy itself. As we have seen, the strength of the relationships varies across non-economic issues as well. It presumably varies across countries and over time, which forms a subject for future research.

What are the implications of our findings for the study of politics and policymaking? They are fairly clear for the study of multi-level governance in the EU as priorities across

levels differ in substantial ways. Based on previous research, we have reason to believe that the public's priorities have consequences for policy agendas and policy itself (e.g., Cobb and Elder 1972; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Kingdon 1995; Jones et al. 2009; Jennings and John 2009; Chaqués Bonafont and Palau 2011; Bevan and Jennings 2014), yet this research has not yet considered how the multi-level nature of the public agenda, shown here, may affect that relationship. Do policymakers distinguish the differences in the public agenda at different levels? Do they reflect these differences in their policy behavior? These are empirical questions, the answers to which remain to be seen.

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NOTES

[1] There have been other approaches—see Geer (1991) for a useful review.

[2] This lacuna is surprising given the amount of available data on the subject. Gallup first asked the question "What is the most important problem that you and your family face today?" as long ago as 1945 in the US. It has asked similar survey questions about the most important problem facing people personally in both Britain and France throughout the post-war period (see Gallup 1976; 1977).

[3] The countries are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Cyprus, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. It addition Great Britain and Northern Ireland as well as East and West Germany are included separately in the Eurobarometer, making for a total of 27 member states and 29 unique cases.

[4] For example, pensions are often a personal concern that tend to be legislated on at the national level with limited EU involvement.

[5] Previous research shows allowing multiple answers for each respondent has little effect on MII responses at the aggregate level (see Jennings and Wlezien 2011).

[6] This is done by splitting aggregate responses on the economy from each of the remaining issues in the dataset including the "other" category.

[7] Online Appendix B further considers these relationships through a series of aggregate and individual level boxplots that serve to summarize and compare the data across measures.

[8] Each of these measures is based on the roots of the inverse error variance matrix of the model; however, as the distribution of the null hypothesis, no relationship, is not well defined it is common practice to use multiple test statistics in order to support the robustness of the results.

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Table 1: Theoretical Correspondence between
Priorities across Levels

Relationship	Expectation
Country/Personal	High Correspondence
Country/EU	Medium Correspondence
Personal/EU	Low Correspondence

Table 2: Ordered Mean Responses for Personal, Country and EU Levels

	Personal		Country		EU	
Rank	*Issue*	*Mean*	*Issue*	*Mean*	*Issue*	*Mean*
1	Economy	77.13%	Economy	87.06%	Economy	86.01%
2	Pensions	14.43%	Law and Order	12.32%	Environment and Energy	12.91%
3	Environment and Energy	10.39%	Pensions	8.79%	Immigration	11.84%
4	Law and Order	5.32%	Immigration	8.38%	Law and Order	8.30%
5	Immigration	2.97%	Environment and Energy	6.02%	Terrorism	7.75%
6	Other	1.68%	Other	2.15%	International Relations	6.50%
7	Terrorism	0.95%	Terrorism	1.99%	Pensions	2.94%
8	International Relations	0.56%	International Relations	0.89%	Other	0.89%

Table 3: Correlations of Personal, Country and EU Responses by Issue

|	Country/Personal	Country/EU	Personal/EU
Immigration	0.852***	0.669***	0.500***
Environment and Energy	0.836***	0.805***	0.722***
Economy	0.778***	0.269**	-0.044
Terrorism	0.553***	0.284**	0.135
Law and Order	0.504***	0.537***	0.285**
Pensions	0.475***	0.499***	-0.036
International Relations	0.388**	0.249	0.194
Other	0.387***	0.123	0.558***

Note: * $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$; N = 869 country, issue years

Issues are ordered by the size of the country-personal correlation

Table 4: Multivariate Analysis of Variance of Personal, Country and EU Responses

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Test Statistic	F	Sig.
Country/Personal				
Wilks' lambda	69	0.024	463.94	0.000
Lawley-Hotelling trace	69	40.015	463.94	0.000
Pillai's trace	69	0.976	463.94	0.000
Residual	800			
Total	869			
Country/EU				
Wilks' lambda	64	0.039	309.17	0.000
Lawley-Hotelling trace	64	24.580	309.17	0.000
Pillai's trace	64	0.961	309.17	0.000
Residual	805			
Total	869			
Personal/EU				
Wilks' lambda	64	0.058	203.63	0.000
Lawley-Hotelling trace	64	16.189	203.63	0.000
Pillai's trace	64	0.942	203.63	0.000
Residual	805			
Total	869			

Figure 1: Scatterplots of Personal, Country and EU Responses
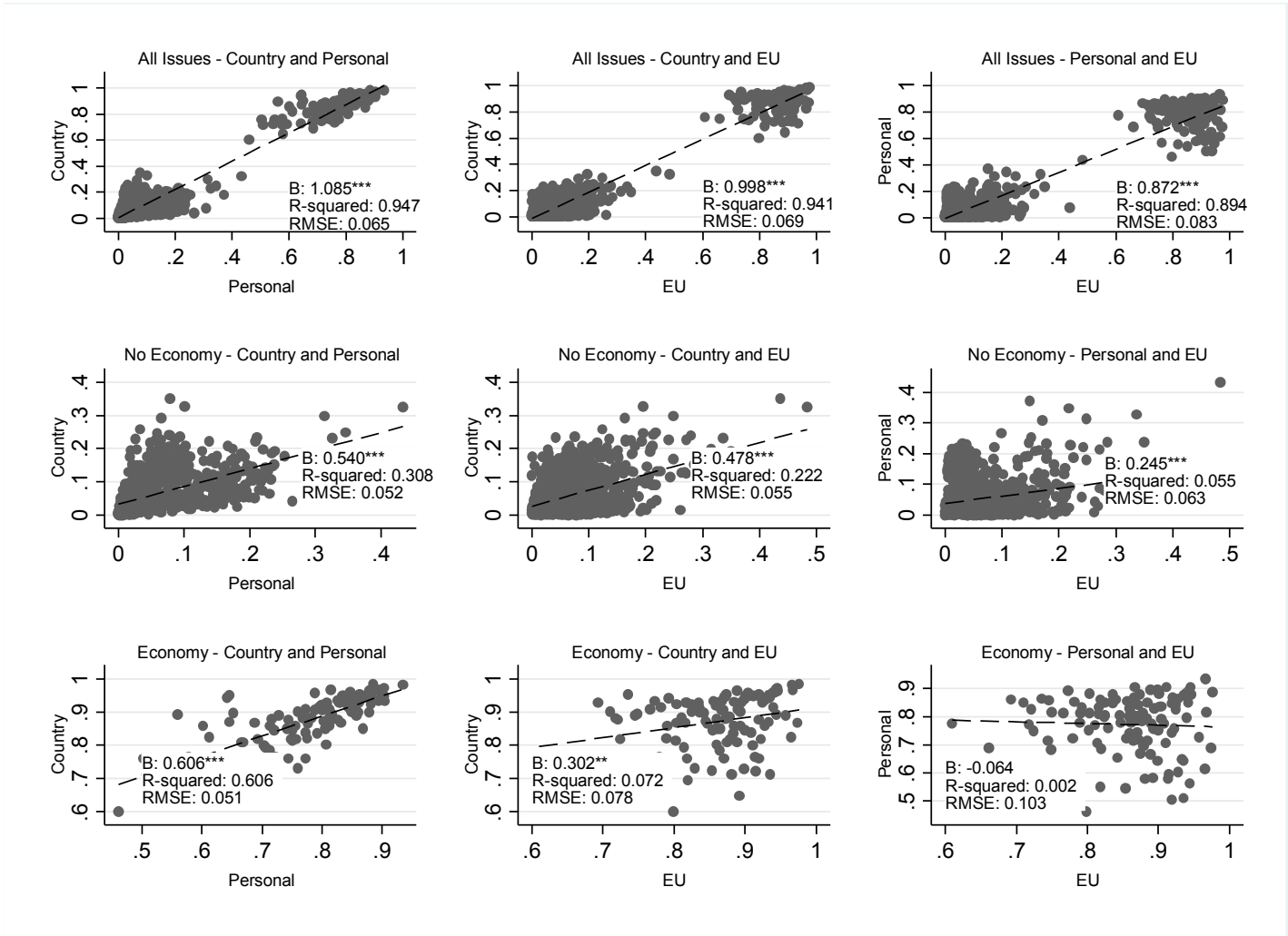
Note: B is the coefficient estimate for the line of best fit where * p ≤ .05, ** p ≤ .01, *** p ≤ .001

ONLINE APPENDIX A: INDIVIDUAL LEVEL ANALYSES

As discussed in the main text, the use of individual level data limits the number and types of methods that can be used to investigate this data. This is because the Eurobarometer survey data is organized through a series of dummy variables that are coded as equal to 1 if a respondent indicated that a particular issue was the "most important issue" to them and coded as equal to 0 otherwise. While respondents were given the options of listing up to two issues for the personal, country and EU levels, they often offered just a single answer for one or more of the measures. The number of zeros in the data prevents us from undertaking the sort of graphical analyses used in the paper and would make the use of MANOVA inappropriate as well. However, correlational analyses are still quite useful and can be compared with the inferences from our findings at the aggregate level. It is important to note, however, that the correlation coefficients will be quite different at the individual level. Namely, they will be considerably smaller due to the large number of zeros in the data while also reporting much higher levels of statistical significance as a result of the massive increase in the number of cases. Table A1 presents the correlations for each issue between MII measures.

[insert Table A1 about here]

In Table A1 all of the correlations between each of the pairs of MII measures are now significant at the 99.9% confidence level due to the massive increase in the number of cases, from 869 in our aggregate analyses to 1,738,478 respondents here. Nevertheless, these results demonstrate the same essential pattern as all of our other analyses, namely that the strongest relationship is between the country and personal levels, followed by the country and EU levels with clearly the weakest relationship between the personal and EU levels. As discussed, the high number of zeros also leads to noticeably smaller correlation coefficients, but these smaller coefficients further indicate that individuals are noticeably less consistent than the

aggregate population in their MII responses across the different levels. These individual level findings therefore both support our conclusions at the aggregate level and suggest the difference between these levels is far greater and more critical to address when using the measures in individual level analyses.

Table A1: Individual Level Correlations of Personal, Country and EU Responses by Issue

	Country/Personal	Country/EU	Personal/EU
Immigration	0.196***	0.145***	0.099***
Environment and Energy	0.219***	0.186***	0.148***
Economy	0.274***	0.127***	0.083***
Terrorism	0.267***	0.078***	0.056***
Law and Order	0.182***	0.171***	0.104***
Pensions	0.213***	0.073***	0.040***
International Relations	0.076***	0.042***	0.034***
Other	0.183***	0.163***	0.124***

Note: * p ≤ .05, ** p ≤ .01, *** p ≤ .001, † p ≤ 0.10; N=1,738,478 respondents
Issues are ordered to match Table 2 for an easy comparison

ONLINE APPENDIX B: BOXPLOTS SUMMARIZING THE DATA

We further examine variation between these different levels using boxplots that provide a graphical summary of the data. Figure B1 presents the boxplot of responses for each level across all issues, while Figures B2 and B3 present a series of by-issue boxplots for each level.

[insert Figures B1 to B3 about here]

A boxplot like those in Figure B1 presents a general overview of the data. Specifically, the box region indicates the interquartile range with the line through it denoting the median value of aggregate MII responses. The whisker that protrudes from the top and bottom of the box indicates the minimum and maximum values, with dots above or below each whisker indicating those values that are considered outliers.[1] Using this information to compare the three MII measures, there are clearly some similarities as well as differences. For instance, although the interquartile ranges of the levels overlap, the median aggregate response for country MII is higher than for personal MII, while the median for EU MII is yet higher than the country MII median. The outliers also differ with the clear bifurcation in responses seen in Figure 1 further demonstrated here. These outliers include all economic MII responses for each of the three MII measures, but are clearly more closely grouped for the country and EU levels. Overall, the summary of each level provided in Figure B1 reveal a reasonable degree of similarity in the overall composition of the data across issues (consistent with what we see in the top row of Figure 1).

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[1] "Outliers" are values that are more than one and a half times the interquartile range below the lower quartile and above the upper quartile.

Breaking each measure down by issue reveals a far greater level of variation in MII responses. Figures B2 and B3 present boxplots for each issue category, including the "other" category. The boxplots for the economy presented in the lower left quadrant of Figure B2 are perhaps the most similar overall despite the clear non-relationship between personal and EU responses on the economy shown in the bottom row of Figure 1. However, careful inspection of the boxplots for the economy reveals why no relationship exists between these two levels as they clearly exhibit different patterns of variation. Most notably there is a higher degree of variation in personal MII than EU MII. Specifically, there is a lower median for personal MII than the lower quartile for EU MII and a minimum for personal MII that is less than any EU MII outliers.

Other issue areas exhibit far more variation, but in largely understandable ways. For example, the proportion of immigration responses is both generally much higher for country and EU MII than for personal MII, but is also far more varied reflecting the heterogeneity of the degree to which immigration is a concern across countries within the EU. MII responses about terrorism reveal a similar pattern, but with a clear increase in the proportion of aggregate responses moving from the personal MII to country MII and from country MII to EU MII. Interestingly, while terrorism receives a substantial proportion of responses for EU MII, only a few outlier observations for country MII put the issue at the same level of importance, possibly due to a high threat of terrorism within some member states. In contrast, responses for pensions exhibit the opposite pattern, with the highest proportion of responses for personal MII and lower proportion of responses for country MII and finally the lowest proportion of responses for EU MII. This makes sense given that pensions are an issue that affect people personally, but are also influenced by government policy – with respect both to state-run and private pension schemes. The remaining issues areas reveal various patterns of responses across the three levels. Overall, the patterns shown in Figures B2 and B3 indicate

that personal, country and EU MII responses are indeed different, but typically vary in predictable and consistent ways.

However, these differences also demonstrate why these measures are not suitable or consistent substitutes for one another. This becomes clear through a comparison of responses for the pensions and terrorism categories in Figures B2 and B3. Pensions are more highly prioritized for personal MII than terrorism by a large margin, yet terrorism is clearly a higher priority than pensions for EU MII.

Figure B1: Boxplots of Personal, Country and EU Responses – All Issues
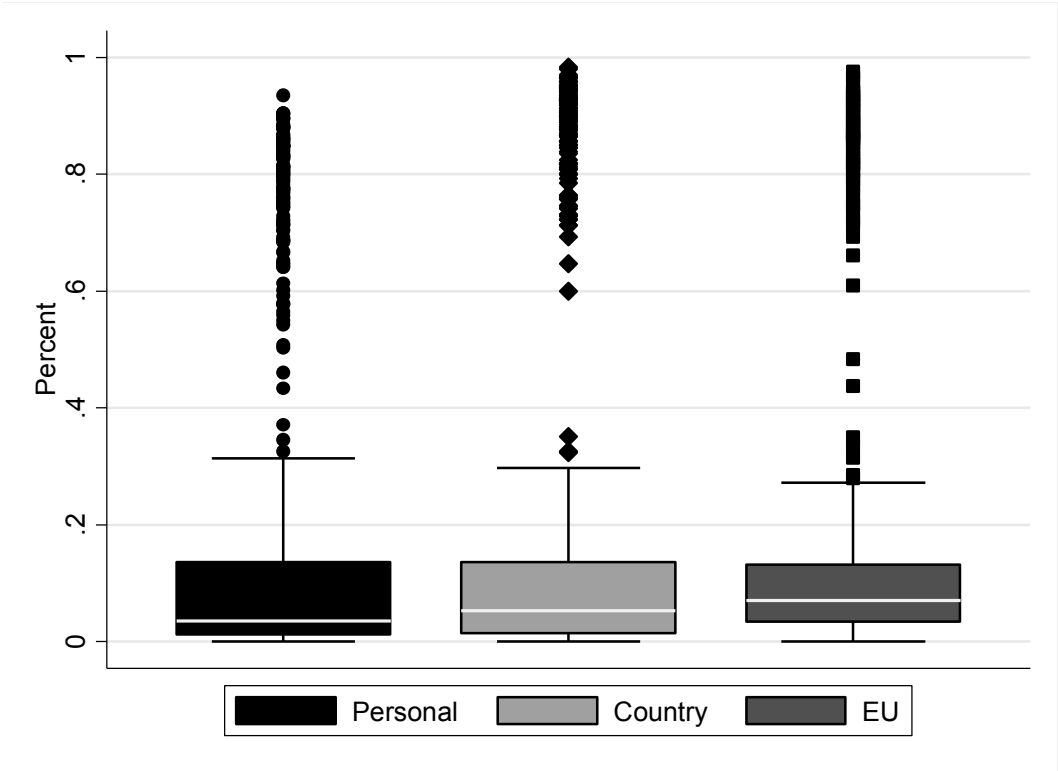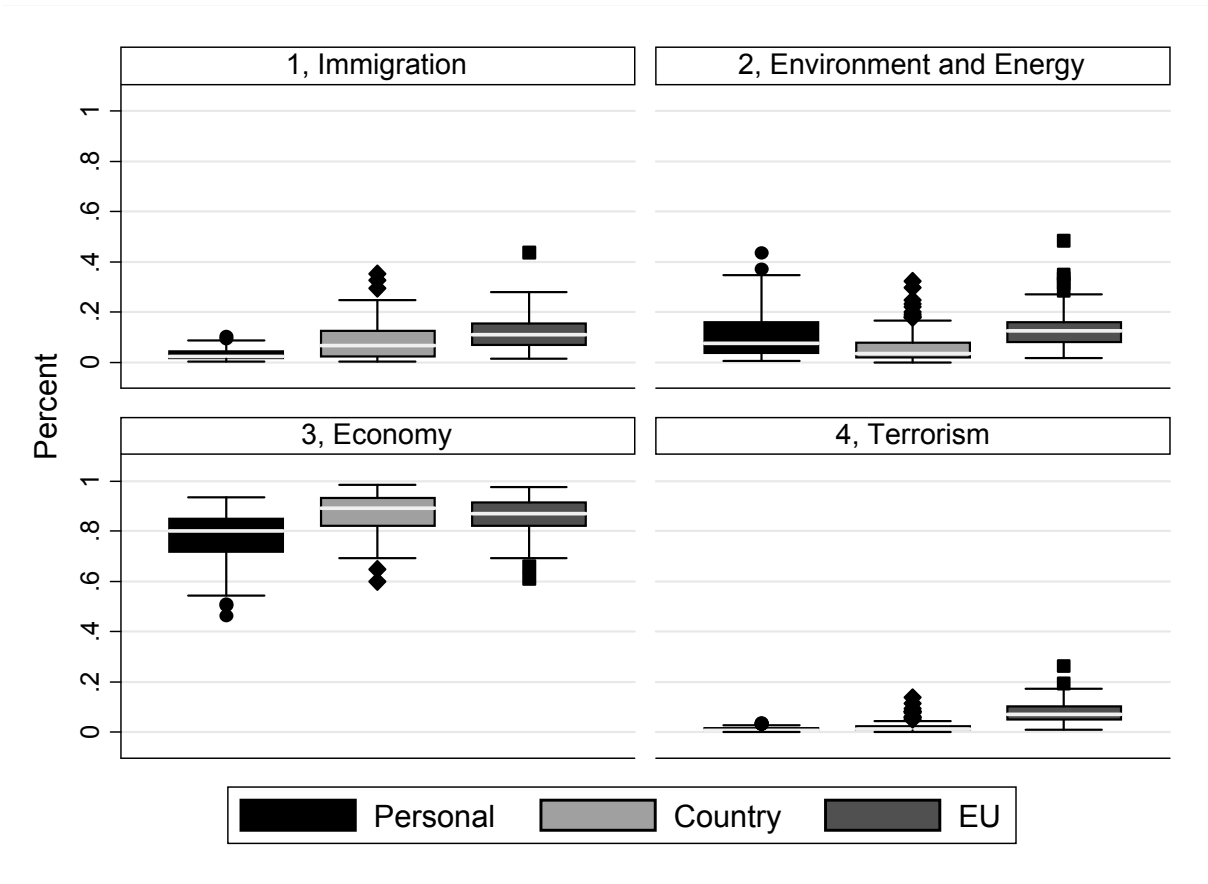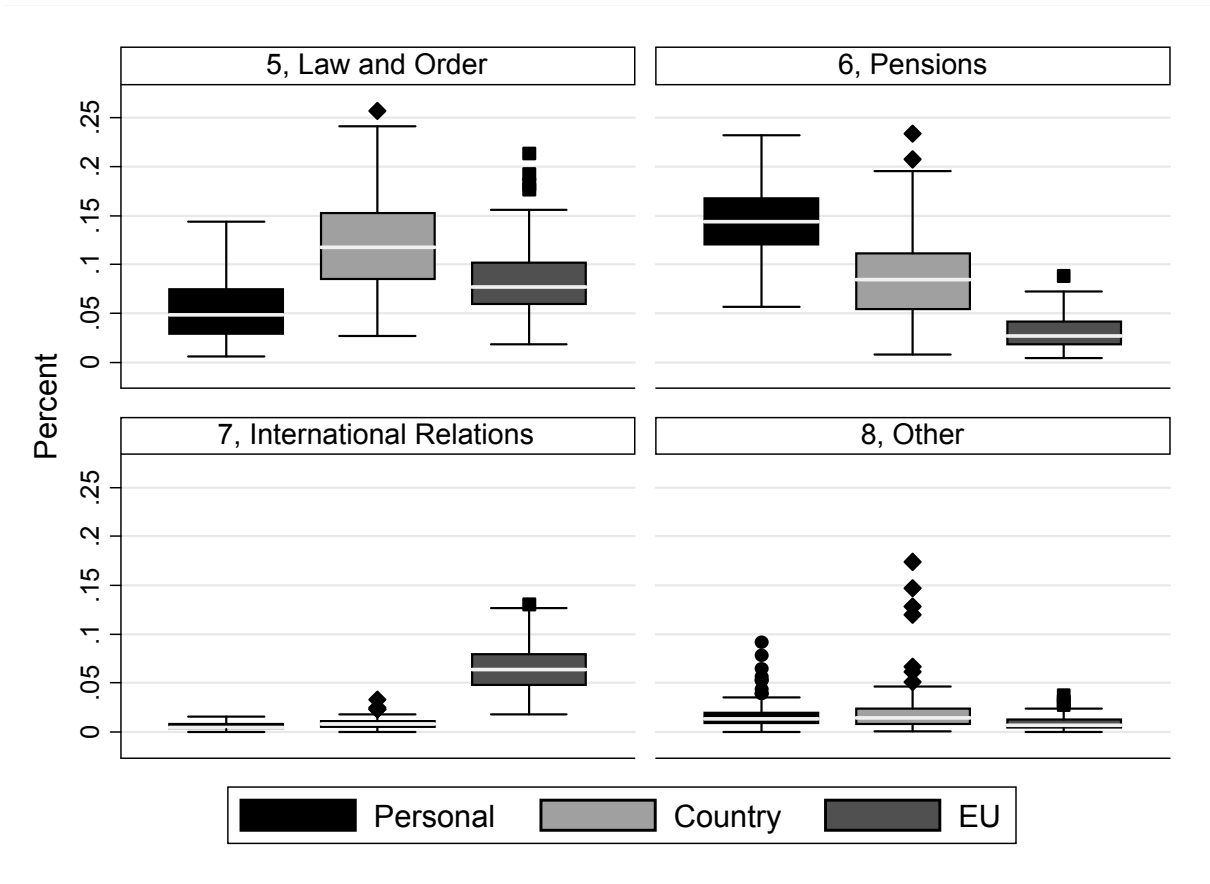
Figure B2: Boxplots of Personal, Country and EU Responses –Immigration; Environment and

Energy; Economy; Terrorism

Note: Issues are ordered to match Table 2 for an easy comparison

Figure B3: Boxplots of Personal, Country and EU Responses – Law and Order; Pensions; International Relations; Other

Note: Issues are ordered to match Table 2 for an easy comparison

ONLINE APPENDIX C

Table C1: Multivariate Analysis of Variance of Personal, Country and EU Responses, No

Economy

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Test Statistic	F	Sig.
Country/Personal				
Wilks' lambda	31	0.514	22.02	0.000
Lawley-Hotelling trace	31	0.945	22.02	0.000
Pillai's trace	31	0.486	22.02	0.000
Residual	722			
Total	753			
Country/EU				
Wilks' lambda	34	0.725	8.03	0.000
Lawley-Hotelling trace	34	0.380	8.03	0.000
Pillai's trace	34	0.275	8.03	0.000
Residual	805			
Total	869			
Personal/EU				
Wilks' lambda	34	0.732	7.75	0.000
Lawley-Hotelling trace	34	0.366	7.75	0.000
Pillai's trace	34	0.268	7.75	0.000
Residual	805			
Total	869			

Note: The lower values, but consistent inferences with the results in Table 3 are due to the

overall weaker relationship for issues excluding the economy as evidenced by Figure 1.