A Need for Control? Political Trust and Public Preferences for Asylum and Refugee Policy

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Abstract

Political trust matters for citizens' policy preferences but existing research has not yet considered whether this effect depends on how policies are designed. To fill this gap, this article analyses whether and how policy design and political trust interact in shaping people's policy preferences. We theorise that policy controls such as limits and conditions can function as safeguards against uncertainty, thereby compensating for a person's lack of trust in political institutions in generating support for policy provision. Focusing on the case of public preferences for asylum and refugee policy, our empirical analysis is based on an original conjoint experiment with 12,000 respondents across eight European countries. Our results show that individuals' trust in the political institutions of the European Union has a central role in the formation of their asylum and refugee policy preferences. Individuals with lower levels of political trust in European institutions are less supportive of asylum and refugee policies that provide expansive, unlimited, or unconditional protection and more supportive of policies with highly restrictive features. We also demonstrate that even politically distrusting individuals can systematically support policies that provide protection and assistance to refugees if there are limits or conditions on policy provision. We conclude by discussing the relevance of our findings to theoretical understandings of the role of political trust in the formation of individuals' policy preferences.

Keywords

Introduction[*]

The trust people have in political institutions is an important ingredient in the formation of their preferences on a wide range of public policy issues. Political trust affects individuals' policy preferences by functioning as a means for assessing the performance of governing institutions. Through this function, the degree of people's political trust influences the extent of government action they support. This is particularly important for policies that mostly benefit political minorities as previous research has shown (Hetherington 2005; Rudolph and Evans 2005; Paxton and Knack 2011; Popp and Rudolph 2011).

Yet, the current academic understanding of how political trust conditions policy preference formation is still rather limited and incomplete, as Citrin and Stoker (2018) remark in their recent review essay. While previous research has demonstrated that political trust matters for policy preferences (see Rudolph 2017 for an overview), we argue that it is limited by its dichotomous conception of public preferences (i.e. 'supporting' vs. 'opposing' a policy). This dichotomous approach does not sufficiently reflect the complexity of individuals' preferences as it ignores the possible role of policy design.

Policy design has been shown to have its own separate influence on policy preferences (Bechtel et al. 2017, Ackert et al. 2007), so it is important to explore the potential interactions between policy design and political trust. The current literature on the role of political trust in shaping individuals' policy preferences implies that widespread citizen distrust hinders the government from pursuing liberal policies of government spending and protection (Citrin and Stoker 2018). This line of reasoning fails to consider how particular policy design features could possibly mitigate the conditional effect of low trust on policy preferences.

The aim of this study is to examine whether and how policy design and political trust interact in shaping policy preferences. We theorise that policy controls such as limits and conditions can provide safeguards which can mitigate a person's lack of trust in political institutions in their preference formation. Distrusting individuals, according to our theoretical framework, can nevertheless provide support for policy areas that require sacrifice and are not directly beneficial to them, if certain safeguards, namely policy limits and conditions, are in place.

We test this framework empirically by studying public preferences for asylum and refugee policy in a cross-national experimental setting. There are several reasons why asylum and refugee policy is a particularly suitable policy area for our analysis. Political trust is likely to play an especially important role for certain types of policies. It is particularly pertinent to policies under which the majority of citizens have almost no first-hand experience, receive few tangible benefits but incur real or perceived costs (Hetherington 2005). Asylum and refugee policies are good examples of such policies. Moreover, the specific nature of asylum-seeking and refugee protection, in particular the complexity of the policy processes and the volatility of migrant arrivals, makes citizens' confidence in the functioning of political institutions especially pertinent.

This article makes several contributions. First, we propose a new theoretical framework to explain how policy design can mitigate the role of low political trust in conditioning public policy preferences. Second, we build on earlier observational approaches and analyse the relationship between political trust and policy preferences in an experimental setting for the first time. Our conjoint methodology allows us to demonstrate empirically how certain policy instruments enable distrusting individuals to nevertheless generate support for policy areas that are not directly materially beneficial to them. Our results thus imply that political trust does not simply have a binary effect on policy preferences. Contrary to the way it has been mostly understood until now (Hetherington 2005; Hetherington and Globietti 2002), the impact of political trust critically depends on the design features of the policies. We show that specific policy design features such as limits and conditions are able to mitigate perceived risk and uncertainty which we expect to be crucial for individuals who are less trusting in political institutions.

Political Trust, Policy Preferences and the Role of Policy Design

Hetherington's (2005) theory of political trust helps us understand *when* political trust is relevant in preference formation – in other words, why and how it is important in some policy areas and not in others. According to Hetherington, political trust plays an important role in preference formation when a policy involves sacrifice and risk (p. 6), and when it concentrates its "benefits on a minority while imposing the real or perceived costs on a political majority" (Hetherington 2005, pg. 106). In other words, trust can be expected to matter most when the majority is asked to make a sacrifice without receiving tangible benefits in return.

Political trust can affect individuals' policy preferences by offering a way of coping with the complexities of the world today "by structuring views about specific (…) policies according to their more general and abstract beliefs" (Hurwitz and Peffley 1987, p. 1114). In particular, when it comes to highly complex policy issues, individuals are likely to rely on cognitive simplification strategies that minimize the time and cognitive effort in the formation of their judgements. In such cases, political trust functions as a heuristic device, or mental shortcut, that allows people to expend less effort in gathering information for their decision making. This would mean that individuals who have little (or a lot of) confidence in political institutions are using their negative (or positive) evaluations as a heuristic in the formation of their policy preferences. Therefore, individuals who are distrusting of their government's institutions are inclined to restrict the scope of the state's activities and spending (Hetherington 2005) while more trusting individuals are more open to cooperate or support government initiatives (also see Putnam 2000; Putnam 1993). A lack of trust in an institution also makes people less willing to accept its decisions in general (Tyler and Degoey 1996).

However, this current understanding of how political trust affects public support for government policies is limited by its consideration of public preferences in terms of binary policy choices. It suggests that political trust determines *whether* individuals support or oppose government activity in a certain policy area at all. Hetherington (2005: 139) argues that "when the public does not trust that the government will implement the policies efficiently or fairly, people will prefer that the government not be involved." This binary approach obscures a more nuanced role that political trust can play in the formation of policy preferences. Individuals not only decide whether they support policy provision or not, but they are also influenced by the specific design of the policy. Our aim is to go beyond Hetherington's theory by considering the role of political trust in the formation of policy preferences involving non-binary policy choices and, more specifically, by theorizing how certain policy designs can encourage individuals who are distrusting of political institutions to nevertheless be supportive of policies that require sacrifice but for which they do not receive tangible benefits.

So, what policy features might allow distrusting individuals to form supportive policy preferences? We know from existing research that, in addition to acting as a heuristic that helps reduce complexity, trust is an important resource for coping with uncertainty (Ellinas and Lamprianou 2014; Kollock 1994; Yamagishi, Cook, and Watabe 1998) which is also relevant to policy preference formation. We argue

that certain policy instruments can offer an alternative mechanism for mitigating uncertainty amongst individuals who lack trust in political institutions. A sense of distrust tends to accompany "a course of action based on suspicion, monitoring, and activation of institutional safeguards" (Lewis and Weigart 1985, pp. 969). We reason that distrusting individuals can support more expansive government policies if they employ explicit means of control. Such means of policy control can function as safeguards against uncertainty, compensating for a person's lack of trust in political institutions during preference formation. We identify two potential instruments of policy control: *limits,* which ration the policy provision and *conditions,* which regulate the policy's effective provision according to well-defined rules (see Spicker 2015).[1]

Based on the idea that policy controls can act as safeguards against uncertainty, we reason further that the use of limits and conditions carries a greater importance in preference formation of distrusting individuals relative to more trusting individuals. This is because, if they are to support some form of policy provision, low trusting individuals have a greater need to rely on policy safeguards to compensate for the perceived uncertainty generated by their lack of political trust. In other words, we expect that the difference between the extent of individuals' support for policies that feature limits and conditions, and their support for policies with unconditional or unlimited features, will be accentuated for individuals who are less political trusting.

Empirical Approach: Public Preferences for Asylum and Refugee Policy

Asylum and refugee policies are a clear example of policies that benefit a political minority in the host country (i.e. non-citizens seeking protection) while requiring the majority of citizens to make a sacrifice in the sense that these policies do not generate immediate and tangible material benefits for them. While refugees and asylum-seekers remain a relatively minor component of immigration in wealthy democracies, they are nonetheless disproportionately present in the public's perception of who immigrants are (Blinder, 2015; Blinder & Jeannet, 2017) and the policy issue has become perceived as rife with uncertainty, particularly after the global refugee 'crisis' in 2015-6.

We implemented an original choice-based conjoint survey experiment to examine if the relationship between political trust and policy preferences for asylum and refugee policy is contingent upon how policy is designed. In our conjoint experiment, respondents were shown pairs of randomly generated policies and asked which of the two policies they would prefer their country to adopt. This randomized design allows researchers to isolate the separate causal effects of particular policy features in garnering public support (see Hainmueller et al. 2015).

A conjoint experiment has some notable advantages over observational survey designs which makes it well-suited for this study. Most importantly, it allows us to assess the influence of policy design features on people's support for asylum and refugee policy, and how this varies across individuals who differ in their extent of political trust. Unlike previous research on political trust and policy preferences which is predominantly observational, the conjoint design helps us to minimize the possibility of social desirability bias which is crucial in policy areas that are strongly subject to ethical and humanitarian considerations. It does so by minimizing the likelihood that respondents provide a response they believe to be politically correct or 'expected' by the researchers, since the different policy options vary across several dimensions (Hainmueller et al. 2015).

Our analysis focuses on Europe, a continent at the epicentre of the global refugee 'crisis' in 2015-16. Our survey experiment was conducted online in May 2019 across eight European countries: Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden. The total sample size was 12,000 adults,

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[1] Both limits and conditions, can also be used to reign in the extent of financial spending in a policy area.

comprising a nationally representative sample of 1,500 in each country.[2] Respondents first read the instructions of the survey and were then shown an introductory page that briefly explained the key terms used in the experiment (such as 'asylum-seeker', 'refugee', and 'resettlement').[3] Each respondent was asked to make five binary policy comparisons, meaning that after completing the survey each respondent had considered and assessed ten randomly generated policies. All asylum and refugee policies shown to respondents included six policy dimensions, with two to three possible policy features selected randomly within each dimension. For each asylum and refugee policy that a respondent considered, we constructed a variable *policy_support*, and coded it 1 if an individual chose this policy and 0 if it was not chosen.[4] After completing the five conjoint tasks, the survey asked respondents a series of questions about their age, gender, education, political orientation, preferred scale of immigration, and political trust.[5]

Table 1 shows the randomly allocated policy features for each of the dimensions of asylum and refugee policy. We identify six core dimensions of asylum and refugee policy, drawing on recent research (Jeannet et al, 2019). These relate to: the right to apply for asylum; the resettlement of recognized refugees; the return of asylum seekers whose applications for protection have been unsuccessful to countries where they might face harm; the right to family reunification for recognized refugees; and the provision of financial assistance to first countries of asylum, i.e. lower-income countries outside Europe that host large numbers of refugees near conflict regions. As shown in Table 1, within each dimension, we randomize policy design features that include or exclude limits or conditions. Finally, in order to validate our measures of political trust (we measure both EU and national political trust as further described below), we also include a dimension that randomizes decision-making over asylum applications between the European Union and national governments.

An example of a conjoint task as it appeared in our survey can be found in Appendix 5. The order in which the dimensions were listed was randomized for each respondent.

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[2]   The survey company that implemented the experiment, Respondi, uses matched sampling procedures which has been shown to be a highly accurate technique for approximating a random sample (see Ansolabehere and Schnaffer 2013).

[3]   The text of this introduction can be found in Appendix 1. To be sure that these definitions did not prime the respondents conjoint tasks, a group of respondents (n=1015) was not shown this introduction page. To rule out a priming effect, we do not find significant differences between the preferences of individuals who were shown this introductory page and individuals who were not.

[4]   After choosing one of two policies, respondents were asked to rank each policy on a scale from 1 to 7. We have used these ratings as a robustness check for our dependent variable measurement (available upon request). It also allows us to validate the measurement of policy choice as well as identify individuals who were inattentive (e.g. because they gave inconsistent answers) and whose choices may thus decrease data quality.

[5]   The precise wording of all these questions can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 1. Experimental policy features, by six policy dimensions of asylum and refugee policy

Asylum Applications	1. Anyone can apply for asylum in [YOUR COUNTRY] <u>without annual limits</u>. 2. Anyone can apply for asylum in [YOUR COUNTRY] until <u>an annual limit</u> is reached.
Resettlement	1. <u>No resettlement</u> of United Nations-recognized refugees to [YOUR COUNTRY] 2. <u>Low resettlement</u> of United Nations-recognized refugees to [YOUR COUNTRY] (1 person per 10000 citizens per year, i.e. [country specific population]). 3. <u>High resettlement</u> of United Nations-recognized refugees to [YOUR COUNTRY] (2 or more persons per 10000 citizens per year, i.e. [country specific population]).
Return to Harm	1. Refused asylum-seekers are <u>never</u> sent back to countries where they could face serious harm 2. <u>In some cases</u>, refused asylum-seekers can be sent back to countries where they could face serious harm.
Family Reunification	1. Recognized refugee <u>can always</u> bring his/her spouse and children 2. Recognized refugee can bring his/her spouse and children <u>only if refugee can pay for their cost of living</u> 3. Recognized refugee <u>cannot</u> bring his/her spouse and children
Decision-making	1. <u>Each EU country</u> makes its own decisions on asylum applications within its territory. 2. <u>A centralised European Union agency</u> decides on applications for asylum for all EU countries
Financial assistance to non-EU countries hosting refugees	1. [YOUR COUNTRY] provides <u>unconditional</u> financial assistance to non-EU countries that host refugees. 2. [YOUR COUNTRY] provides financial assistance to non-EU countries that host refugees <u>only if</u> they help reduce asylum seekers coming to Europe. 3. [YOUR COUNTRY] provides <u>no</u> financial assistance to non-EU countries that host refugees.

We used two survey items to measure a person's political trust.[6] Given the multi-level governance of asylum and refugee issues in the European Union, we measure both trust in EU institutions and national government institutions.[7] EU trust and national political trust are conceptually distinct (see DeVries 2018) and we expect both to matter in the formation of Europeans' asylum and refugee policy preferences. While national political institutions govern many dimensions of asylum and refugee policy, asylum and refugee policy is widely perceived as a European issue due to the way it has been framed in public discourse (d'Haenens and Lange 2001, Horsti 2007; Slominski and Trauner 2018). For these reasons, we expect political trust in European institutions to play a particularly important and potentially dominant role.

To analyse results of our experiment across sub-groups of respondents with different levels of political trust, we follow the approach by Leeper et al (forthcoming) and compute the conditional

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[6] We asked respondents the following question: "I would like to ask you a question about how much you trust certain institutions. Please tell me if you tend to trust or tend not to trust: 1) national government institutions and 2) EU institutions." Respondents were asked to choose from the following response categories: entirely trusting, somewhat trusting, a little bit trusting, a lit bit distrusting, somewhat distrusting, entirely distrusting.

[7] We asked respondents the following question: "I would like to ask you a question about how much you trust certain institutions. Please tell me if you tend to trust or tend not to trust: 1) national government institutions and 2) EU institutions." Respondents were asked to choose from the following response categories: entirely trusting, somewhat trusting, a little bit trusting, a lit bit distrusting, somewhat distrusting, entirely distrusting.

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marginal means.[8] When computing the marginal means, we follow standard practice and apply cluster-robust standard errors at the respondent level to correct for possible within-respondent clustering. In all our analyses, we use entropy-balancing survey weights to correct for sampling error.

Experimental Results

We find strong evidence that policy preferences for asylum and refugee policies are conditional on a person's trust in EU institutions. The results are displayed in Figure A below, in the form of marginal means. We distinguish between six sub-groups of respondents who differ in their degrees of political trust in European institutions.[9]

The marginal means can be interpreted as an indication how favourably a policy is viewed. In a forced choice design such as ours, where respondents need to choose exactly one of the two policies they are shown, a person randomizing their choice would select each policy feature with a probability of 50 percent. A marginal mean of, for example, 55 percent indicates that policies that include this particular feature are selected with a probability of 55 percent.

Figure A. Marginal Means for Trust in European Political Institutions
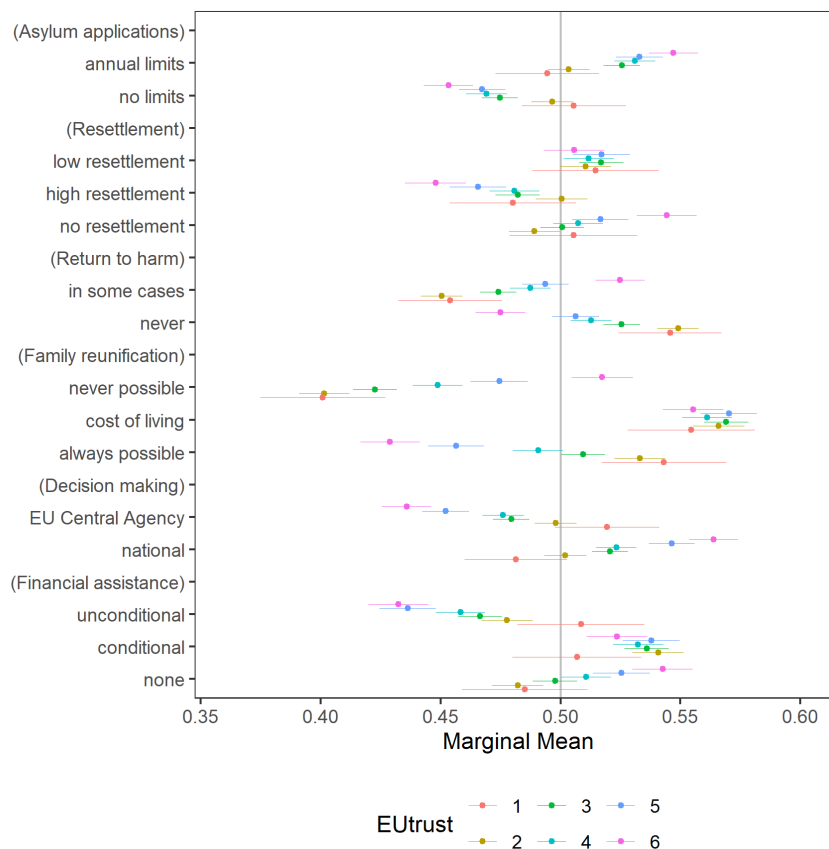
Note: Values of EU trust 1-6 indicate answer options "Entirely trusting" (1, bottom of the stacked bars), "Somewhat trusting", "A little bit trusting", "A little bit distrusting", "Somewhat distrusting", and "Entirely distrusting (6, top of the stacked bars)". Results from separate estimations per sub-group.

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[8] As Leeper et al. (forthcoming) point out, marginal means allow us to compare the effects of different levels of political trust on individuals' policy preferences in a more intuitive manner than other approaches.

[9] Results for all respondents without distinguishing by level of political trust are available in Appendix 6.

The findings in Figure A strongly support our expectation that individuals who are more distrusting tend to be less supportive of policies that include expansive, unlimited, and unconditional features, and more supportive of policies that eliminate protection/assistance in some policy dimensions. For example, in the asylum dimension, distrusting respondents are significantly less likely to support policies that feature unlimited asylum applications than the most trusting respondents (the difference in marginal means between the most and least trusting sub-groups of respondents is seven percentage points). Similarly, considering unconditional family reunification, the most distrusting people are considerably less likely to support policies which allow for unconditional family reunification than the most trusting people in our sample (the difference between the marginal means of the most and least trusting sub-groups is ten percentage points). The same patterns of lower support for unconditional policies amongst individuals with less political trust can be observed for never returning refused asylum seekers to places where they could face harm, unconditional financial assistance to non-EU countries hosting refugees, and high levels of refugee-resettlement.

At the same time, less trusting respondents are significantly more likely than trusting persons to support policies that eliminate protection and assistance. As can be seen in Figure A, this holds for all our policy dimensions that feature the elimination of protection, rights, or assistance altogether: distrusting individuals are significantly more likely to support policies that do not provide any financial assistance to non-EU countries (difference in marginal means between least and most trusting respondents is 5.7 percentage points) and that do not allow for any refugee resettlement (difference in marginal means is 3.9 percentage points). Distrusting individuals are also considerably less likely than trusting individuals to oppose policies that never provide family reunification for recognized refugees (marginal means 51.7 and 40.1 percent, respectively).

Our results suggest that distrusting respondents prefer policies that abandon protection to policies that provide protection without limits or conditions. The inverse applies to the most trusting individuals. For example, with regard to family reunification, the most distrusting individuals are more supportive of a policy that abolishes the right to family reunification than a policy that provides this right unconditionally (marginal means difference = 8.9 percentage points). In stark contrast, for highly trusting individuals, a policy which abandons family reunification is 14.2 percentage points less likely to be supported than a policy that allows for unconditional family reunification. A very similar pattern can be observed for financial assistance to non-EU countries. In the case of resettlement, distrusting people, unlike those individuals with high amounts of political trust, prefer policies that do not allow for any resettlement to policies with high levels of resettlement.

Therefore, if we consider respondents' preferences for policies that include 'extreme' policy features only, i.e. 'no protection/assistance' and 'protection without limits and conditions', we find support for Hetherington's (2005) argument that distrusting individuals on average prefer no intervention by the government over government intervention. However, our analysis of the role of political trust goes beyond this binary understanding and also considers policy preferences when policy controls such as limits and conditions are employed. Our results show an important nuance and new insight, namely, that even distrusting individuals can support policies if they include limits or conditions.

Figure A shows clearly that individuals with lower levels of political trust are more supportive of policies that provide protection and assistance to refugees if these policies utilize controls such as limits or conditions. This holds across all five policy dimensions that include values with features of limits or conditions. For example, individuals with low levels of trust show greater support for asylum and refugee policies that include limits on annual asylum applications (MM=0.55) than for policies that do not include such limits (MM=0.45). Similarly, people with low trust show considerably more support for asylum and refugee policies that condition family reunification on the refugee's ability to cover the costs of living of their family members (MM=0.56) than for policies that facilitate family reunification without this condition (MM=0.43). Similar preference structures can be observed in the policy dimensions relating to return, financial assistance to non-EU countries hosting refugees, and refugee resettlement.

Across all policy dimensions except for the 'return dimension', a low level of political trust accentuates the relative difference between individuals' support for asylum and refugee policies which feature limits and/or conditions and their support for policies which do not.[10] In other words, policies that feature limits and conditions are more relevant to the formation of supportive policy preferences of low trusting individuals. For example, considering financial assistance to non-EU countries hosting refugees, the difference between policies that include conditions on financial assistance and unconditional financial assistance is much larger for people with low trust than for individuals with high trust. In fact, people with the highest degree of trust in our sample do not differ in their support for policies that provide conditional or unconditional financial assistance. The same applies to the other policy dimensions. As we expected, low levels of political trust amplify the positive role of limits and conditions in generating support for asylum and refugee policies that provide protection and assistance.

Overall, our results support our theoretical argument that policy controls can compensate, partially or even fully, for a lack of trust in generating support for asylum and refugee policies. They also show that, in some cases, distrusting people can prefer policies that utilize policy controls to policies that provide no protection or assistance. For example, with regard to family reunification, distrusting people are more likely to support the conditional policy (MM = 0.56) than a policy of no family reunification at all (MM=0.52).

The results discussed above all relate to individuals' trust in *EU institutions* which, we find, plays a much larger role in conditioning public asylum and refugee policy preferences than people's trust in their *national government institutions*. Still, our results for national political trust indicate that the use of limits and controls can generate support among people with low trust for asylum and refugee policies that provide protection to refugees.

As shown in Figure B below, people with low degrees of trust in their national government institutions show significantly greater support for asylum and refugee policies that provide protection/assistance to refugees if these policies include limits and/or conditions. For example, low trusting respondents prefer policies that include conditional rather than unconditional family reunification policies (MMs = 0.56 and 0.47, respectively), conditional rather than unconditional financial assistance to non-EU countries (MMs = 0.53 and 0.45, respectively), limited rather than unlimited numbers of asylum applications each year (MMs = 0.53 and 0.47, respectively), and restrictions on protections for failed asylum seekers. These results are consistent with our claim that policy controls can compensate for low political trust and generate policy support even from distrusting people.

However, we do not find that it is only, or primarily, people with low trust in national political institutions who prefer policies that include controls. As can be seen in Figure B, most respondents, regardless of their degree of trust in national governmental institutions, prefer policies that include limits to conditions to policies that provide unlimited and unconditional protection. There is no evidence in our data that the presence of policy controls makes a larger difference to public support among the lowest trusting respondents. More broadly, in contrast to our analysis of the role of trust in EU institutions, we find no evidence to support the idea that individuals who are less trusting in their national government institutions tend to be less supportive of policies that include expansive, unlimited, and unconditional features, and more supportive of policies that eliminate protection/assistance in some policy dimensions. In other words, our results on trust in national government institutions do not support the theoretical expectations based on Hetherington (2005).

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[10] There is one exception to this statement: In the 'governance' dimension, the experimental design does not allow for a possible policy condition or limit.

Figure B. Marginal Means for Trust in National Political Institutions
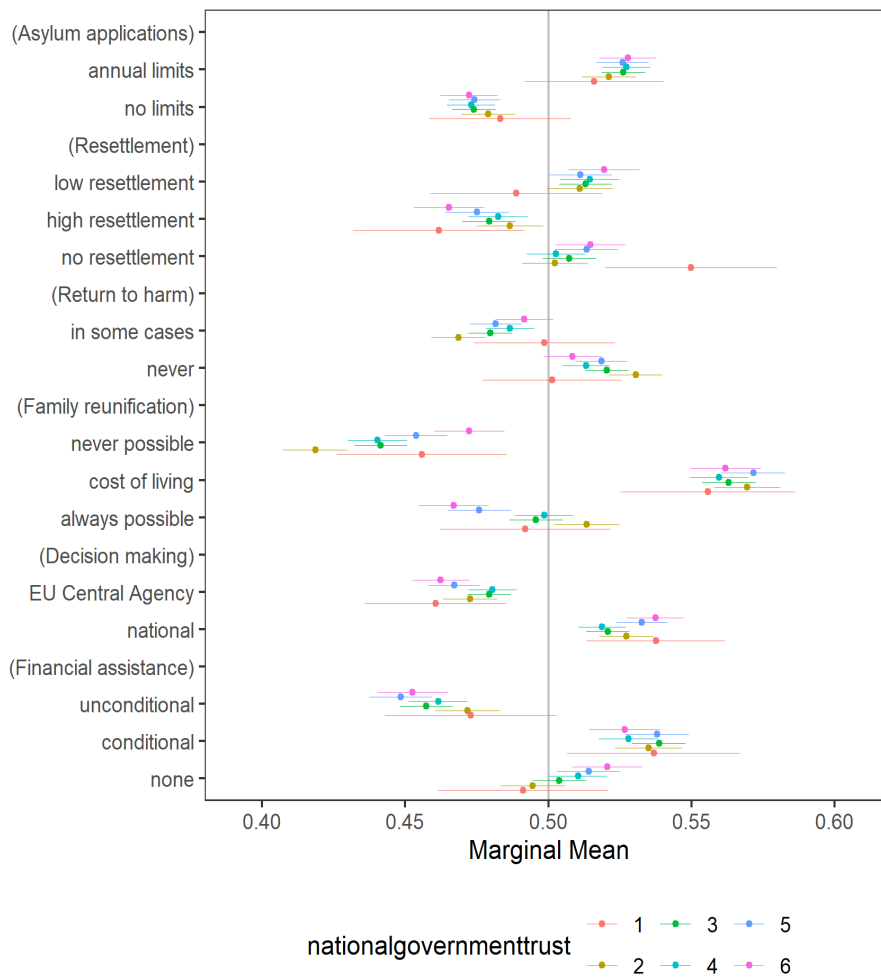
Note: Values of national government trust 1-6 indicate answer options "Entirely trusting" (1, bottom of the stacked bars), "Somewhat trusting", "A little bit trusting", "A little bit distrusting", "Somewhat distrusting", and "Entirely distrusting (6, top of the stacked bars)" Results from separate estimations per sub-group.

Robustness Checks

We conduct a series of checks to verify our results. We investigated whether our result on the conditional role of EU trust is merely an artefact, and instead might mask the influence of another individual-level characteristic that is correlated with EU trust. To investigate this possibility, we conducted a battery of robustness checks in which we interact different variables with the six policy dimensions. The results can be found in Appendix 3. Comparing different model specifications with the help of a nested model comparison test suggests that interactions between policy features and individual characteristics improve further the fit of the model and can affect some of the interactions between policy features and individuals' trust in EU institutions. The estimates of the interaction between EU trust remain significant and of the same direction but they are almost all smaller in magnitude when introducing simultaneous interactions with immigration attitude. Adding interactions between policy features and age groups as well as interactions between policy features and the respondent's education level hardly makes a difference for any of the estimates. Finally, we add interactions with political ideology (scale of liberal to conservative). Doing so does not substantively change the results, although for the estimates of two policy features (high resettlement; and family reunification conditional on cost of living) the significance of the interaction estimate is eroded above the p<0.05 threshold.

Conjoint tasks are cognitively demanding and therefore require respondents to devote a certain degree of concentration. To be sure that participants were able to focus sufficiently on the conjoint tasks, we required them to complete the survey only on a computer and not allowed to complete it on a mobile device. We also took measures to reduce bias from potential survey fatigue. We restricted the number of tasks to five per individual, which is well within the number of tasks that a respondent can complete before fatigue reduces response quality (Bansak et al. 2018). In addition, we analysed whether estimated preferences depend on the number of conjoint tasks that have already been completed, to ensure that any remaining form of fatigue does not affect our results strongly. As is shown in Appendix 8, there are no statistically significant differences in the estimates across the number of conjoint tasks.

The results have to be interpreted in light of our choice to apply equal weights for each country due to the similar sample size in each of the countries included in our survey. The estimates for the preferences of an average individual across the eight countries, we reweight the results using the size of the represented population in each country (see Appendix 4).[11]

Discussion and Conclusion

This article provides the first experimental evidence about the relationship between political trust and policy preferences and a novel analysis of how this relationship is contingent on the design of policies. To assess this question empirically, we conducted an original cross-national conjoint experiment to examine how a person's trust in political institutions conditions his or her preferences for asylum and refugee policy. Randomizing the policy features, we demonstrate that individuals with lower levels of EU trust are more supportive of policies that provide protection and assistance to refugees if these policies utilize controls such as limits or conditions. Moreover, we find that that there is less divergence between low and high trusting individuals when policies feature instruments of control such as limits and conditions. We have argued that this is the case because policies that feature policy controls can function as safeguards against uncertainty, which allow for distrusting individuals to nonetheless form supportive policy preferences.

Our finding that trust in EU institutions plays a much more significant role in conditioning public preferences for asylum and refugee policy than trust in national government institutions does not come as a surprise. Public debates on asylum and refugees in Europe have become highly Europeanised in recent years, in the sense that the regulation of asylum and refugee issues in Europe is perceived to be a European issue as much as (or even more so than) a national issue. Data from Eurobarometer suggest that immigration is highly salient at the European level, but much less so at the national level (European Commission 2019).[12] Furthermore, over the past few years, the European Council, the European Commission, and individual EU Member States have made a considerable number of policy proposals on how to reform Europe's asylum and refugee policies following the large inflows of asylum seekers and other migrants in 2015-16 (Geddes and Ruhs 2018). These proposals have led not only to extensive political debates across the EU but also to considerable media coverage of these issues in EU Member States, which is likely to have strengthened Europeans' perception of asylum and refugee issues as European policy questions.

Beyond the specific analysis of public support for asylum and refugee policies, our results also have important implications for the role of political trust in the formation of policy preferences more generally. The finding that politically distrusting individuals are less supportive of asylum and refugee policies that provide expansive and unlimited protections and rights are in line with the established theory and argument put forward by Hetherington (2005). Yet our research also refines this argument

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[11]   Results available upon request.

[12]   For example, in 2019 the share of Europeans who mentioned immigration when asked to identify the two most important issues facing the EU and their own countries were 35 percent and 17 percent, respectively

and common understanding by demonstrating how even distrusting individuals can generate support for policies that are not directly beneficial to them if certain policy controls are in place. In fact, we find that individuals who lack trust in European institutions are most attracted to this alternative and more conditional way of providing protections to asylum seekers and refugees. Our results imply that certain policy controls, such as limits or well-defined conditions, have a compensatory effect in the sense that they act as safeguards that can counter-act and in some cases completely offset an individual's lack of political trust in his or her preference formation.

Future research is needed to refine these results. There is still much to be understood about various aspects of how policy controls, such as limits and conditions, can offset a person's distrust in political institutions in the formation of policy preferences. For instance, how strong must policy controls be to compensate fully for a person's lack of trust in political institutions? What exactly makes a policy control 'weak' or 'strong' in this context? Our experimental design tests the impact of the basic principle of using limits and conditions in asylum and refugee policy but not the required strength of the controls and conditions. These questions – to what extent and how policy controls can compensate for a lack of political trust in the formation of policy preferences – can and should also be analysed in the context of other public policy areas where political trust would be expected to be consequential, such as minority rights or the provision of international development aid.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Introductory pages of experiment: Definitions and Instructions

We would like to get your thoughts on policies towards asylum seekers and refugees in Europe. There are no right or wrong answers as people have different opinions about these issues.

Important definitions:

In the survey, we use the terms "asylum seekers", "refugees", and "resettlement." It is important to be clear about the different meanings of these terms.

An "<u>asylum-seeker</u>" is someone who enters your country to ask for protection, but whose application for protection has not yet been decided by your government. If their application is unsuccessful, the person is considered a "refused asylum-seeker."

If an asylum-seeker's application for protection is successful, he or she is given the formal status of a "<u>refugee.</u>" This means that refugees are people in need of protection whose formal status as a refugee has already been recognized.

"<u>Resettlement</u>": Instead of people coming to [YOUR COUNTRY] to apply for asylum, the process of resettlement involves the transfer of people who are already recognized refugees, from a non-EU country that hosts large numbers of refugees (e.g. in refugee camps) directly to [your country]. In contrast to the asylum process, where your government considers and decides on whether the application for protection is successful, under resettlement it is the United Nations that has decided and granted the formal status of a 'refugee'.

What we are asking you to do:

Imagine that the [country] government is proposing different policy options for dealing with asylum seekers and refugees. We will now provide you with information about the different policy options, each of which is made up of six components. We will always ask you to compare two policy options and make a choice between them. Please note that the policy options that you are presented with may differ in some, but not necessarily all components. Of the two policy options presented to you, please always choose the one that you would personally prefer to be implemented in [country]. In total, we will show you five comparison pairs of policy options. Please take your time when reading the descriptions of each policy option.

Please consider each choice carefully as though they are real choices. Think carefully about the advantages and disadvantages of each option. How would you feel if the policy option you chose were implemented by the government? Even if you are not entirely sure, please indicate which of the two policy options you prefer.

Appendix 2: Definitions of control variables

National government trust: "I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. Please tell me if you tend to trust or tend not to trust national government institutions". Answer scale: Entirely trusting, Somewhat trusting, A little bit trusting, Somewhat distrusting, Entirely distrusting. This item is included in Appendix 3 as a linear variable.

EU trust: "I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. Please tell me if you tend to trust or tend not to trust European Union institutions". Answer scale: Entirely trusting, Somewhat trusting, A little bit trusting, Somewhat distrusting, Entirely distrusting. This item is included in Appendix 3 as a linear variable.

Attitude towards migration: "Do you think the number of immigrants in [YOUR COUNTRY] nowadays should be:" Answer scale: Increased a lot, Increased a little, Kept the same, Decreased a little, Decreased a lot. This item is included in Appendix 3 as a linear variable.

Age: "How old are you?" Answer scale: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-70. This variable is always included as a factor, i.e. separate dummy variables for each level.

High skill: "What is the highest educational level that you have attained?" This is included as a dummy. No formal education, Incomplete primary school, Complete primary school, Incomplete secondary school: technical/vocational type, Complete secondary school: technical/vocational type, Incomplete secondary: university-preparatory type, Complete secondary: university-preparatory type, Some university-level education, without degree, University-level education, with degree. In the models in Appendix 3 we include a dummy variable taking the value one for the latter two levels

Liberalism: "Which of the following comes closest to describing your political views?" Answer scale: Very conservative, Moderately conservative, Neutral/centrist, Moderately progressive/liberal, Very progressive/ liberal, None of the above, Don't know/Not sure. To reduce the number of different levels, we aggregate these values in the following four groups: Conservative, Neutral/Centrist, Progressive/liberal, None/Don't know/Unsure. These are then included as a factor, i.e. separate dummy variables for each level.

Appendix 3

Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) of Asylum and Refugee Policy Features Interacted with Individual Characteristics

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Asylum Applications: Baseline = No Limits					
Asylum Applications: Annual Limits	0.05 ***	0.05 ***	0.05 ***	0.03 **	0.04 ***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Resettlement: Baseline = No Resettlement					
Resettlement: High resettlement	-0.03 ***	-0.03 ***	-0.03 ***	-0.03 **	-0.07 ***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Resettlement: Low resettlement	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	-0.02
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Return to Harm: Baseline = Never					
Return to Harm: In Some Cases	-0.04 ***	-0.04 ***	-0.04 ***	-0.04 ***	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Family Reunification: Baseline = Always possible					
Family Reunification: Cost of Living	0.07 ***	0.07 ***	0.07 ***	0.07 ***	0.09 ***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Family Reunification: Never Possible	-0.05 ***	-0.05 ***	-0.05 ***	-0.04 ***	0.02
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Decision making: Baseline = National					
Decision making: EU	-0.05 ***	-0.05 ***	-0.05 ***	-0.05 ***	-0.08 ***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Financial Assistance Baseline = None					
Financial Assistance: Conditional	0.03 ***	0.03 ***	0.03 ***	0.03 ***	0.01
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Financial Assistance: Unconditional	-0.05 ***	-0.05 ***	-0.05 ***	-0.03 **	-0.05 ***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Interactions with EU trust					
Asylum limits		0.03 ***	0.01 ***	0.01 ***	0.01 **
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
High resettlement		-0.04 ***	-0.01 **	-0.01 **	-0.01
		(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)

Low resettlement	-0.03 ***	-0.01 **	-0.01 *	-0.01 *
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Return to harm	0.05 ***	0.03 ***	0.03 ***	0.02 ***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Reunification: Cost of living	0.03 ***	0.01 *	0.01 *	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Family: Never possible	0.07 ***	0.04 ***	0.04 ***	0.03 ***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
EU decision	-0.05 ***	-0.03 ***	-0.03 ***	-0.03 ***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Conditional financial solidarity	-0.03 ***	-0.02 ***	-0.02 ***	-0.01 ***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Unconditional Solidarity	-0.04 ***	-0.01 ***	-0.01 ***	-0.01 *
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Interactions with national government trust				
Asylum limits	-0.01 **	-0.01 *	-0.01 *	-0.01
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
High resettlement	0.01 **	0.01	0.01	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Low resettlement	0.01 **	0.01 *	0.01 *	0.01
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Return to harm	-0.01 ***	-0.01 ***	-0.01 ***	-0.01 *
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Reunification: Cost of living	-0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Family: Never possible	-0.01 *	-0.00	-0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
EU decision	0.02 ***	0.01 ***	0.01 ***	0.01 ***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Conditional financial solidarity	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Unconditional Solidarity	0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00

	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Interactions with immigration attitude	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Interaction with age and skill level	no	no	no	yes	yes
Interactions with liberalism scale	no	no	no	no	yes
N	128210	128210	128210	128210	128210
R2	0.02	0.03	0.05	0.05	0.05

Notes: *** and ** indicate statistical significance at the 1% and 5% level, respectively. Standard errors cluster at the individual level. Estimates are average marginal component effects (AMCEs). Results are weighted with individual-level weights to provide national representativeness. All participating countries are equally weighted. See Appendix 2 for how covariates are measured.

Appendix 4: Approximate population size represented by the experiment

Country	Population
Austria	7,551,861
France	54,812,530
Germany	71,615,384
Hungary	8,360,507
Italy	52,379,121
Poland	32,204,231
Spain	39,659,680
Sweden	8,328,959

Notes: Adult population on January 1, 2018 from Eurostat. Partly estimates.

Appendix 5: Sample conjoint task (from the German language version)

Appendix 6: Overall effects of policy features on the probability of accepting an asylum and refugee policy, not disaggregated by political trust
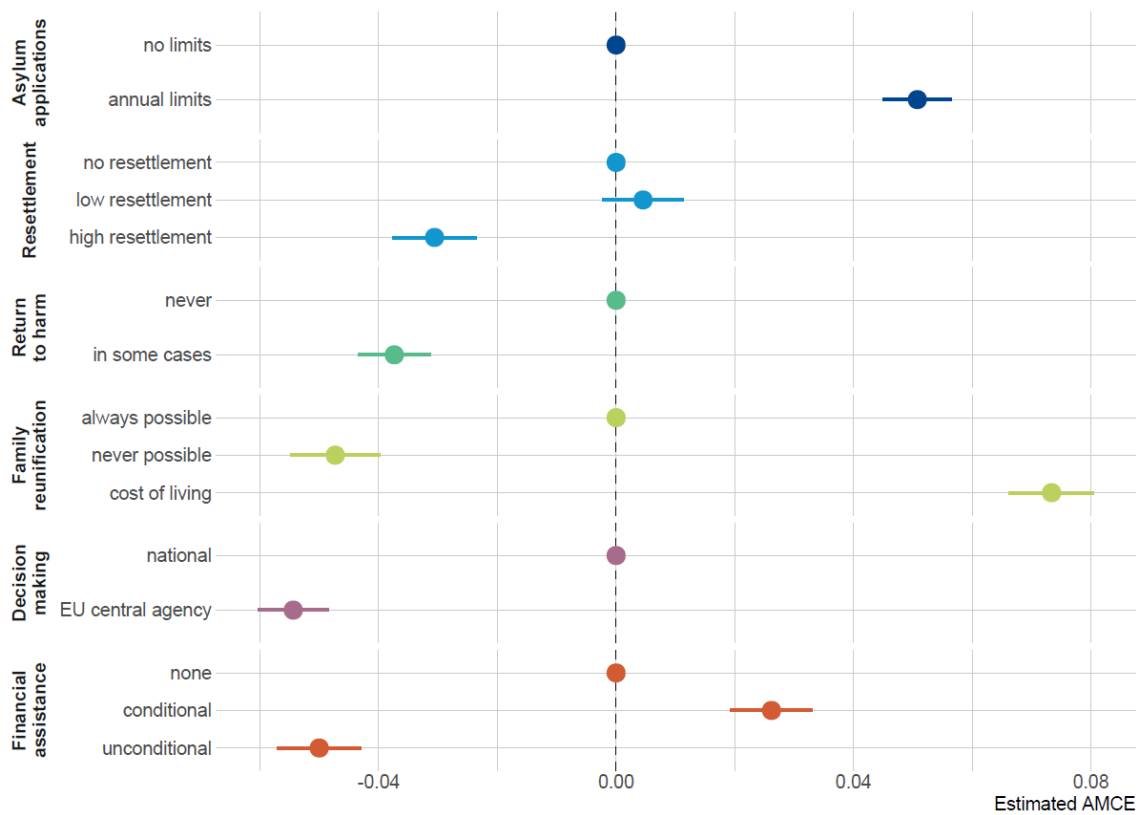

Note: The effects of the policy features on the probability of accepting the asylum and refugee policy. Dots indicate point estimates with 95% confidence intervals from linear (weighted) least squares regression. Those on the zero line without confidence intervals denote the reference category for each policy dimension.

Appendix 7. Display of frequencies of values within and across policy dimensions
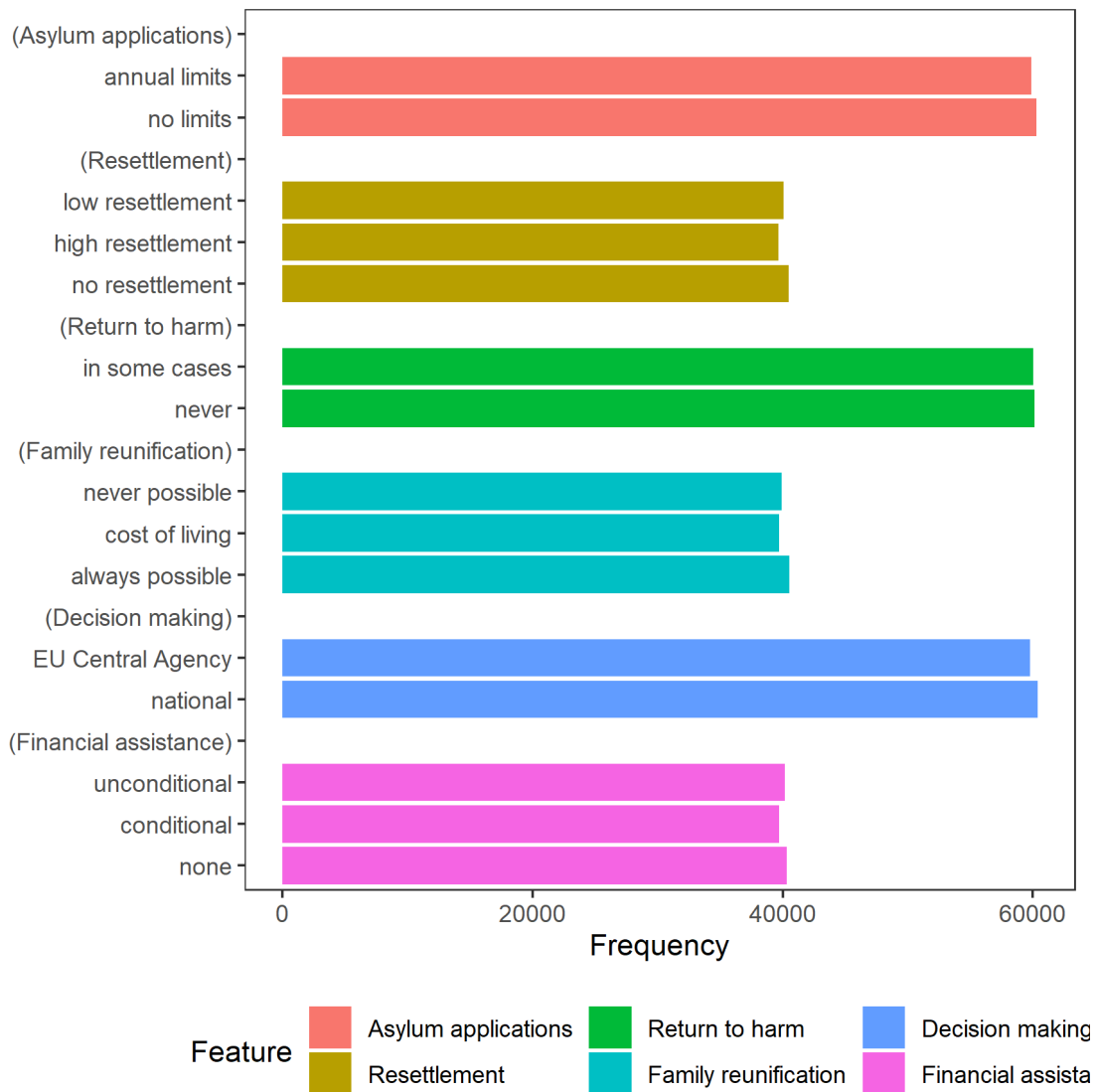
Appendix 8: Investigating possibility of survey fatigue
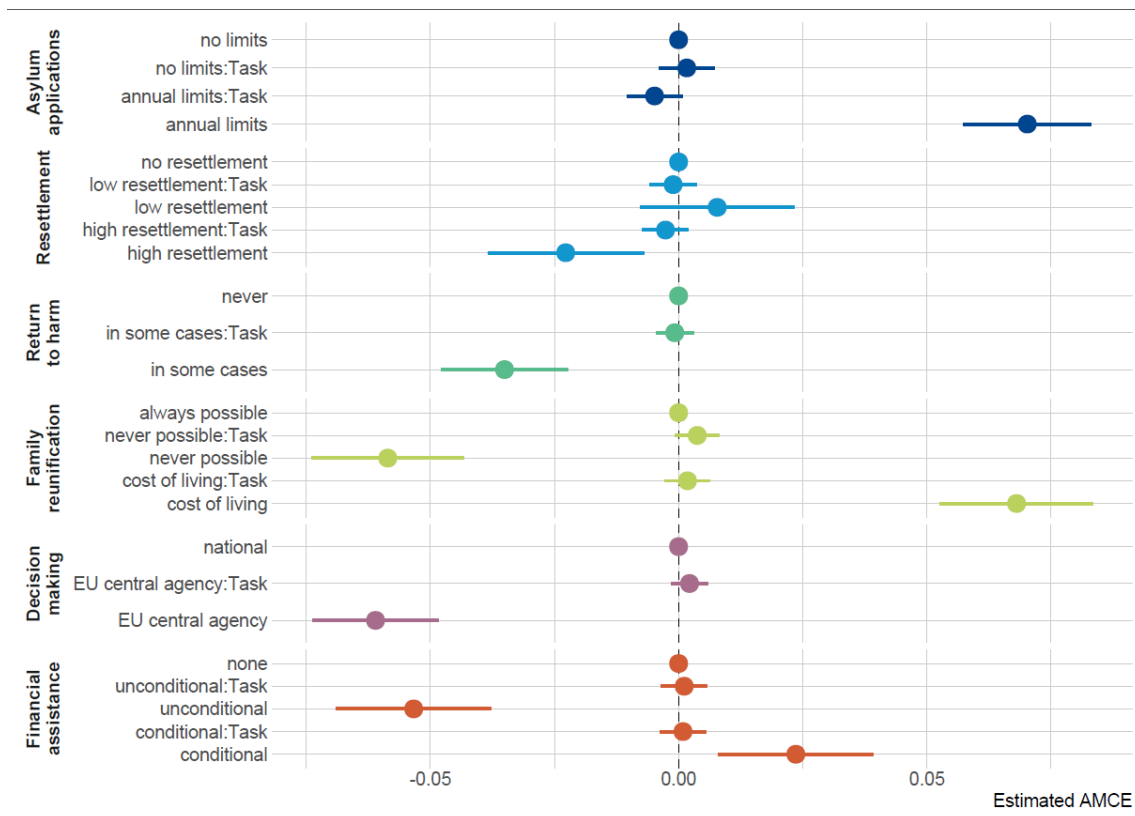
Notes: Reporting results from an interaction model that estimates AMCEs relative to the respective baseline category and interacts each value with the task number, i.e. whether this was the first, second, third, fourth, or fifth conjoint task for an individual. Specification otherwise as in the rest of the paper. Insignificant interaction terms indicate that the overall effect of a policy feature does not change significantly with the number of conjoint tasks the respondent has conducted.