A Conditional God of Vengeance and Reward
The impact of responsibility perceptions on the link between performance evaluation and political support

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Abstract

We go beyond the existing literature on evaluation-based political support by analyzing the impact of responsibility perceptions on the link between performance evaluation and political support. The common evaluative-approach focusses only on the direct effects of policy evaluations on political support. However, a direct effect does not provide proof for an evaluative-mechanism underlying political support. A change in political support can be due to a cognitive punishment/reward mechanism or simply due to differences between individuals such as general societal pessimism. In addition, the performance-support link is growing more and more complex as modern democracies increasingly divide tasks and legislation across multiple levels of government. We argue that the missing link in the literature is the conditionality of the performance-support link on the perceptions of responsibility. This article presents a more critical test of the performance-hypothesis by introducing the conditionality of the punishment-reward mechanism on perceptions of responsibility into the model. We test this conditionality using a pioneering approach that separates and simultaneously models between-respondents and within-respondents effects. Here, within-respondent effects are not plagued by alternative causal mechanisms related to differences between individuals. Findings show that within respondents, the effects of performance evaluations on political support for a government level are conditional on the perceived responsibility of that government level. This provides convincing evidence that there is indeed an evaluative mechanism underlying political support.

1. Introduction

The common 'evaluative approach' to political support assumes people act as gods of vengeance and reward by holding governments accountable for policy outcomes. Political support for government institutions is thought to be (at least partly) driven by policy evaluations. Various scholars have tried to grasp this reward-punishment mechanism by focusing on the direct effect of policy evaluations on political support (e.g, Huseby 2000; Kumlin 2007; 2014; Miller and Listhaug 1999; Svallfors 2002). Such a direct test may however not be most suitable to uncover the mechanisms driving political support. Found evidence for a direct effect does not clarify whether change in political support is actually due to a cognitive punishment/reward mechanism or simply due to differences between individuals such as general societal pessimism (Key 1964, 569). Is the public really a god of vengeance and reward or does it support the government irrespective of its faults?

An essential conditional of the punishment/reward mechanism is the belief that the government in question is responsible for the positive or negative developments on which it is judged (Arceneaux 2006; Arceneaux and Stein 2006; Cutler 2008; Rudolph 2003b, Rudolph 2006). The common evaluative-approach assumes that citizens are (vaguely) aware of the responsibility of governments for specific policies (Cutler 2008). It is however an empirical question whether this assumption holds. Particularly multilevel governments impose great cognitive demands on citizens as it requires information on the responsibilities and jurisdiction of each level of government. As noted by Johns (2011, 54) "where there are multiple levels of government, often with different parties (or combination of parties) in office, each developing its own record, the simple reward-punish model becomes much more complex" (cf. Hobolt and Tilley 2013).

The missing link in the extant literature is the conditionality of the reward-punishment mechanism on the perceptions of responsibility held (Van der Walle and Bouckaert 2003;

Van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2016). By ignoring the role of perceptions of responsibility and looking at direct effects only, the common evaluative approach provides necessary but not sufficient evidence for the punishment-reward mechanism (Van der Walle and Bouckaert 2003). This article presents a more systematic test of the evaluative-approach of political support by introducing perceptions of responsibility into the model. It addresses the following question: *To which extent is the effect of performance evaluations on government support conditional on perceptions of responsibility?*

To date, only Hobolt and Tilley (2014, 132) have studied how individual level attributions of responsibility condition the effects of policy evaluations on political support. Their results present straightforward and compelling evidence for the conditionality of the evaluative-approach of political support. They show that the more people hold the EU responsible for policies, the more their evaluations of those policies affect support for the EU. However, their adopted approach is suffering from important limitations and is therefore not the a very critical test of the evaluative-approach of political support. Firstly, they only include one level of government in their model, the European Union. In multilevel governments, citizens are likely to compare and evaluate the responsibility and performance of government levels against each other. Ignoring the multilevel structure of contemporary political systems results in an oversimplified picture of the relationship between citizens and the political system in European democracies (Muñoz et al. 2011). Secondly, they are unable to differentiate between the mechanisms underlying the relationship between performance evaluations and political support. Alternative mechanisms might drive the effect regarding more general differences *between* individuals (referred to as cluster confounding bias). One possible alternative mechanism is a general discontentment bias: negative people might displace their overall resentment on political trust and simply hold lower trust and lower evaluations, regardless of the relationship between performance and political support (Bartels

2015; Bell and Jones 2015)[1]. Hobolt and Tilley (2014) draw their conclusions from differences between individuals, rather than within individuals, and as a result cannot be certain that a punishment/reward-mechanism is underlying the relationship.

We employ an alternative approach with three key elements. First, we measure political support for three levels of government (the local, national and European government) by means of the same questions, so that we can compare the effects of policy evaluations onto support for the different government levels in *one integrated model*. These measures entail both satisfaction with the way democracy works and trust in institutions. Second, we assess a wide range of policy fields that differ in the actual appointment of formal responsibilities at the three levels of government. Third, and most importantly, we distinguish between within-respondent and between-respondent effects to get a clearer picture of the true mechanism at work. As noted, effects between performance evaluations and political support might also be driven alternative mechanisms resulting from cluster confounding bias. If support is truly evaluative in nature, one excepts to see variation *within* individuals with regard to how they evaluate the performance of different levels of government and how they allocate support accordingly. Within-individual effects provide a more precise test of the performance-support link as it filters out many alternative causal mechanisms. By simultaneously modeling within- and between-respondent effects in one model, and by testing the conditionality of the performance-support link on perceived responsibility, this paper presents the most critical test of the performance-support link yet performed in the extant literature.

With this approach, this article touches upon the central assumptions in two strands of literature: it specifies the evaluative model that is dominant in the literature on political support (e.g. Anderson 2000; Dalton 2004; Van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2016; see Van der

[1] The vice versa may could also hold: Positive people hold more trust and more positive evaluations, regardless of an actual punishment/reward mechanism.

Meer (2016) for an overview) and uncovers the clarity of responsibility argument dominant in the economic voting literature (Powell and Whitten 1993; Mishler and Rose 1999; Anderson 2000; Curtis 2014).

For such a critical test to be successful, it is essential to use a case with variation in objective responsibility of government levels across policy domains. The Netherlands constitute such a case. Over the past decades, the Dutch government engaged in processes of European integration, decentralization and privatization on all sorts of policy fields. As a result, we can simultaneously consider policy areas where responsibility is clearly confined to one level of government, policy areas where responsibility is more divided amongst different levels of government, and policy areas where no level of government bears objective responsibility (because it was privatized).

This article uses survey data from the first Dutch Local Election Study, part of which was especially designed to analyze the conditional evaluation-support relationship.

2. Theory and hypotheses

This article studies the relationship between policy performance and political support and how this is possibly conditioned by perceptions of accountability within a multilevel political environment (see Figure 1). To the extent that political support is more or less a cognitive evaluation, the performance of institutions will affect their public support. Extant research focuses mainly on direct effects, rather than on the conditionality of these effects (e.g., Citrin and Green 1986; Kornberg and Clarke 1992; Lawrence 1997; Chanley et al. 2000; Van der Meer and Dekker 2011; Elinas and Lambrianou 2014). In addition, extant research focuses mainly at the variation between respondents, while a more valid test of the model would focus on the variation within respondents.

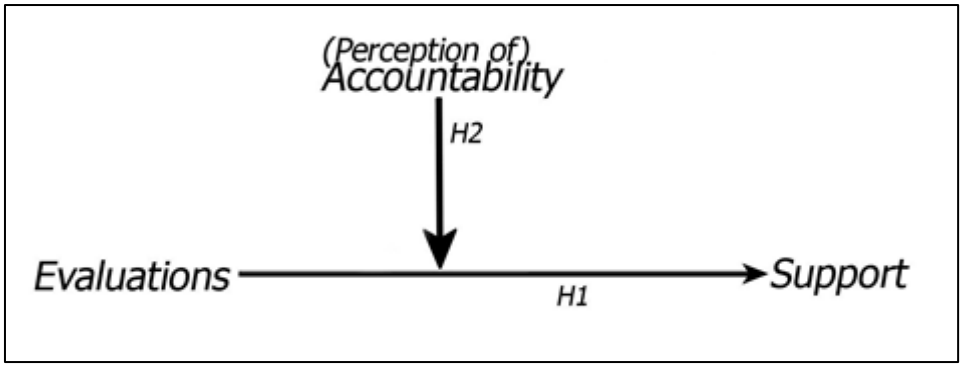

Figure 1 - The Conditionality of the Policy Feedback Mechanism

The idea of that policy performance influences political support is nothing new. Policy feedback is defined as the extent to which policy performance translates into individual attitudes and behaviors such as political support. Easton's (1965, 1975) 'system model' of political processes is considered one of the main paradigms in political legitimacy and support. In this model, Easton (1975, 449) argues for a certain feedback loop where "evaluation of outputs and performance may help to generate, and probably at all times will help to sustain, confidence in the authorities". Despite the long-standing dominance of Easton's system model, the implied feedback loop constitutes one of its least explored elements.

Regardless of its long existence in theory, policy feedback only reached the mainstream of empirical political research in recent decades (Soroka and Wlezien 2004; Soss and Schram 2007; Kumlin 2002; Kumlin and Stadelmann-Steffen 2014). The majority of extant research on policy feedback focuses on one specific outcome: the influence of macroeconomic performance on political support (e.g., Dalton 2004; Taylor 2000), possibly because the regulation of the macro economy is believed to be one of the most salient issues for citizens (Dalton 1999). Findings are inconclusive. Evidence that objective economic performance affects political support is mixed and at times even contradictory (see e.g. Anderson 2009; Dalton 2004; Hakhverdian and Mayne 2012; Miller and Listhaug 1999;

Oskarsson 2010). Yet, at the individual level, citizens' perceptions of economic performance are strongly and consistently related to political support (e.g. Citrin and Green 1986; Hetherington and Rudolph 2008; Van der Meer and Dekker 2011).

The limited evidence for the evaluative approach in the economic realm has led to skepticism about the explanatory power of policy evaluations on individual political attitudes (e.g., McAllister 1999; Dalton 2004). One should, however, not prematurely dismiss all performance-type factors before extending research on policy feedback beyond the economic sphere (Kumlin 2010). As noted by Marsh and Tilley (2010, 134), "voters do not simply evaluate the economy and therefore the government, but also evaluate the government's performance across a range of policy areas". Alternative fields such as health care and social insurance have rarely been considered in relation to political support. The few existing studies on policy feedback in non-economic spheres do find significant relationships. Kumlin (2007), for example, finds that satisfaction with the functioning of democracy is related to welfare state performance (cf. Huseby 2000; and Lühiste 2014 for similar findings). The lack of research on the performance-support link beyond the economy, as well as the small number of promising findings, led Kumlin (2017) to claim that there is ample room in this area for future research.

Regardless of whether one studies performance evaluations of the economy or the welfare state, the most convincing evidence for performance-based support can be found at the individual-level. It are the subjective measures of performance evaluations, i.e. the perceptions of performance, that are most consistently related to political support rather than the objective performance measures. Such a discrepancy between objective and subjective performance evaluations does not undermine the performance-hypothesis. On the contrary, the relationship between subjective performance evaluation and political support forms the essential test of the evaluative-mechanism underlying political support. As explained by

Curtis (2014, 405; cf Nannestand & Paldam 2000), subjective measures of political support "enable more appropriate theoretical tests of the underlying psychological processes linking perceptions to outcomes, since what individuals act upon is not necessarily what *is*, but what they *perceive to be*". When explaining individual citizens behavior, perceptions are reality (Kumlin 2011, 114). In this way, the relationship between objective evaluations and political support can only hold under the strict precondition that subjective perceptions correspond objective reality (Van der Walle and Bouckaert 2003).

When dealing with subjective measures, one however is faced with the difficulty of pinpointing the underlying causal mechanisms between evaluations and political support. A cognitive mechanism may drive the relationship where performance of different levels of government are carefully evaluated and political support for each of these government levels is affected by these evaluations. However, the relationship may also be driven by alternative differences between individuals, such as a general (dis)contentment bias where general resentment or positivity is displaced on political objects (Hooghe and Zmerli 2011; Key 1964; Kumlin 2007; Van der Walle and Bouckaert 2003).[23] As a result of these diverging causal mechanisms, one cannot be certain which one drives the relationship when only focusing on direct effects of performance evaluations. The common-evaluative approach is however largely based on direct effects, and in this way, it only provides necessary but not sufficient evidence for the punishment-reward mechanism (Van der Walle and Bouckaert 2003).

[2] With regard to the first mechanism, the relationship could also be reversed: low levels of trust can lead to poorly evaluated performance (cf. Van der Walle and Bouckaert 2003; Kumlin 2014).

[3] Regarding the second mechanism. Hooghe and Zmerli (2011, 4) indeed argue that "judgments made on the political trust scale are not necessarily based on the actual performance of individual institutions, but reflect a kind of general assessment of the prevailing political culture within a country". They only look between respondents rather than within respondents, even though they acknowledge the essentiality of observing significant differences across institutions as not all institution reach the same level of performance (Fisher et al. 2010).

A more critical test of the punishment-reward mechanism involves pulling apart between-individuals effects from within-individuals effects and simultaneously analyzing them in one model (Bartels 2015; Bell and Jones 2015). In such a model, the within-individual effects are not affected by differences between individuals which rules out many alternative causal mechanisms. If one finds a within-individual effect of performance evaluations on political support, this effect is derived from the variation in performance evaluations across different policies.[4] A positive within-effect means that policy areas which are more positively evaluated lead to more political support in comparison to policy areas which are more negatively evaluated. Between-individual effects are derived from variation between individuals in their general performance evaluations of all policy areas. While these too could be driven by a reward-punishment mechanism, one cannot rule out the many alternative causal mechanisms resulting from between-individual differences.

Following this line of theory, we foremost hypothesize the following:

H1: Positive policy performance evaluations have a positive effect on political support.

Next, we go beyond the extant literature by arguing that the effect of performance evaluations onto political support is unlikely to be an unconditional effect. It is likely to differ with citizen characteristics, with level of government, and with the policy field itself. To elaborate, European welfare states have been increasingly affected by multilevel governance. In these multilevel democracies, there is a large variance in the size, visibility, capacity and jurisdiction of the different levels of government (Muñoz 2017). The increased complexity of multilevel democracies makes evaluating government performance a 'daunting task', since citizens need to be aware of the performance and responsibilities of each level simultaneously

[4] Because alternative explanations are ruled out, there remains only very little variation left to explain within-individuals. As such, it is rather unlikely to find direct within-respondent effects of performance evaluations on political support.

(Hobolt and Tilley 2013; 2014). Various scholars have noted that multilevel governance introduces information costs that may make it harder for citizens to allocate clear responsibility for outcomes to the correct level of government (Cutler 2004, 2008; Anderson 2006; Hobolt and Tilley 2014). In relation to this, citizens have in general low levels of political knowledge (Carpini and Keeter 1997, Fournier 2002) and knowledge of public services (Van Slyke and Roch 2004). Also, the media predominantly focusses on the national government and on policy areas that are considered 'valence issues' (i.e. the economy and health care). The complexity of multilevel governance, the low levels of general political knowledge of citizens, the variance in visibility and capacity of government levels, and the bias in the provision of information on government performance in the media are likely to result in differences in the awareness of citizens of the performances of government levels in various policy areas.

Responsibility perceptions as a key moderator

Theoretically, perceptions of responsibility for policy performance are the key moderator that ought to condition the relationship between policy performance and political support (Abramowitz et al. 1988; cf. Feldman 1982; Lau and Sears 1981; Tyler 1982).[5] Judgments of responsibility are the "principal mechanism by which citizens hold representatives to account for their actions, since it is those judgments that intervene between evaluations of policy outcomes and voting behavior" (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, 10). One would expect a stronger effect of policy performance on political support if the level of government is actually deemed responsible for such policy outputs.

[5] Easton (1975) too recognized the necessity for specific support that individuals attribute a causative force to the behavior of authorities.

Rarely have studies on political support taken perceptions of responsibility in account on the individual level. Some lessons can however be taken away from the economic voting literature. On the aggregate level, various scholars have found that institutional clarity of responsibility affects voters' ability to allocate responsibility for policy outcomes (Hobolt and Tilley 2014, 8; cf. Powell and Whitten 1993)[6]. Such aggregate level data, however, is suboptimal to uncover the causal mechanisms behind the policy feedback link at the individual level. For performance evaluations to have an effect on political support, what matters is which governments citizens perceive to be responsible, rather than who formally is. In the economic voting literature, a handful of studies have tried to incorporate subjective measures of responsibility into their models. Marsh and Tilley (2010), for example, find that, in the UK and Ireland, attributed (economic) evaluations affect vote choice much more than attributed evaluations. Rudolph and Grant (2002) find a similar effect of perceived presidential responsibility on economic voting in the US (cf. Gomez and Wilson 2003). These studies however suffer from similar limitations as Hobolt and Tilley (2014): they only focus on one level of government and are unable to pinpoint the underlying causal mechanism (see introduction). Also, their main dependent variable is vote choice or party support, and findings may not hold when considering political support.

This article analyzes to what extent perceived responsibility conditions the relationship between performance evaluations and political support on the individual level by hypothesizing that*:*

H2. The effects of policy evaluations on political support are moderated by perceptions of responsibility: When a governing body is perceived to be more responsible for policy outcomes, the effect of policy evaluations increase.

[6] Studies show that in contexts in which responsibilities for public policies are shared among many actors, for example due to large coalitions and/or low party cohesion, voters are less likely to assign responsibility to the government for economic outcomes (Anderson 2000; Duch and Stevenson 2008; Hobolt and Tilley 2014; Powell and Whitten 1993; Van der Brug et al. 2007; Whitten and Palmer 1999).

If political support is based on a cognitive evaluation, conditional on one's perception of responsibility, we expect to see a moderation *within* respondents (i.e. Government A (rather than another level) is perceived as responsible for a specific policy and hence is allocated political support according to its performance in this area). Such a moderation is much less likely to play a role *between* respondents where the relationship between general performance evaluations and general political trust is not necessarily conditional on the general level of perceived responsibility of all levels of government. Alternative causal mechanisms are likely to drive the between-individual effect which are unaffected by perceptions of responsibility.

Lastly, it is unlikely that such a moderation forms a linear relationship. This line of reasoning is still highly under-theorized, as no studies have yet taken this second step. However, based on common sense, negative responsibility perceptions (when a government level is perceived to be *less* responsible for a certain area in comparison to another level) are unlikely to have the same effect as positive responsibility perceptions (when a government level is perceived to be *more* responsible for a certain area in comparison to another level). People simply do not consider the actors that are *not* responsible when evaluating performance. Furthermore, when different levels of government are perceived to be more or less equally responsible, the effects of performance evaluations on support for a specific government level are likely to be much less conditioned by perceptions of responsibility in comparison to when a government level is perceived to be relatively much more responsible. Hence there is likely to be a certain threshold when perceived responsibility conditions the performance-support relationship and when this threshold has been passed, the moderation is likely to form a curvilinear relationship.

H3. *The conditionality of the relationship between performance evaluations and political support on perceptions of responsibility forms a curvilinear relationship with a threshold effect.*

3. Data and Methods

3.1 Individual level data

DLES

The first Dutch Local Election Study (DLES) provides an excellent cross-sectional dataset to address the research problem at hand.[7] It is based on the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences (LLIS) panel, including a high quality randomly-selected probability sample of all Dutch households. The panel consists of 4500 households, containing 7000 individuals, and is refreshed every 8 years. Respondents are drawn from the population register by Statistics Netherlands. For the current study, only panel members of eighteen years and older were invited to participate by means of an online questionnaire. The LLIS panel has been in full operation since October 2007 and has been employed by many (Dutch and international) researchers since. The rich data of the LLIS panel lies at the core of the Dutch infrastructure on social scientific research. Unique to the DLES dataset is the module on perceived government responsibilities especially designed for this article. Fieldwork for the DLES was completed in March 2016 and resulted in a response rate of 79.6% of the approached members of the LISS panel (n = 2,579).

Dependent variable

Political support is operationalized for each level separately, using an index of one's satisfaction with the way democracy works and trust in government institutions. Satisfaction with the way the government works at the three government levels is measured on a four-point scale, ranging from 0 ('completely dissatisfied') to 3 ('very satisfied'). Trust in the institutions of each government level is based on a series of questions asking how much the

[7] The DLES is likely to be repeated with every local election, providing opportunities for time-series analyses later on.

respondent trusts institution X on a 4 point scale ranging from 'completely no trust' to 'a lot of trust'.[8] Trust in the national government consists of one's trust in the Government and Second Chamber (α =0.81). Municipal level trust is made up of one's trust in the Municipal Council, the Local Executive, and the Mayor (α= 0.90). European level trust is comprised of one's trust in the European Union.

Satisfaction with the way democracy works and trust in government institutions together make a strong measure of political support with a Cronbach's α between 0.72 (municipal level) and 0.84 (European level). Our dependent ranges from 0 ('no political support') to 3 ('high political support'). Political support is generally highest for the municipal level ($\bar{x}$: 1.70), followed by the national level ($\bar{x}$: 1,59), and the European level ($\bar{x}$: 1.06). Our dependent variables of political support contains 7 (EU), 13 (National), and 30 (Local) unique values between 0 and 3 and is treated as a continuous variable.[9]

Independent Variables

a. Responsibility attribution

Respondents were asked how responsible they thought each level of government was for developments in each domain. Perceived responsibility is measured on an 11-point scale.[10] The six domains had been selected to ensure sufficient variation in actual responsibility.[11] For the aims of this article, we are not interested in factual levels of government responsibility, rather in the perceived levels of responsibility per government. As shown in Figure 2, the

[8] Respondents were also offered the option to answer 'don't know' which is coded as missing.
[9] As a robustness check, we also conduct our analysis using only the question on one's satisfaction with the way democracy functions as a dependent variable (see Appendix B). This question is the same for all three levels of government and hence most comparable. This analysis does not yield different results from the analyses using the index measure. The size and significance of the effects are highly comparable.
[10] Those who answered 'don't know' were set to the mean and identified using a separate dummy variable.
[11] For example, in the Netherlands municipalities bear the greatest responsibility for the execution of health care, the national government bears most responsibility for social security, and the railway services are privatized so that no level of government bears actual responsibility

perceived responsibility of different levels of government varies per area. The national government is deemed most responsible, with little variation. Even in privatized policy areas, such as railway services, the national government is perceived as highly responsible. The local government is perceived as particularly responsible for crime prevention and health care services and much less for pensions and railway services. The EU is perceived as relatively responsible for crime prevention and asylum-seeking refugees.

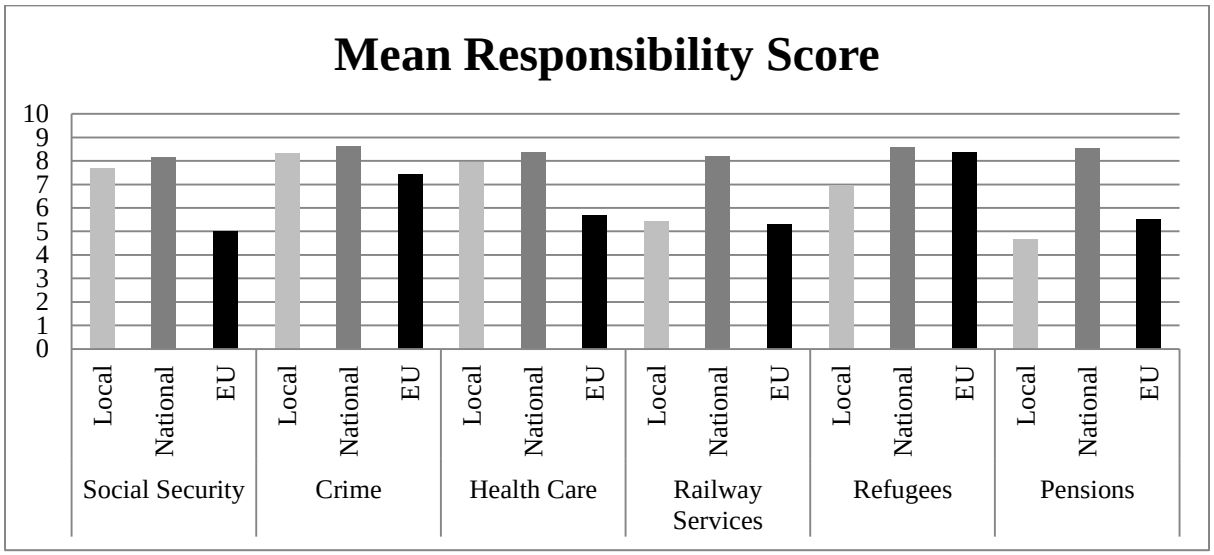

Figure 2 – Mean responsibility scores per area. Source: DLES 2016

b. Performance evaluation

To measure performance evaluation, respondents were asked to evaluate performance in six different domains: crime prevention, health care, social security, pensions, railway services, and asylum-seeking refugees.[12][13] Answers range from 0 'very dissatisfied' to 10 'very satisfied'. Don't know is coded as missing. Respondents evaluated performance in social security ($\bar{x}$: 5.27), railway services ($\bar{x}$: 5.51), and crime prevention ($\bar{x}$: 5.50) most positively and policy on asylum seeking refugees ($\bar{x}$: 4.13) most negatively.

c. Control variables

We control for various rival explanations of political support that are put forward in the literature (for an overview, see Van der Meer and Zmerli (eds.) 2017): age, level of education, gender, political interest, political knowledge,[14] and left-right ideology (11-point self-placement scale). See the online appendix for some descriptive statistics on the data.

d. Modeling technique

To test our hypotheses, we transposed our data into a long format with each respondent having 18 observations for each government level and policy area combination. On this dataset we perform a multilevel linear regression (using the 'xtreg' command in Stata 13) including both between- and within-effects of performance evaluation and perceived responsibility (level 1 variables). The separation of these effects is done using a relatively

[12] The exact description of the domains are: "de aanpak van het aantal vluchtelingen dat asiel aanvraagt in Nederland"; "personenvervoer over het spoor"; "de bestrijding van criminaliteit"; "het pensioenstelsel"; "de zorg voor jongeren, langdurig zieken en ouderen"; "de bijstand".
[13] We are interested in perceived performance rather than actual performance.
[14] Due to the focus of the DLES, the political knowledge questions included focus on local political knowledge regarding the name of the Mayor and whether the Aldermen are in the council. Those who correctly answered both questions are coded as 1. To measure political interest, the DLES includes a question on whether or not the respondent reads local and national news in the newspaper. Political interest is a binary question where those who read political news are coded as 1. Whether or not respondent correctly answered two knowledge questions on politics.

new and pioneering method referred to as the unified "within-between Random Effects" (RE) framework for analyzing nested/panel data (Bartels 2015; Bell and Jones 2015).

Such a model has the advantage of both fixed effect and random effects models (Bartels 2015; Bell and Jones 2015). Rather than controlling out the cluster confounding bias between higher level units (respondents in our case), the within-between RE framework explicitly models such (causal) heterogeneity. Separating the between from the within-effect of the predictor variable is done by decomposing the variance of the predictor into a respondent-specific mean value (between-respondent effect $\bar{X}_j$) and a value for the difference between the actual score X_{ij} and the level respondent-specific mean value ($X_{ij}^W = X_{ij} - \bar{X}$, Bartels 2015).[15] Additionally, we can test whether the between and within effects are significantly different from one another.[16] Due to the separation of within-and between-cluster variation in level 1 variables, thereby accounting for cluster-level heterogeneity, threats to the accuracy of standard errors are very small (Bartels 2015).

4. Results

Model A (Table 1) presents the results from a linear random intercept model including the direct effect of performance evaluations. It distinguished between within-individual effects and between-individual effects, and includes the absolute value of the difference between the within and between-individual effects to test for cluster confounding (cf. Bartels 2015, 18). The ρ suggests that 56% of the error variance is accounted for by the between-respondent level error.

[15] *i* indexes level-1 units (answers within respondents for different levels of government and policy areas) and *j* indexes level 2 units (respondents). *W* specifies the within-respondent effect.
[16] See also Voogd et al. (2016) for another example of the application of the within-between RE framework.

The results show that the between-respondent variable for performance evaluation has a positive significant direct effect on political support, meaning that, for a given individual, more positive evaluations of policies in general result in an overall more positive evaluation of governments. With each unit increase in overall evaluation (on a scale of 0 to 11), political support increases by approximately 0.18 (on a 4 pt. scale). Figure 3 portrays this strong linear between-respondent relationship between performance evaluations and political trust.[17] As noted, several causal mechanisms may be at work as differences between individuals drives this effect. This also includes a general positivity/negativity bias where positive people hold higher evaluations and higher levels of support, irrespective of an evaluative mechanism.

The direct within-effect of performance evaluation is positive but very small and statistically not significant. A more positive evaluation of a specific policy area, relative to the other policy areas, does not necessarily result in a higher level of trust. The abs. test shows that there is significant cluster confounding for performance evaluation. Consistent with our expectations, we find that H1 on the main effect of general evaluations of policies on general political support is supported only between-respondents, not within-respondents.

Interestingly, model A shows that perceived responsibility also has a positive and significant direct effect on political support, between- as well as within-individuals. Such an effect was not anticipated by our theoretical framework. The effects are almost equal in size and the cluster confounding test shows the differences between the two are insignificant. Thus, the effect of perceived responsibility can be seen as a pooled estimate of which the interpretation does not rely on the comparison that is being made. For a given individual, higher levels of perceived responsibility result into higher levels of trust. And more responsibility assigned to a specific level on a specific policy area results into more trust for this level. Though we can only speculate about the underlying causal mechanisms, possibly

[17] The mean of political trust is 1,45.

this effect has something to do with the perceived capacity of a government level. We shall further discuss this unanticipated effect in the discussion. Lastly, the group of respondents who answered they did not know who is responsible is not significantly different from those who did answer the perceived responsibility question.

As expected, the control variables also contribute to political support: being younger, female, highly educated, and politically interested results in higher levels of political support. Additionally, dummies for the different levels of government show that political support is highest for the municipality in comparison to the EU.

Conditional effects

The crucial question, however, is to what extent the effect of performance evaluation on political trust is conditional on perceptions of responsibility. Model B shows that the direct between-respondent effect found in Table 2 of performance evaluation on political support is not conditional on perceptions of government responsibility. As expected, the between-respondent interaction effect of performance evaluation and responsibility perception is not statistically significant. This provides further evidence that effects between individuals are not necessarily driven by an evaluative-mechanism, but may be due to optimists simply being more optimistic, independent of whom they perceive to be responsible for certain policies.

Most interestingly, the within-respondent interaction effect of performance evaluation and responsibility perception is statistically significant and positive. The cluster confounding test shows that the within-respondent effect is significantly different from the between-respondent effect. While Model A showed no signs of a main effect of performance evaluation on political trust at the within-level, Model B shows that a within-effect of performance evaluation is present under the specific conditions of high perceived responsibility. Policy evaluations are more strongly related to political support for

government level X by subject S if subject S perceives government level X to be more responsible for those policies.

Both the insignificant between-respondent and the significant within-respondent interaction effects are consistent with our predictions. To facilitate the interpretation of the results, Figures 4 and 5 present the marginal between-respondent and within-respondent effects of performance evaluation on political support. They clearly show that the relationship between performance evaluation and political support increases in strength as perceived responsibility increases, but only within respondents rather than between respondents. As noted above, the most precise test of the evaluative model lies within-respondents where they evaluate the performance of various government levels, and allocate political support accordingly.

TABLE 1 - Direct & Conditional effects on Political Support
Random-effects Maximum Likelihood Estimation Model

	MODEL A: DIRECT EFFECTS			**MODEL B: CONDITIONAL EFFECTS**		
Variables:	Between-Effects	Within-Effects	Abs test	Between-Effects	Within-Effects	Abs test
Performance evaluation	0.18***	0.00	0.18***	0.20***	0.00	0.22***
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.00)	(0.02)
Perceived responsibility	0.02**	0.01***	0.00	0.03*	0.01***	0.03*
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Dummy DK responsibility	0.02	-0.00	0.02	0.06	-0.00	0.14
	(0.06)	(0.01)	(0.06)	(0.13)	(0.01)	(0.13)
Performance*Responsibility				-0.00	0.00***	-0.01*
				(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Performance*Dummy DK				-0.01	-0.01	0.00
				(0.03)	(0.00)	(0.03)
Age	-0.00***			-0.00**		
	(0.00)			(0.00)		
Sex	0.07***			0.07***		
	(0.02)			(0.02)		
Education (low=ref)						
Middle	0.02			0.02		
	(0.03)			(0.02)		
High	0.09***			0.09***		
	(0.02)			(0.02)		
Left-right	-0.00			-0.00		
	(0.00)			(0.00)		
Political Interest	0.07***			0.07**		
	(0.02)			(0.02)		
Political Knowledge	0.04			0.03		
	(0.02)			(0.02)		
Policy Area (Soc. Sec = ref.)						
Crime Prevention	-0.01*			-0.02*		
	(0.01)			(0.00)		
Health Care	-0.00			-0.00		
	(0.01)			(0.01)		
Pensions	0.01			0.01		
	(0.01)			(0.01)		
Railway Services	0.01			0.01		
	(0.01)			(0.01)		
Refugees	-0.01			-0.01		
	(0.01)			(0.01)		
Government (EU = ref)						
Municipality	0.64***			0.64***		
	(0.00)			(0.00)		
National level	0.50***			0.50***		
	(0.00)			(0.00)		
Observations	N=2452, T(avg. 26.5) Tot. Obs.= 40348			N=2452, T(avg. 16.5) Tot. Obs.= 40348		
-Var(Level-1 Error)	0.35			0.35		
-Var(Level-2 Error) (Panel level-variance component)	0.40			0.39		
- ρ(Level-2 Error / Total Error)	0.56			0.56		
-LR Test (H_0: Level-2 Errorr=0)	χ^2 20936.13, p=<.000			χ^2 20976.33. p=<.000		
-AIC	37755.22			37723.03		
-BIC	37953.14			37955.37		

Tables show unstandardized beta coefficients; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Source: DLES 2016

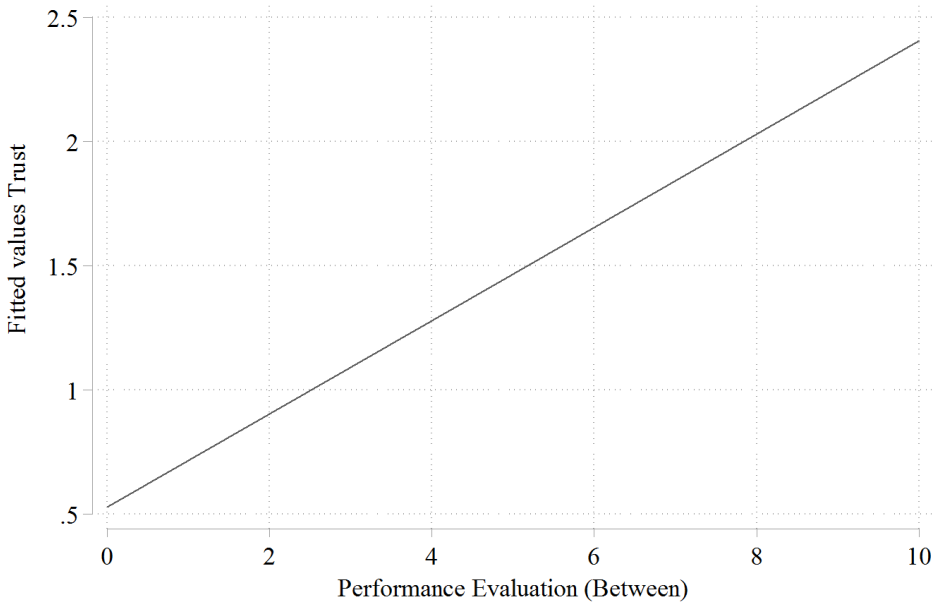

Figure 3 – Linear Prediction between-effect Performance Evaluation on Political Support

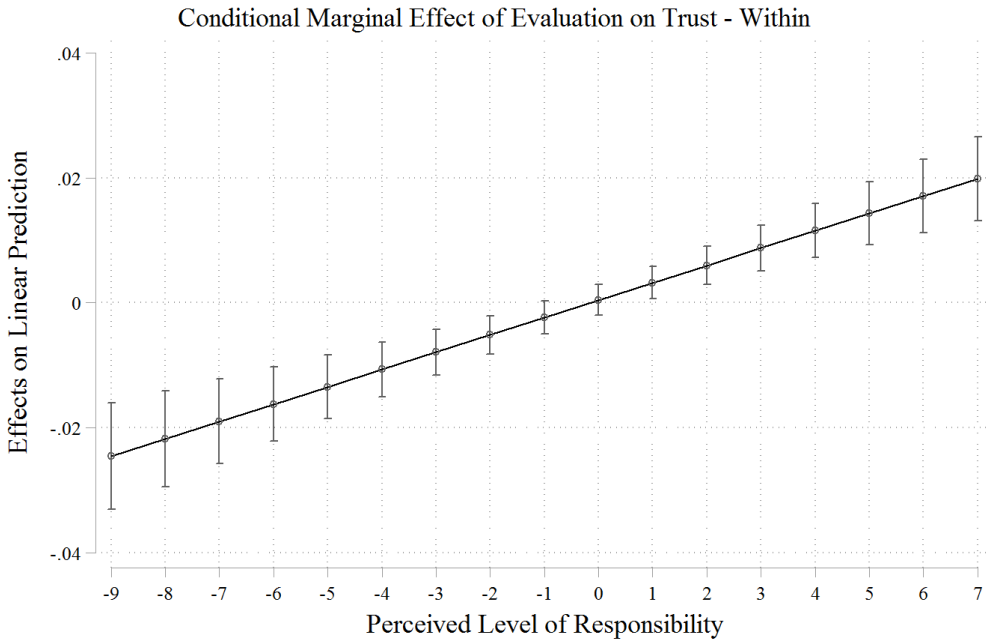

Figure 4 - Marginal within-respondent effect Evaluation on Political Support, conditional on Perceived Responsibility

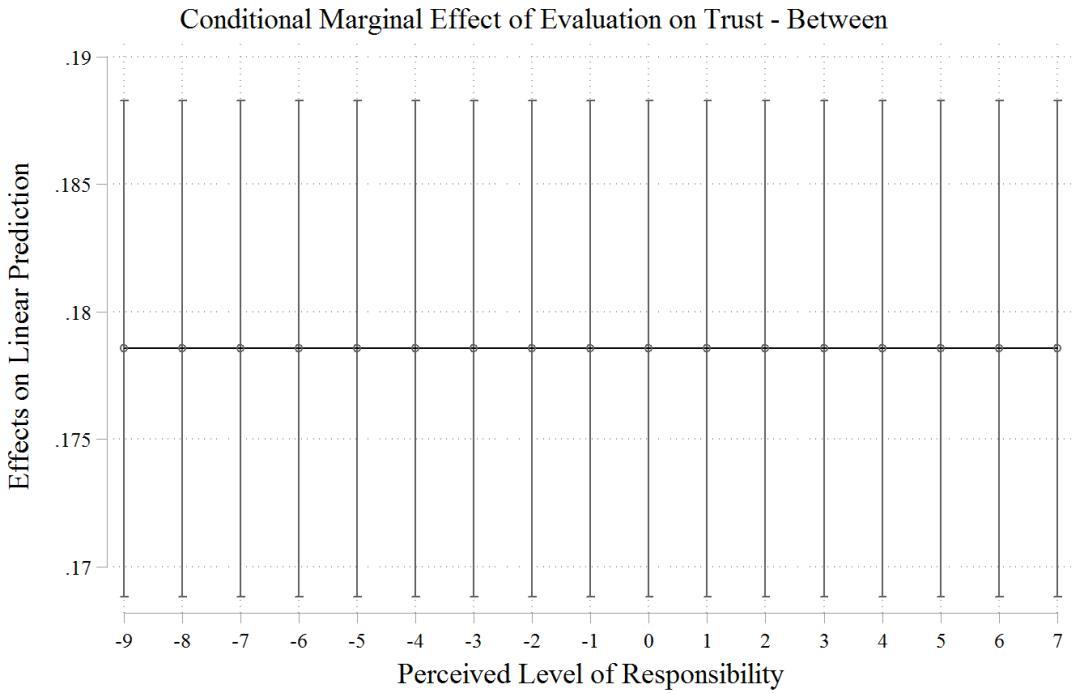

Figure 5 - Marginal between-respondent effect Evaluation on Political Support , conditional on Perceived Responsibility

Curvilinear effects

An additional test shows that the conditionality of performance-based support on perceptions of responsibility constitutes a curvilinear relationship (see Table 2). Figure 6 visualizes this relationship. This pattern suggests a certain threshold-effect: once the respondent assigns relatively more responsibility to government level X for policy area A, there is a strong positive relationship between the evaluation of policy area A and support for government level X. This relationship increases exponentially as perceived responsibility increases. However, when government level X is considered somewhat less responsible for policy area A in comparison to the other levels of government (score -6 to -1), the evaluation of policy area A has a negative but very marginal effect on political support for government level X. This effect of negative responsibility might be driven by the same causal mechanism underlying the direct effect of perceived responsibility (see discussion). When government

level X is considered completely not responsible for policy A in comparison to the other government levels (score -9 and -8), the evaluation of policy A has no significant effect on one's political trust for government level X. When all levels of government are considered equally responsible (score 0), there is no statistically relationship between performance evaluations and political support. In sum, the conditionality of the performance-support link on perceptions of responsibility only takes place once perceived responsibility passes a certain threshold. There is only a strong and positive conditionality once a respondent perceives a government level as relatively (much) more responsible.[18]

TABLE 2 – Conditional Effects on Political Support II
Random-effects Maximum Likelihood Estimation Model – Second order Moderation

	MODEL C: CURVILINEAR EFFECT		
	Between-Effects	Within-Effects	Abs test
Performance evaluation	0.10*	-0.00	0.11*
	(0.05)	(0.00)	(0.05)
Perceived responsibility	0.02	0.01***	-0.02
	(0.04)	(0.00)	(0.04)
Perceived Responsibility²	0.00	-0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Dummy DK responsibility	0.05	-0.00	0.04
	(0.13)	(0.01)	(0.14)
Performance*Responsibility	0.02	0.00***	0.03
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Performance*Dummy DK	-0.01	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.03)
Performance*Responsibility²	-0.00	0.00*	-0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Observations	N=2452, T(avg. 16.5) Tot. Obs.= 40,348		
-Var(Level-1 Error)	0.35		
-Var(Level-2 Error)	0.39		
(Panel level-variance component)			
- ρ(Level-2 Error / Total Error)	0.56		
-LR Test (H_0: Level-2 Errorr=0)	χ^2 20988.08 p=<0.000		
-AIC	37719.28		
-BIC	37986.04		

Tables show unstandardized beta coefficients; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. For full table including controls, see Appendix C. Source: DLES 2016

[18] While it would certainly be interesting to see how the conditionally works for specific levels of government, or for specific policy areas, the current research design does not allow for second-order interactions with either policy areas and/or levels of government. Because the data is transposed into a long format on the basis of policy area and government level combination, including such a second-order interaction term would result in a lack of variance either on the dependent variable (when interacted with level of government) or on the independent variable (when interacted with policy area).

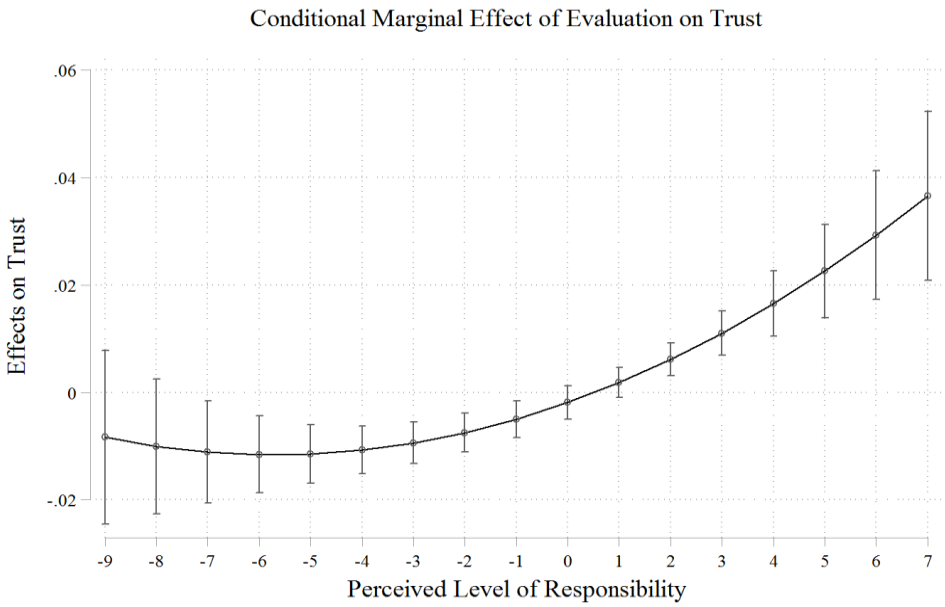

Figure 6 - Marginal within-respondent effect Evaluation on Trust, conditional on Perceived Responsibility

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This article presents a highly critical test of the general assumptions in two strands of literature. Firstly, the evaluative model that is dominant in the literature on political support assumes that, to the extent that political support is more or less a cognitive evaluation, the performance of institutions ought to affect the support people hold for them. By focusing strongly on direct effects, this strand of literature nonetheless ignores the conditionality of the evaluation-support relationship on perceptions of responsibility. Another strand of research, the economic voting literature, looks at clarity of responsibility by showing that when responsibility is clear, the relationship between policy evaluation and electoral behavior is much stronger (e.g., Powel and Whitten 1993; Anderson 2000). They rely however predominantly on aggregate level measures of responsibility and are unable to uncover the causal mechanisms at the individual level.

This study analyzes the relationship between individual measures of performance evaluations in six policy fields and political support at three government levels, thereby differentiating between within-respondent and between-respondent effects.[19] If support is truly evaluative in nature, one expects to see variation *within* individuals with regard to how they evaluate the performance of different levels of government and how they allocate support accordingly. In addition, within-respondent effects are not plagued by the influence of alternative causal mechanisms resulting from between-respondent differences. Hence, the more precise test of the performance-based support approach lies within individuals.

Findings show that there is significant cluster confounding between individuals: respondents who evaluate more positively in general also hold more overall political support (in comparison to other respondents). This relationship is not conditioned by perceptions of responsibility which suggests that causal mechanisms other than a punishment-reward mechanism drive the between-individual effect. Within-respondents, however, we found strong evidence that effects of performance evaluations on political support for a government level are conditional on the perceived responsibility of that government level. The effects of performance evaluations on political support are greater once the government level is perceived as being relatively more responsible.[20] The fact that we only see a clear moderation within respondents (rather than between) provides evidence that there is indeed an evaluative mechanism underlying political support (even if the effects are not very large).

These findings imply that rivaling explanations on the determinants of political support are not mutually exclusive. Theories on the socio-cultural determinants of political support can help explain why some people hold higher levels of support in general,

[19] We performed various robustness checks which led to similar findings: 1) a within-between RE model with 2 separate dependent variables, 2) a fixed effects model with 2 separate dependent variables using OLS. See Appendices.

[20] Similar findings by Hobolt and Tilley (2014) on EU level, though they do not make a distinction between within-respondent and between-respondent effects.

irrespective of whom their perceive to be responsible for specific positive or negative developments (the between-effect). On the other hand, this article also shows that political support is (at least partly) driven by evaluations of performance under the crucial condition that responsibility for such performance is assigned to the level of government in question (the within-effect).

The analyses also suggest opportunities for future research. Although we hadn't anticipated it, we find that perceived performance also has a significant and positive direct effect (both within- and between-individuals). When one perceives a government level as being relatively more responsible than the other levels, one also tends to have more political support for this level of government. While we are not sure why this effect occurs, we think it might be related to the perceived capacity of government levels. The question specifically asks who the respondent holds responsible, rather than who they think is formally responsible. Perhaps people have the tendency to hold the government level accountable whom they perceive to have most capacity to act. Future research can further enlighten us on the relationship between perceived responsibility and political support.

Like any article, this study also leaves room for improvement. A common limitation when dealing with cross-sectional data is the self-selection effect. However, the method we used allowed us to implicitly model cluster differences. As a result, the within-effects are unlikely to be influenced by a possible self-selection effect. Hence, this article presents the most critical test of the performance-support link yet performed in the literature by analyzing the mechanism within respondents. However, the true test of performance-based support includes longitudinal data on performance evaluations and political support.

In sum, this article presented a more precise test of the performance-support link often assumed within the literature. Our findings provide systematic proof that there is indeed a evaluative mechanism underlying political support where performance of the actor in

question is evaluated and levels of political support are adjusted accordingly. We hereby complement the two strands of literature mentioned above on policy feedback and clarity of responsibility by showing that, in a way, the public does act as a 'god of vengeance and reward' with regard to political support, but only when conditioned by the perceptions of responsibility.

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7. Online Appendices

APPENDIX A – Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Political Support	45.138	1,45	0,68	0	3
Performance Evaluation	41.145	4,94	2.27	0	10
Perceived Responsibility	46.647	7,14	2,68	0	10
Age	47.574	52,30	17,26	18	98
Level of Education	47.520	3,73	1,48	1	6
Gender	47.574	0,52	0,50	0	1
Political Interest	47.575	0,63	0,43	0	1
Political knowledge	46.386	0,18	0,38	0	1
Left-right self-placement	47.674	5,19	1,92	0	10

DLES 2016

APPENDIX B – Robustness check: Between-within FE model with 2 separate DV's

TABLE 3 – Conditional Effects on Satisfaction and Trust
Random-effects Maximum Likelihood Estimation Model - Moderation

	Satisfaction Democracy			**Trust in Institutions**		
Variables:	Between-Effects	Within-Effects	Abs test	Between-Effects	Within-Effects	Abs test
Performance evaluation	0.19***	0.00	0.21***	0.21***	0.00	0.24***
	(0.02)	(0.00)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.00)	(0.02)
Perceived responsibility	0.03	0.02***	0.02	0.03*	0.01***	0.03*
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Dummy DK responsibility	-0.16	0.01	-0.23	0.25	-0.01	0.23
	(0.17)	(0.02)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.02)	(0.15)
Performance*Responsibility	-0.00	0.00***	-0.01	-0.00	0.00***	-0.01*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Performance*Dummy DK	0.03	-0.01	0.04	-0.05	-0.00)	-0.04
	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.03)
Age	-0.00**			-0.00**		
	(0.00)			(0.00)		
Sex	0.08***			0.06***		
	(0.02)			(0.02)		
Education (low=ref)						
Middle	0.02			0.03		
	(0.02)			(0.02)		
High	0.08***			0.10***		
	(0.03)			(0.02)		
Left-right	-0.00			-0.00		
	(0.00)			(0.00)		
Political Interest	0.02			0.11***		
	(0.02)			(0.02)		
Political Knowledge	0.03			0.04		
	(0.03)			(0.02)		
Policy Area (Soc. Sec = ref.)						
Crime Prevention	-0.02*			-0.01		
	(0.01)			(0.01)		

Health Care	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
Pensions	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Railway Services	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Refugees	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Government (EU = ref)		
Municipality	0.69*** (0.01)	0.59*** (0.01)
National level	0.64*** (0.01)	0.38*** (0.01)
Observations	N=2420, T(avg. 16.0) Tot. Obs.= 38,784	N=2433, T(avg. 16.3) Tot. Obs.= 39,631
-Var(Level-1 Error)	0.46	0.43
-Var(Level-2 Error) (Panel level-variance component)	0.40	0.41
- ρ(Level-2 Error / Total Error)	0.57	0.52
-LR Test (H_0: Level-2 Errorr=0)	χ^2 20108.09 p=<.000	$\chi^2$13426.51 p=<.000
-AIC	45752.92	49284.24
-BIC	45984.2	49576.1

Tables show unstandardized beta coefficients; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Source: DLES 2016

APPENDIX C – Robustness check: OLS regression (2 DV's) without distinction between/within respondents.

TABLE 4 – Conditional Effects on Satisfaction and Trust

Fixed-effects Maximum Likelihood Estimation Model - Moderation

	Satisfaction Democracy	**Trust in Institutions**
Performance Evaluation	0.10***	0.11***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Perceived Responsibility	0.00	-0.01
(centered)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Dummy DK Responsibility	-0.08	0.09
	(0.09)	(0.11)
Performance*Responsibility	0.00***	0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Performance*Dummy DK	-0.00	-0.03
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Age	-0.00***	-0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Sex (male=ref)	0.10***	0.07***
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Education (low=ref)		
Middle	0.04	0.05*
	(0.03)	(0.03)
High	0.12***	0.15***
	(0.03)	(0.03)
Left-Right	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.01)	(0.00)
Political Interest	0.07**	0.16***
	(0.03)	(0.02)
Political Knowledge	0.04	0.06*
	(0.03)	(0.02)
Policy area (Soc. Sec.=ref.)		
Crime Prevention	-0.03***	-0.03***
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Health Care	0.08***	0.09***
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Pensions	0.08***	0.08***
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Railway Services	0.02**	0.01*
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Refugees	0.12***	0.13***
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Government (EU = ref.)		
Municipality	0.70***	0.60***
	(0.02)	(0.02)
National Level	0.64***	0.38***
	(0.02)	(0.01)
Constant	0.51***	0.27***
	(0.06)	(0.05)
N	38784	39631
Adjusted R^2	0.31	0.27

APPENDIX D – Complete Table 2

TABLE 2 (continued) – Conditional Effects on Political Support II
Random-effects Maximum Likelihood Estimation Model – Second order Moderation

	Trust		
Variables:	Between-Effects	Within-Effects	Abs test
Performance evaluation	0.10*	-0.00	0.11*
	(0.05)	(0.00)	(0.05)
Perceived responsibility	0.02	0.01***	-0.02
	(0.04)	(0.00)	(0.04)
Perceived Responsibility²	0.00	-0.00	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Dummy DK responsibility	0.05	-0.00	0.04
	(0.13)	(0.01)	(0.14)
Performance*Responsibility	0.02	0.00***	0.03
	(0.01)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Performance*Dummy DK	-0.01	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.03)	(0.01)	(0.03)
Performance*Responsibility²	-0.00	0.00*	-0.00*
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Age	-0.00**		
	(0.00)		
Sex	0.07***		
	(0.02)		
Education (low=ref)			
Middle	0.02		
	(0.02)		
High	0.09***		
	(0.02)		
Left-right	-0.00		
	(0.00)		
Political Interest	0.07**		
	(0.02)		
Political Knowledge	0.03		
	(0.02)		
Policy Area (Soc. Sec = ref.)			
Crime Prevention	-0.02*		
	(0.01)		
Health Care	-0.00		
	(0.00)		
Pensions	0.01		
	(0.01)		
Railway Services	0.01		
	(0.01)		
Refugees	-0.01		
	(0.01)		
Government (EU = ref)			
Municipality	0.64***		
	(0.00)		
National level	0.50***		
	(0.00)		
Observations	N=2452, T(avg. 16.5) Tot. Obs.= 40,348		
-Var(Level-1 Error)	0.35		
-Var(Level-2 Error)	0.39		

(Panel level-variance component)	
- ρ(Level-2 Error / Total Error)	0.56
-LR Test (H_0: Level-2 Errorr=0)	χ^2 20988.08 p=<0.000
-AIC	37719.28
-BIC	37986.04

Tables show unstandardized beta coefficients; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Source: DLES 2016