

LSE European Institute inaugural lecture



Blaming Europe? Citizens, Governments and the Media

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LSE INAUGURAL LECTURE - EUROCRISIS@LSE LECTURE

Blaming Europe? Citizens, Governments and the Media

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THE LONDON SCHOOL
OF ECONOMICS AND
POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Blaming Europe?



Questions

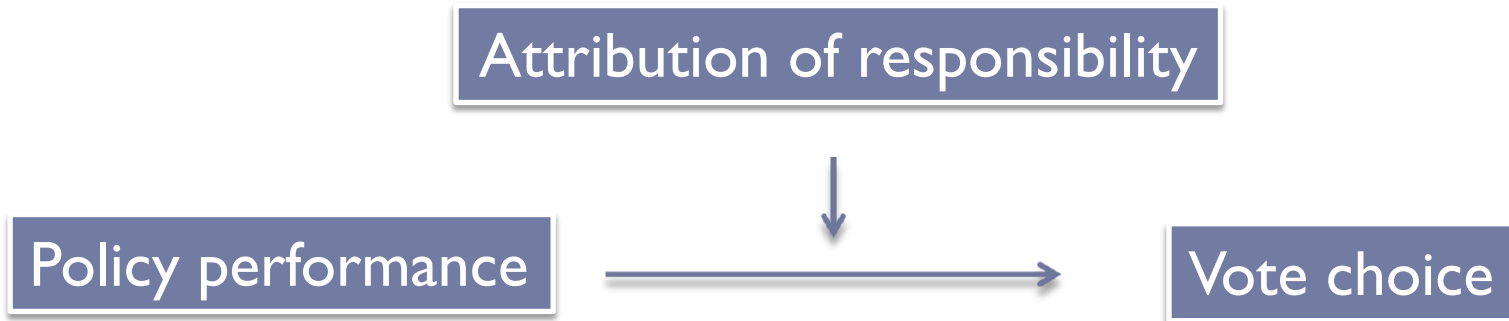
- 1) How do citizens assign blame to the European Union?
- 2) Do the media and governments shift blame to the EU?
- 3) Can citizens hold the EU to account for policy outcomes?



Attribution and Accountability

“Democracy is the process by which people choose the man who'll get the blame.”

- Bertrand Russell

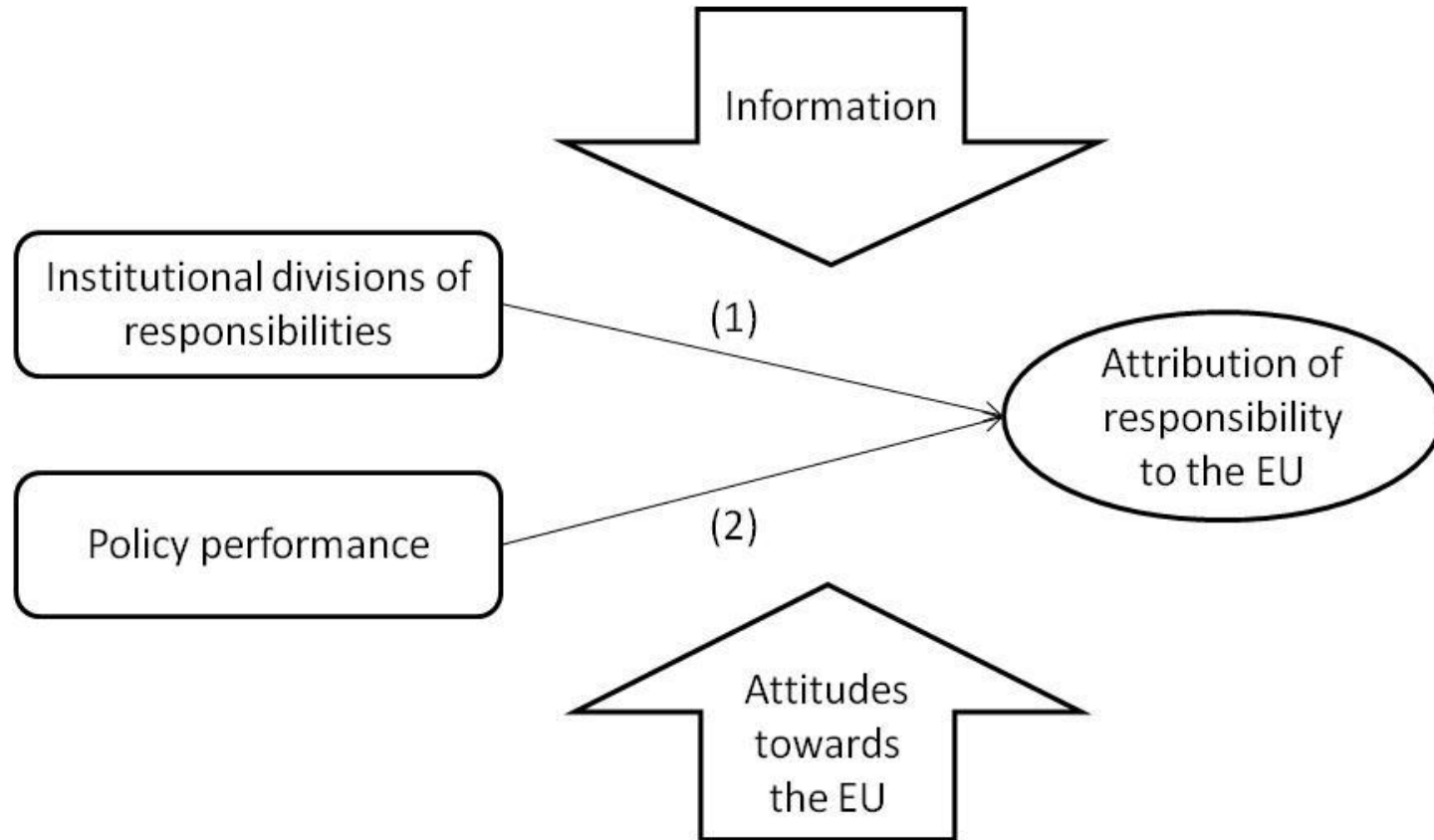


How do citizens assign blame?

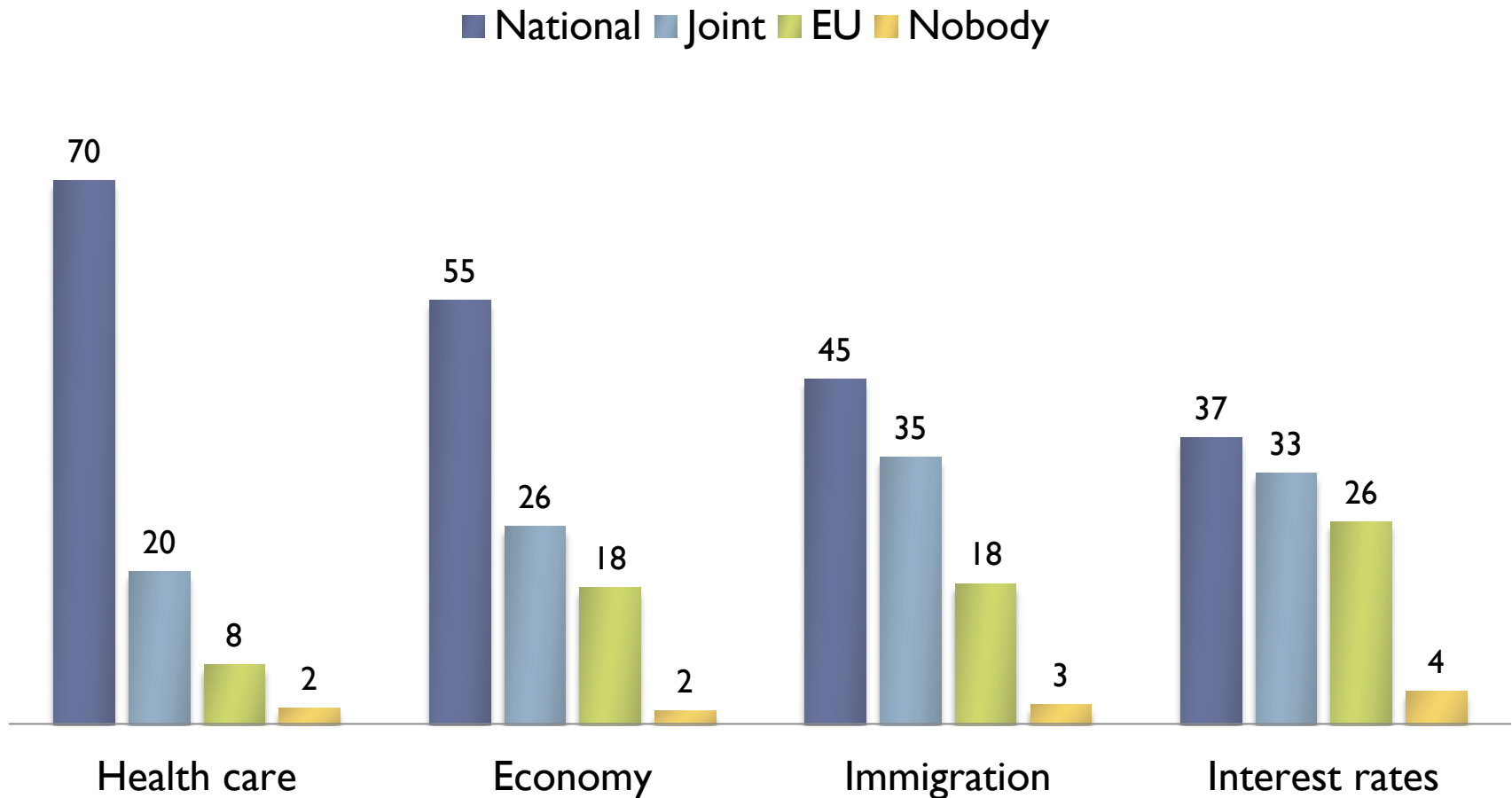
- ▶ *Institutional reality versus individual biases?*
- ▶ Attribution of blame should reflect the division of responsibility across levels of government
 - ▶ Especially when information is available
- ▶ But citizens also rely on in-group biases (EU attitudes)
 - ▶ Selective attribution of blame: Europhiles absolve the EU of blame, whereas Eurosceptics blame the EU for poor performance



How do citizens assign blame?

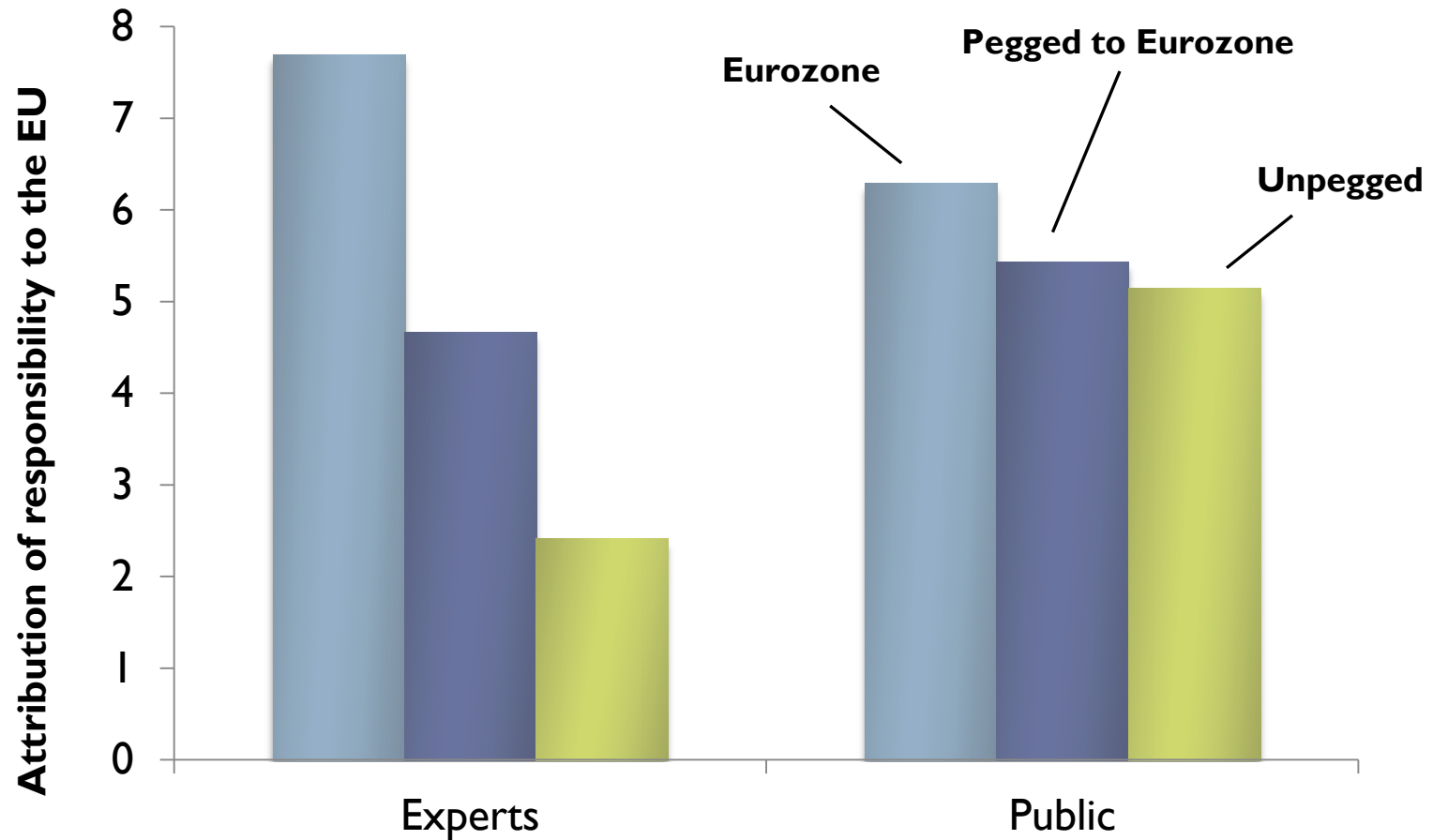


Who is responsible?



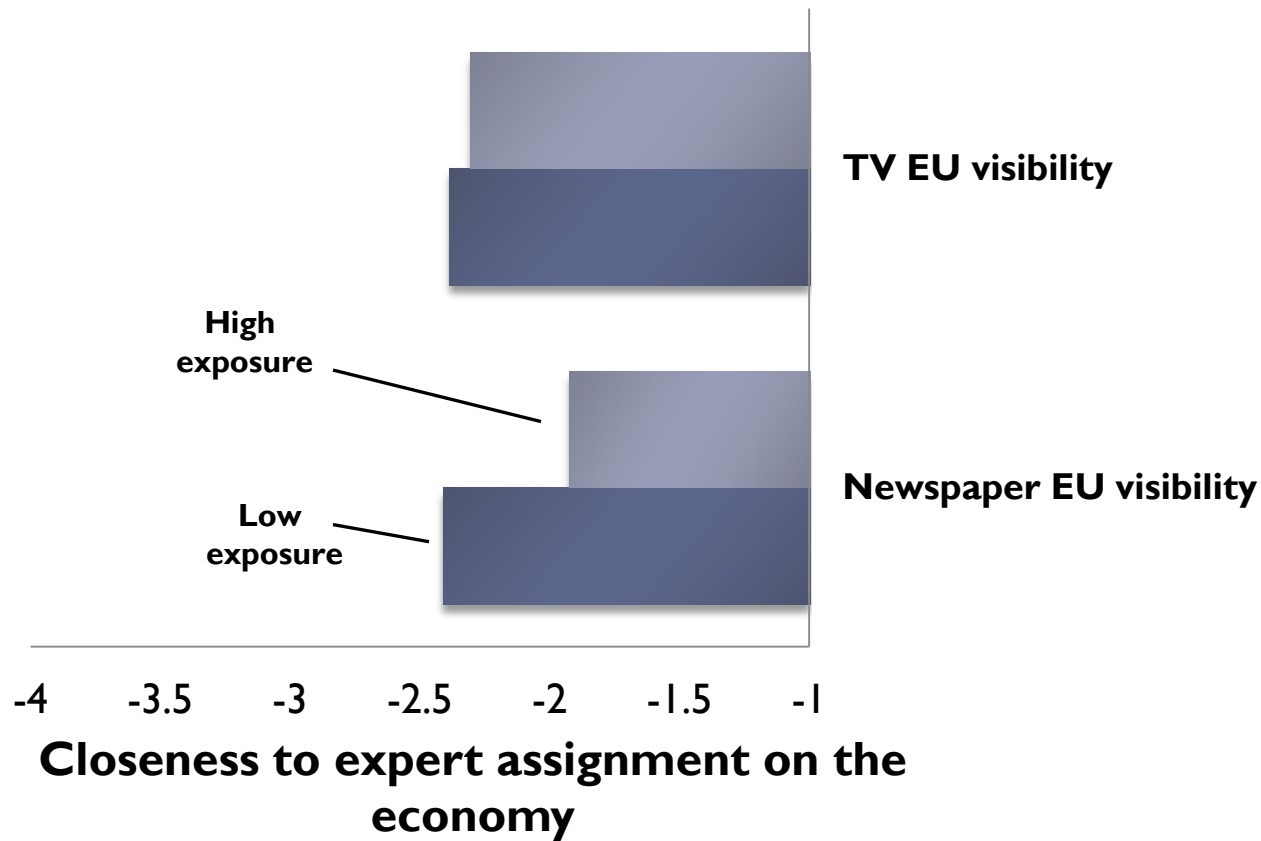
▶ Source: European Election Studies 2009 (N=27,000)

Responsibility for interest rates

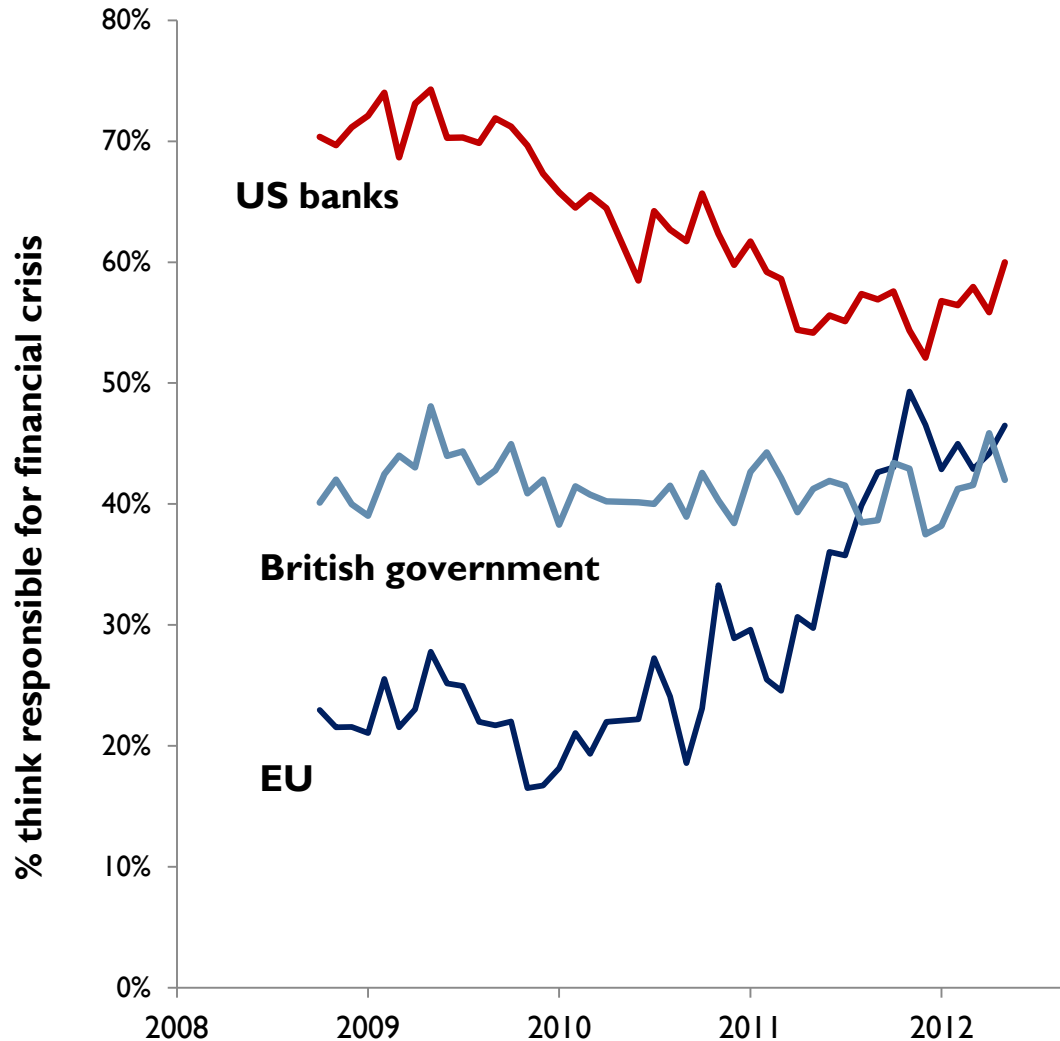


Impact of media coverage on the EU

► When do citizens get it right?

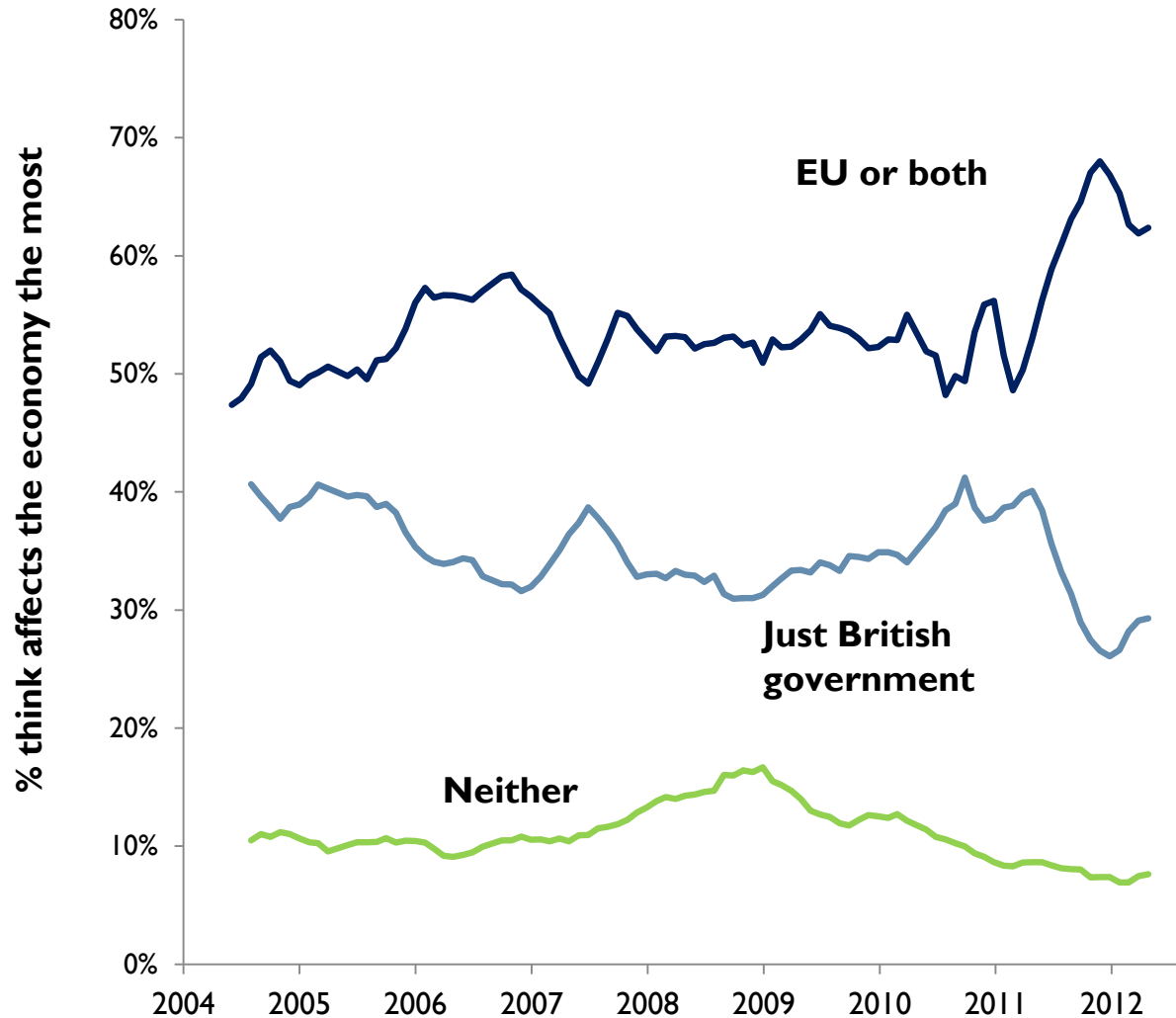


Responsibility for the financial crisis (UK)



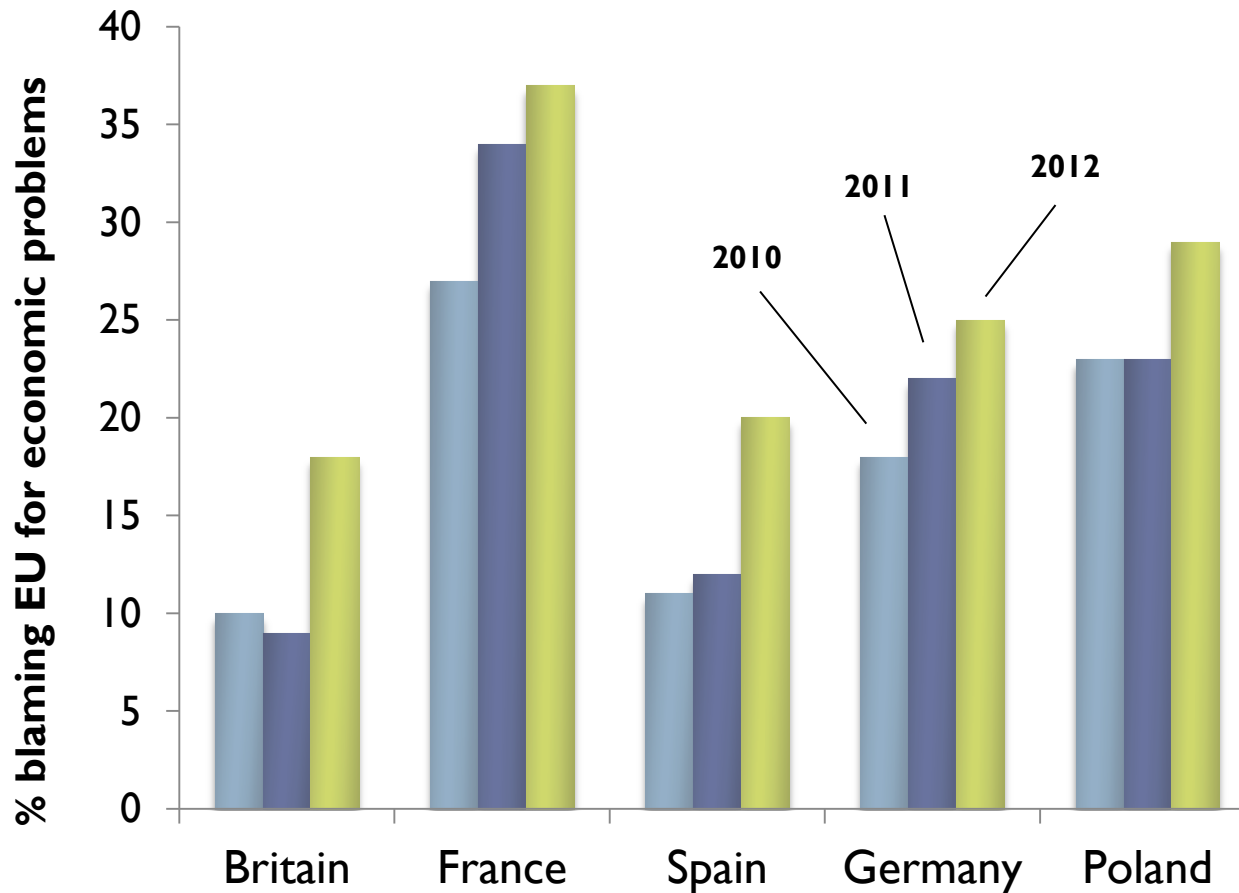
Source: British Election Study, 2008-2012

Responsibility for the economy (UK)



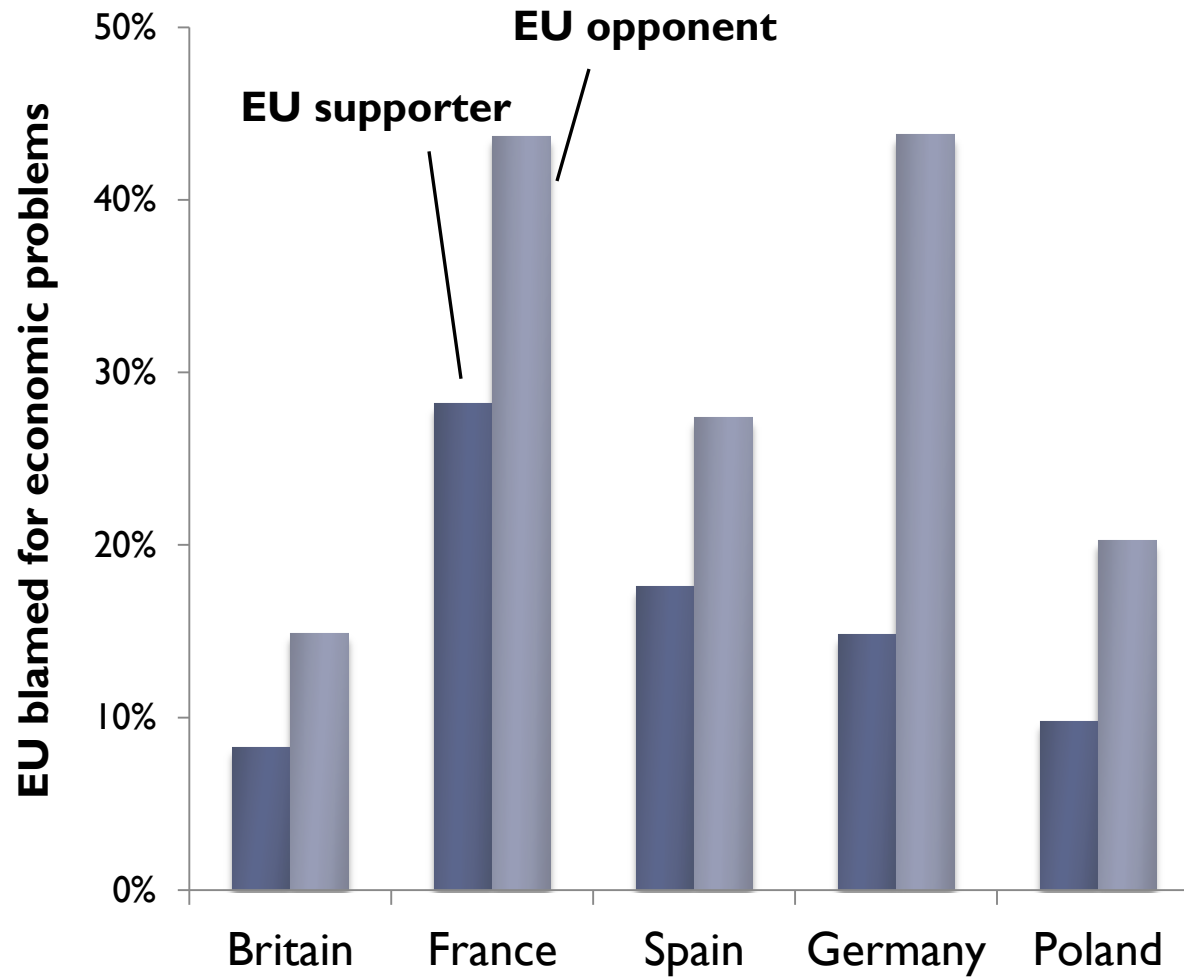
Source: British Election Study, 2004-2012

Blaming the EU for economic problems



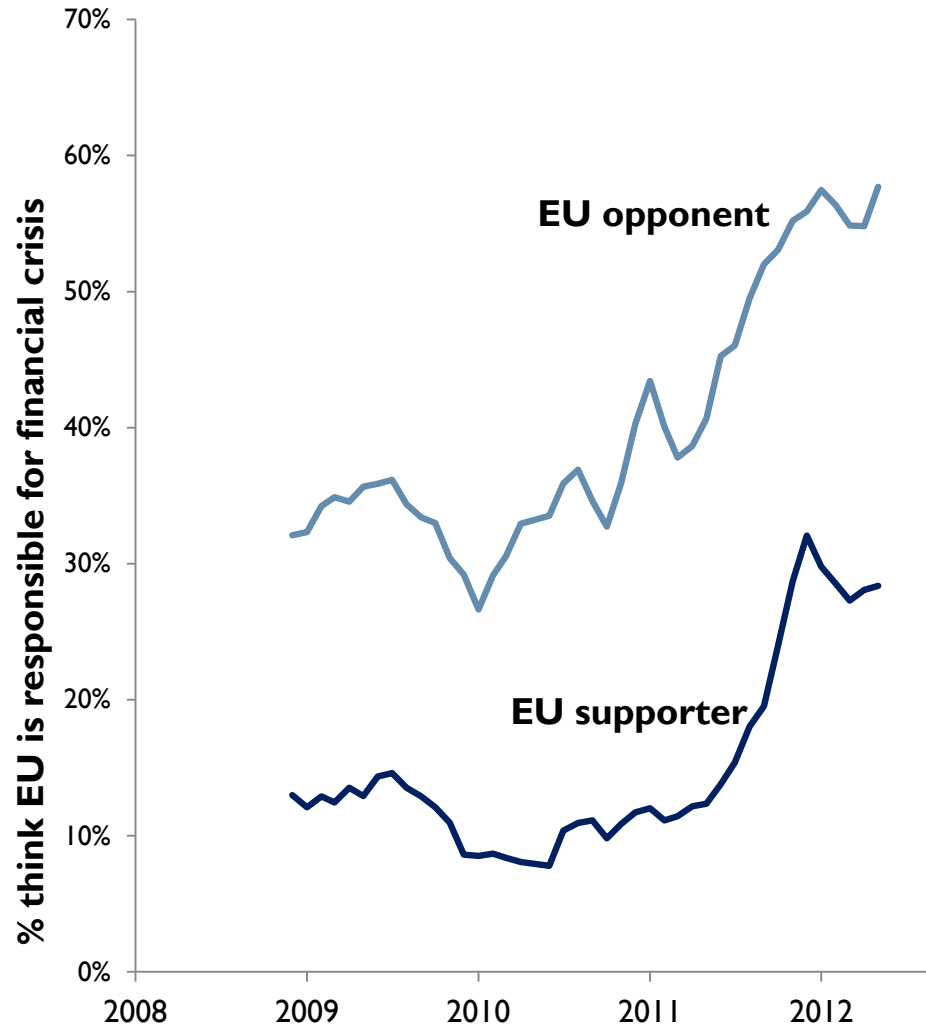
Source: PEW survey data 2010, 2011 & 2012

Selective attribution of blame in the crisis



Source: PEW survey data 2011

Selective attribution of blame for the crisis (UK)



Summary:

How do citizens assign blame?

- ▶ Citizens' attribution of responsibility to the EU reflects the institutional and political context
 - ▶ More blame of the EU as the euro crisis has unfolded
 - ▶ Newspaper consumption makes citizens better able to assign responsibility, and high levels of media coverage reduces biases
- ▶ Selective attribution: blame also driven by attitudes towards the EU



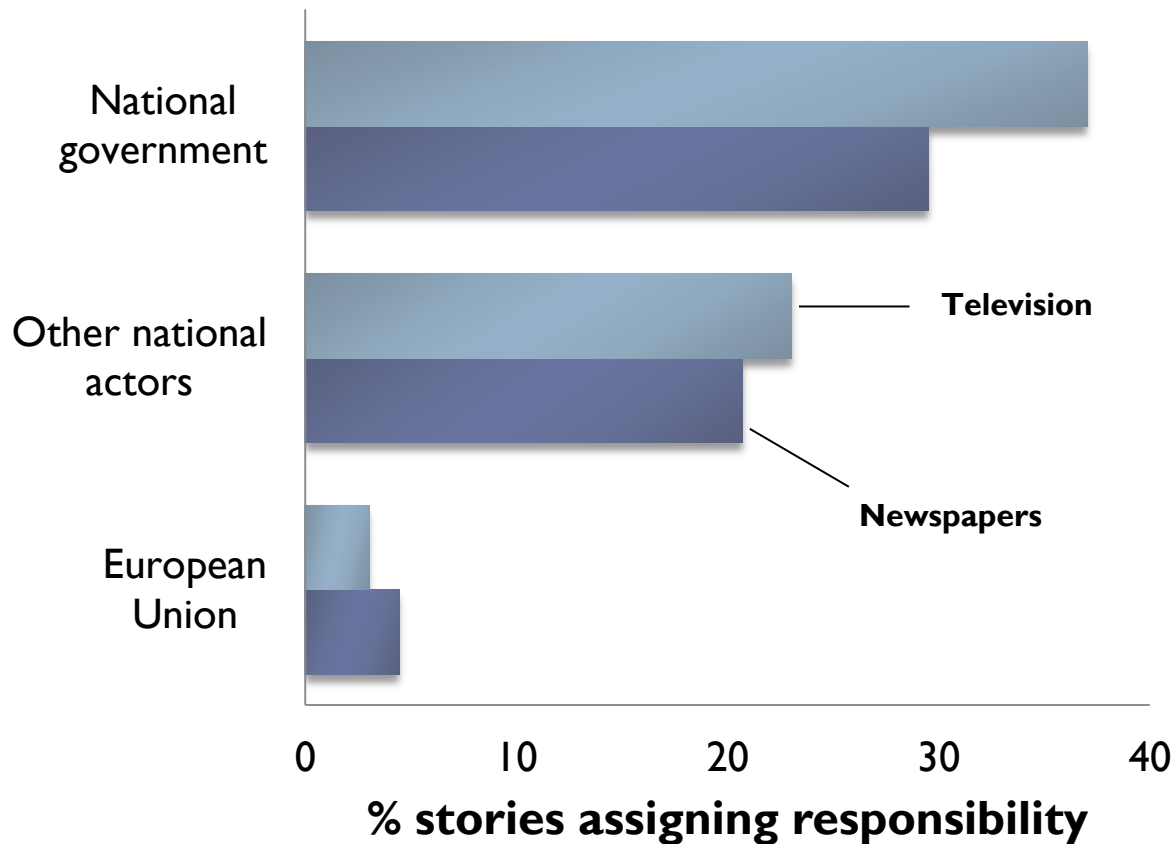
The Blame Game?

- ▶ To what extent do national governments and the national media assign blame to the EU?

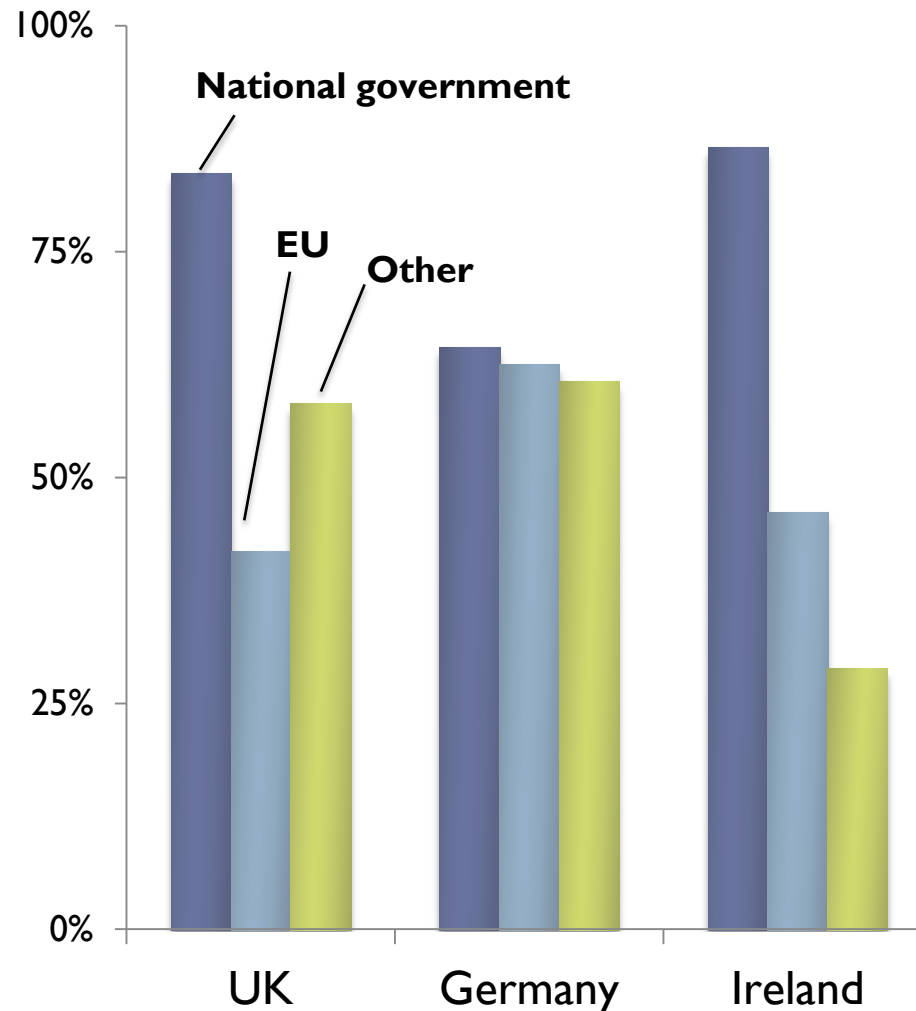


Media blame attribution for the economy

Assignment of responsibility for the economy, 2009

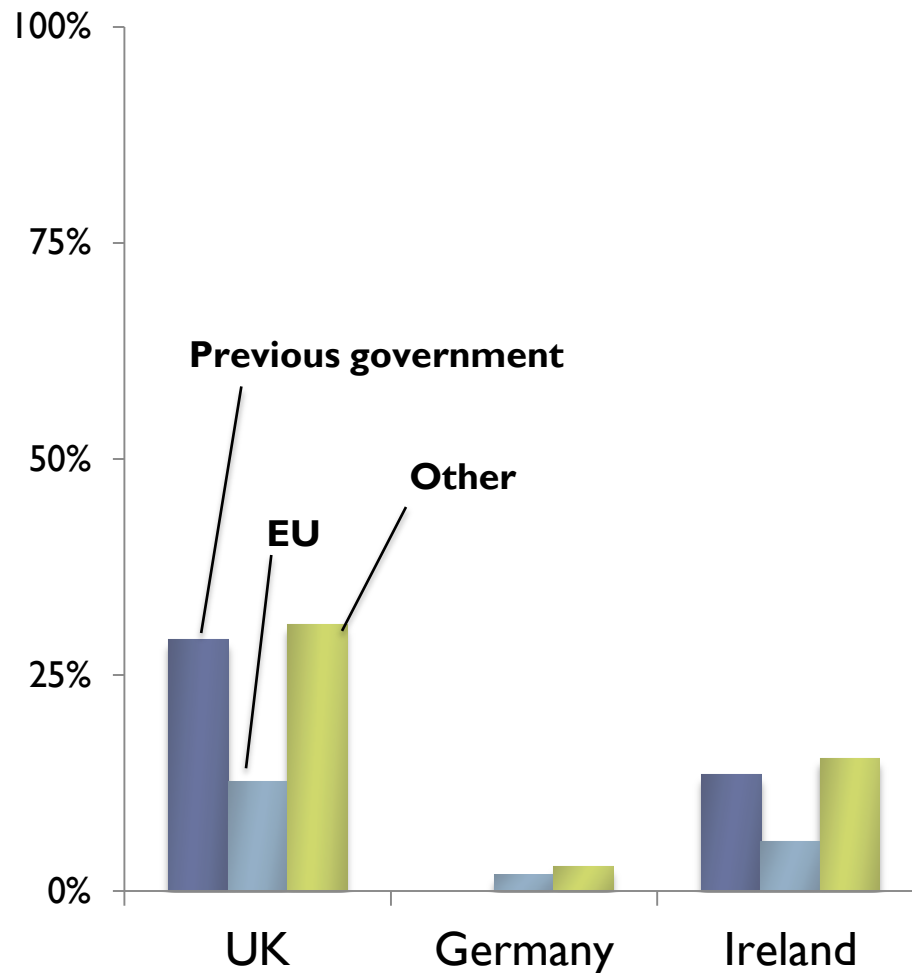


The Crisis: who is credited by governments?



Source: Content analysis of all PM speeches on the economy, 2008- 2012

The Crisis: who is blamed by governments?



► Source: Content analysis of all PM speeches on the economy, 2008- 2012

Summary:

Who do the media and governments blame?

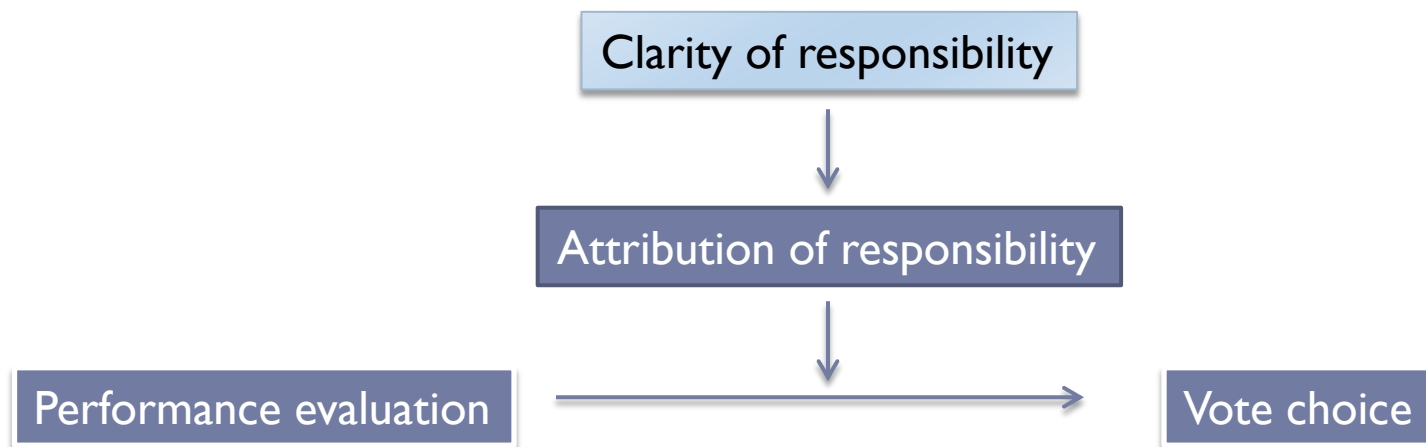
- ▶ The media covers the EU, but policy-specific coverage is less common, and attribution of responsibility to the EU is rare
- ▶ Heads of Governments very rarely blame the EU, even during the crisis. Instead we find:
 - ▶ **Diffusion of responsibility** – joint European responsibility (“we are all in this together”)
 - ▶ **Credit taking** – national governments claiming credit for policy outcomes



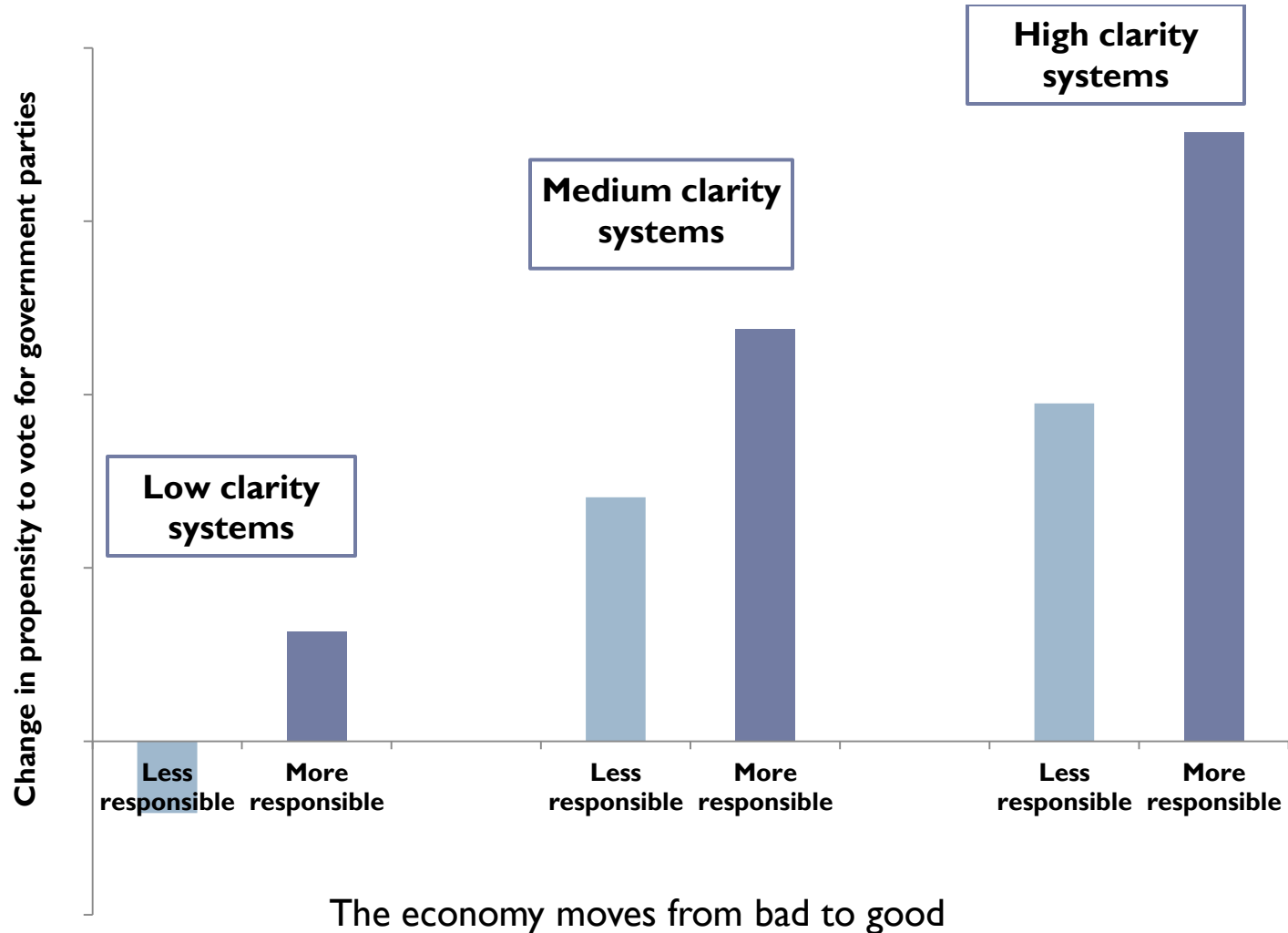
Can citizens hold the EU to account for policy outcomes?

▶ **Accountability:**

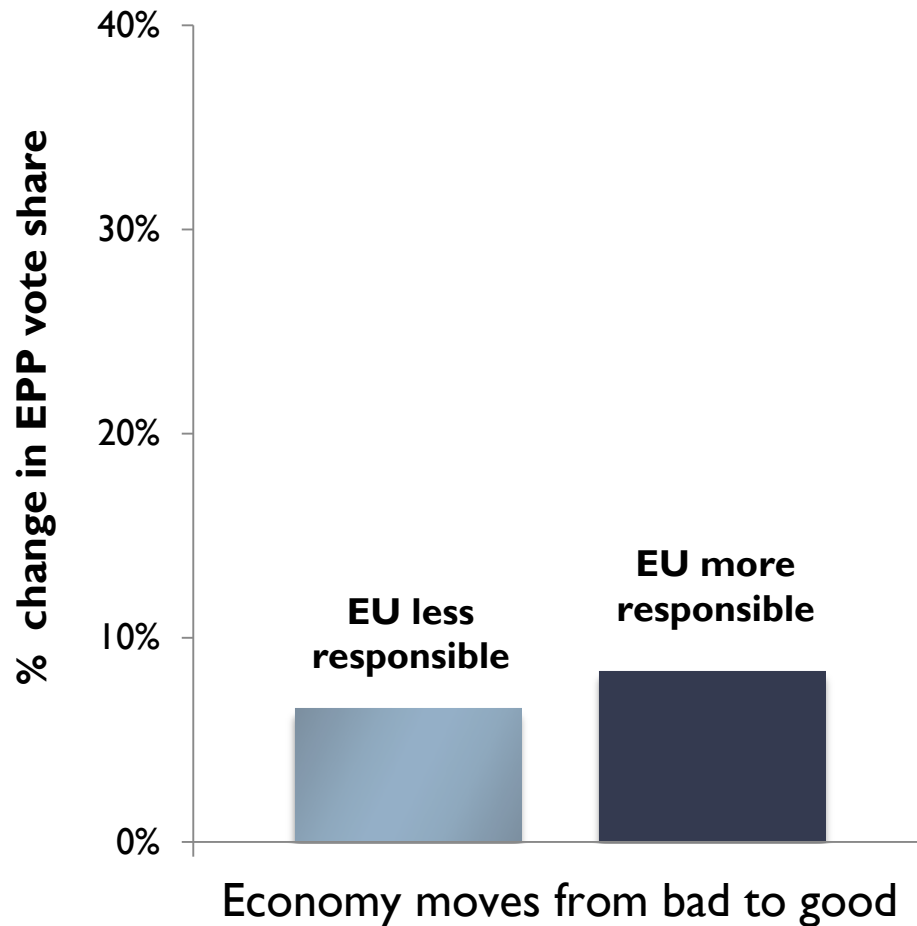
- ▶ Punishing or rewarding governments for policy outcomes that is their responsibility
- ▶ Greater performance voting when there is “clarity of responsibility” ~ identifiable government



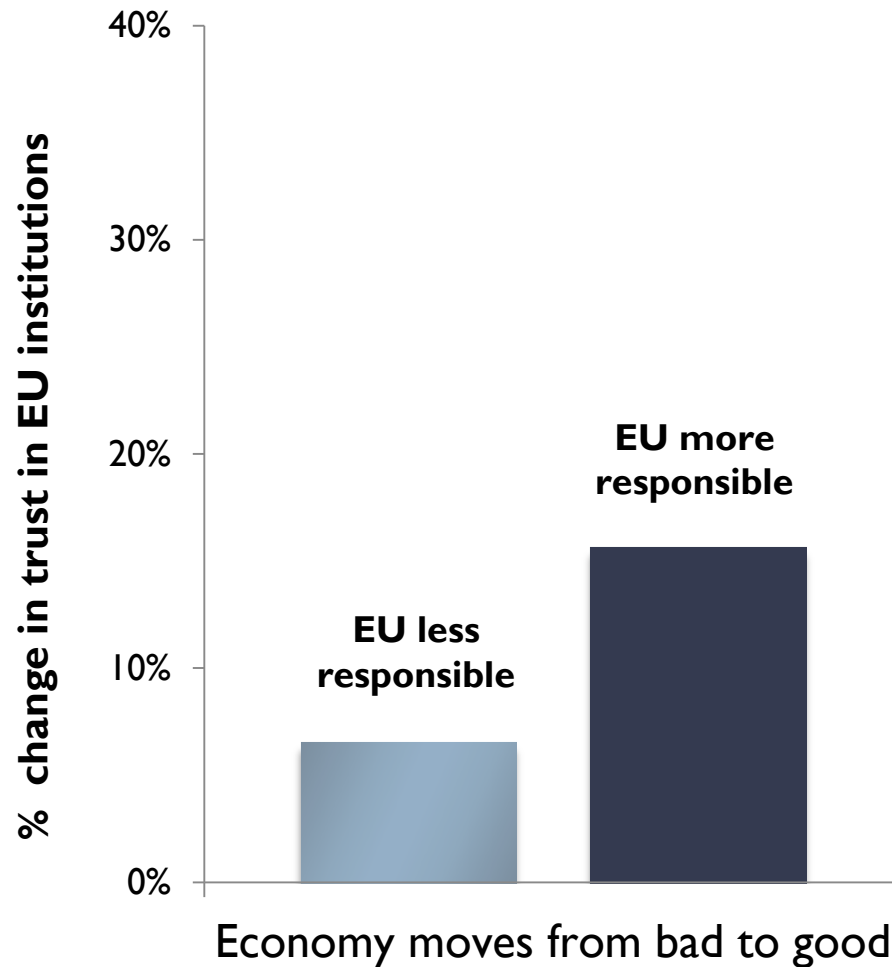
Accountability in a national context



Accountability in European elections



Effect on trust in the EU



Summary:

Can citizens hold the EU to account?

- ▶ There is no evidence that citizens punish or rewards MEPs for performance that the EU is deemed to be responsible for:
 - ▶ The EU lacks a clearly identifiable “government party” in the EP that voters can punish and reward
 - ▶ No clear link between the European Parliament vote and EU executive
- ▶ However, when citizens blame the EU for poor performance that leads to lower levels of trust in EU institutions



Implications

- ▶ Lack of mechanisms for accountability in the EU
- ▶ Reduced accountability for national governments
- ▶ Consequences for the legitimacy of the EU
- ▶ Aggravated by the crisis



Possible solutions to accountability deficit

- ▶ **Greater institutional clarity**
 - ▶ Clearer divisions of competences
- ▶ **Greater government clarity**
 - ▶ Government-Opposition politics in the European Parliament
 - ▶ Stronger link between parliamentary majority and the Commission or a directly elected Commission President
- ▶ **Greater transparency to make it more difficult for national politicians to diffuse blame/claim credit**

“A fundamental deepening of the EMU must go hand in hand with greater democratic legitimacy. Wherever new competences are created at European level or closer coordination of national policies is established, full democratic control has to be ensured.”

Future of Europe Group (EU Foreign Ministers), 17 Sep 2012



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