

Measuring Solidarity – Towards a Survey Question on Fiscal Solidarity in the European Union

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Abstract: Comparing solidarity attitudes between EU citizens is significant in the context of European integration, since solidarity - or rather the lack thereof - has been used in public debates and recent studies as an explanation for a variety of crises. In these academic studies, the measurement of solidarity and its conceptualization strongly differ and that prevents us from evaluating the long-term existence of solidarity in the EU or its effectiveness. This article intends to narrow this gap by starting a theoretical discussion on a possible standardized question on fiscal solidarity in the EU. To do so, it examines existing questions and borrows from the research on social trust and survey methodology. Then, it proposes a new fiscal solidarity question, of which its reliability and validity is assessed via the Survey Quality Predictor, a computer program to evaluate survey questions. This article argues that the new fiscal solidarity question should mention the term solidarity and include the solidarity practice defined as permanent financial help. Once established, a standard solidarity question will strengthen the comparability of solidarity in continued social science research.

Introduction

The biggest challenges of the European Union (EU) today - including redistribution, inequality, and identity - touch upon the concept of solidarity (De Schutter, 2017; Ross, 2020). Historically, practices of solidarity in the EU integration process have taken place primarily in the form of the Regional Policy, developed to ease economic integration. After the Eurozone and migration crisis, the COVID-19 health crisis brought the issue of solidarity in the EU to the forefront once again. While the first national reflexes in Spring 2020 led to the unilateral closing of borders and fights over medical supplies between Member States - summarized by Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* as 'Ugly Europe' (La Repubblica, 2020) - the EU institutions tried to counterbalance this tension by emphasizing the existing solidarity between Member States in treating patients, sharing medical supplies across the EU and the repatriation of more than 600,000 Europeans stranded abroad (European Commission, 2020a). The main efforts of the EU lay in securing an extraordinary budgetary package, which aimed to address the economic grievances of the southern States including Italy or Spain. The package was initially

blocked by the ‘Frugal Four’ – an informal group of fiscally conservative Member States: Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Austria (and occasionally Finland) - which were then accused of displaying a lack of solidarity (Zerka, 2020). Eventually, the Member States agreed on that budgetary package, which was consequently called the ‘Solidarity Leap’ by Thierry Breton, the Commissioner for the Internal Market (European Commission 2020b, p.1). For the first time in history, the Next Generation EU (NGEU)¹ fund could allow the Commission to take on supranational debts by borrowing funds on the capital markets.

Solidarity in the EU has been studied on many levels, focusing on its conceptual development (Banting and Kymlicka, 2017; Habermas, 2013; Sangiovanni, 2013) or emphasizing the practice of solidarity (Grimmel, 2017; Rothstein, 2017). Many studies state a crisis of European solidarity (Delanty, 2008; Habermas, 2013), yet without explaining how the quantity of solidarity has been measured or which period it is being compared with. These questions are partly addressed by public opinion studies that analyze the attitudes of EU citizens towards solidarity (e.g.: Ciornei and Recchi, 2017; Gerhards et al., 2019; Ferrera and Burelli, 2019; Verhaegen, 2018; Díez Medrano et al., 2019). Nonetheless, conceptualization and measurement of solidarity differ greatly. Most of these works use an ad-hoc operationalization of solidarity which cannot generally be applied beyond a particular study or specific population.

To date, a standardized solidarity survey question has not been developed by academic studies or social science surveys, and using different questions to measure solidarity has led to problems with comparability. There is still little evidence if, over time, there has been an increase or decrease of solidarity in the EU. As argued by Kankaraš and Moors (2009, p. 557), the validity of comparative attitudes towards solidarity among European citizens is largely taken for granted, and rarely tested. As a

result, the comparative study of solidarity within the EU is still far from delivering relevant results. This article intends to narrow this gap by proposing a question to measure fiscal solidarity among EU Member States.

In this article, I focus on fiscal solidarity, which together with transnational solidarity, sits at the center of public opinion research on the EU, which tends to focus on a solidarity practice built on rationalist rather than altruistic logic. I argue that a new question should explicitly include the term ‘solidarity’, name the solidarity practice in form of financial help and clearly define fiscal solidarity as a permanent instrument based on burden-sharing, not just as ad-hoc help in times of crisis.

As a starting point, this article discusses how solidarity appears in the different issue areas of EU Treaties, pointing to a fundamental rift between rhetorical commitments to solidarity and its practice by the EU and its Member States. It is followed by a discussion of the concept of solidarity. Further to this, the scales of solidarity in the EU and the different levels on which solidarity have been studied are reviewed. After showing the shortcomings in the measurement of solidarity in public opinion research and survey questions, this article turns to the research on social trust. It explains the success of social trust as an attitude variable in social science and examines which aspects of it could be utilized for analysis of solidarity. This article then uses recent advances in survey methodology to improve the wording of the fiscal solidarity question. It also tests the newly developed question, answer categories, and scale, using the Survey Quality Predictor (SQP), a computer program that uses an automatic coding procedure to evaluate survey questions (Sarıs et al., 2011).

The contributions to the political science and sociological school of thought are threefold. First, it is a pioneering article which focuses on a theoretical discussion of a possible fiscal solidarity question. It is one of the first articles to discuss questions of the

measurement of solidarity more broadly through its address of the shortcomings in the operationalization of the solidarity concept in the EU integration process. Finally, this article gives an overview of existing solidarity and trust questions in Eurobarometer, not seen before. While remaining at the micro-level, the findings of this article could help future studies to examine whether European citizens are willing to support fiscal solidarity towards other EU Member States and their citizens. The ultimate aim of this article is to open up the academic discussion on the measurement of solidarity in the EU via survey questions.

EU legislation, EU crisis and Solidarity

Solidarity has been mentioned in the preamble of all European Treaties since the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951. Despite this, it should be noted that it is difficult to find empirical evidence that solidarity was one of the leading forces at any moment of the EU integration process. Further, scholars find ambiguity considering solidarity in the EU Treaties and its interpretation. While some academics argue that Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) cites solidarity as one of the EU's values (Domurath, 2013; Closa and Maatsch, 2014), Ross (2020) emphasizes that solidarity appears in Article 2 but is not listed as a value.

The promotion of solidarity among the Member States is mentioned in Article 3.3 of the TEU: while focusing on the internal market it emphasizes that the EU 'shall promote economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity among Member States'. The Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund, where the EU transfers huge amounts of money to its economically weakest States and regions are an answer to that. In the EU budget between 2014 and 2020, the part on 'Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion' presented 34 percent of the total amount (European Commission, 2018).

There is some mention of solidarity in treaties such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (e.g. Art 24.2. TEU) or the so-called ‘solidarity clause’ in Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU). The latter in particular is often perceived as committing to solidarity, for example, it states, ‘The Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster’. However, in the legislative EU framework, we also find many more conflictive areas. Solidarity encompasses the policies of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice (AFSJ).² Yet, one of the most important instruments of the AFSJ, the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) came under enormous stress during the 2015 migration crisis. Instead of the fair sharing of responsibility, the CEAS lay the burden on the southern Member States, which were overwhelmed with the handling of the asylum procedures and control of the external borders. The most heavily affected states such as Greece and Italy fought for a temporary relocation scheme for asylum seekers and were backed by the President of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, who stated that ‘a true European refugee and asylum policy requires solidarity to be permanently anchored in our policy approach and our rules’ (European Commission, 2015, p.1). However, EU Member States from the Visegrád Group (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia) openly rejected this solution. They justified the non-compliance with various decisions of the European Council with an argument that solidarity is a ‘flexible concept’ (Visegrád Group, 2016, p.1).

There are also other areas, where the Member States are in permanent conflict. Article 122.1 (TFEU) states that in the area of energy, decisions should be taken ‘in the spirit of solidarity between the Member States’ (also Article 194, TFEU). Here, for example, the Member States from Eastern and Central Europe (ECE) have called on the

other Member States to show solidarity, in particular considering the EU's position towards common projects with the Russian Federation (e.g. Nord Stream I and Nord Stream II). One of these numerous interventions took place in 2016 when eight governments of the ECE States signed a letter objecting to the Nord Stream II project. The Nord Stream pipeline ships gas directly over the North Sea and so avoiding the territory of the ECE states, which has resulted in the ECE States losing out on corresponding transport fees. In the objection letter to the proposed expansion of the pipeline, the main argument questioned the supply security, the compatibility of the project with EU law, and the principles of the Energy Union (Sytas, 2016). Calls upon the principle of solidarity were also omnipresent in the Eurozone crisis, expressed by both central actors such as Germany and Greece (Grimmel, 2020).

In all three cases, we see an essential fracture between the commitments to solidarity in the Treaties and the practice of solidarity by the EU and its Member States. However, it should be recognized that the concept of solidarity in the Treaties may be difficult to grasp not only for Member States. Neither the preamble nor the articles of the Treaties provide any legal definition. There is no standard definition of solidarity throughout interdisciplinary approaches of social sciences. Solidarity research reflects highly multidimensional approaches from different fields of research which has led to a variety of conceptualization efforts.

The Concept of Solidarity

Durkheim (1984) was the first to suggest the notion of solidarity as the possible glue that binds societal groups together and prevents them from disintegrating. He distinguished between 'mechanical solidarity', the social cohesiveness of small, undifferentiated groups, and 'organic solidarity', the cohesion of societies differentiated by a relatively

complex division of labor. Durkheim saw solidarity above all as an outcome of social interactions, pointing to an important element of solidarity - its boundedness. Further, Weber (1978) saw solidarity above all as a subjective feeling of 'belonging together' that leads to social action. This group attachment is the first definition of solidarity where solidarity is a feeling, tied to a community or group, whose members are expected to support each other. This feeling of closeness can be based on shared values, norms, or beliefs.

The second meaning of solidarity is solidarity as a practice, for example, the supportive behavior or applied support within (usually closed) national communities (Rorty, 1989). There is a discussion if these solidarity practices must be voluntary and altruistic (affective solidarity) or can be based on self-interest (calculating solidarity) (Paskov and Dewilde, 2012).³ Grimmel (2020) claims the former, arguing that practices of solidarity must be based on selfless motives. When there is coercion from others to apply solidarity, or self-interest seeing these practices as a possible future investment, this cannot be described as solidarity, but something else. This type of solidarity practice could be best explained as exceptional 'explosions of solidarity' (Baumann, 2013, p.1), during unique events or times of crisis.

On the other hand, Hechter (1988) argues that if individuals have invested in a group, then they are more eager to show solidarity. Here, reciprocity helps to explain solidarity as a forward-looking expectation that can help to maintain solidarity practices. Habermas (2013, p. 9) argues that in the EU, at the very least to show solidarity is a political act, and should be not seen as synonymous with the term 'selflessness' or with the term 'justice', be it in its moral or legal sense. Paskov and Dewilde (2012) argue that the distinction between calculating and affective considerations is delicate.

Therefore, the idea that people can be influenced by an affective feeling toward others but also by rational motivations at the same time cannot be excluded (also Weber, 1978).

Research on Solidarity in the European Union

The research on solidarity in the EU is growing rapidly in different research areas. In the conceptual field, solidarity has been connected to values such as democracy (Niznik, 2011), equality (Kolers, 2016), identity (Risse, 2010), and reciprocity and trust (Miller, 2017). Bantling and Kymlicka (2017) connect EU solidarity above all to redistribution and financial help.

Other contributions emphasize the differentiating scales of solidarity. Sangiovanni (2013) presents a full account of EU solidarity principles for three of them: (1) national solidarity, which defines obligations among citizens and residents of Member States, (2) Member State solidarity, which defines obligations among Member States, and (3) transnational solidarity, which defines obligations among EU citizens. Gerhards et al. (2019) distinguish four forms of European solidarity: (1) fiscal solidarity (willingness to support indebted European countries financially), (2) territorial solidarity (willingness to reduce inequality between rich and poor countries), (3) welfare-state solidarity (willingness to support those in need), and (4) refugee solidarity.

The macro-structural approach to institutional solidarity in the EU remains underdeveloped (Börner, 2013; Martinsen and Vollaard, 2014). Further, there are only isolated contributions analyzing conflicts over solidarity between Member States (Knodt and Tews, 2017). Wallaschek (2018) proposes a discursive approach to solidarity building on framing approaches, which were constructed by media discourse during the migration crisis in 2015. Closa and Maatsch (2014) and Kontochristou (2014) place a

special emphasis on political elites, analyzing solidarity actions in national parliamentary debates. Bieler and Erne (2015) analyze cross-border solidarity campaigns such as European labor movements, while Della Porta (2018) examines civic protests as practices of solidarity.

In general, solidarity research is a topic conducted by public opinion research, focusing on the attitudes of EU citizens. While usually these works focus on fiscal or transnational solidarity, the conceptualization and measurement of solidarity differ highly, and we find varying results regarding the level of public support for solidarity actions. While Lahusen and Grasso (2018) find limited public support for EU-wide solidarity actions, other authors argue that more solidarity is found in the EU than perhaps first expected (Bremer et al., 2020; Ferrera and Burelli, 2019; Genschel and Hemerijck, 2018; Gerhards et al., 2019). These analyses, while using different operationalizations, find substantial deviation across Member States, their policy issues, and instruments. The results are often contradictory (Bremer et al., 2020; Ferrera and Burelli, 2019; Genschel and Hemerijck, 2018; Lahusen and Grasso, 2018).⁴ Specifically focusing on public opinion in the EU, the work of Genschel and Hemerijck (2018, p.4) found that many survey participants when questioned on support for an over-indebted Member State, expressed confusion and ambiguity. This further underlines the enormous complexity of survey questions for public opinion research that this article addresses.

The Measurement of Solidarity

With nearly no analysis that exclusively examines the questions of solidarity measurements (except for Soler et al., 2018), the few studies which attempt to untangle such questions, do not offer a reliable blueprint. When analyzing solidarity in the EU, some scholars examined it as part of the social cohesion or social capital camp; measuring

it by borrowing sets of indicators such as social trust, voluntary work, or public engagement (e.g. Berman and Phillips, 2004). Others have constructed measurement models from items found in large-scale comparative surveys in particular the 1999/2000 wave of the European Values Study (EVS), which offered a set of questions in which participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they are ‘concerned about the living conditions of other people’. In this research, solidarity is understood as being directed towards the members of a certain group (e. g. Halman, 2001; Paskov and Dewilde, 2012). Abela (2004), when analyzing the relationship between citizens’ current religious values and the practice of solidarity, used these questions to build his model of socio-economic solidarities. Checking for possible inaccuracies of this approach, Kankaraš and Moors (2009) found through multiple-group latent-class factor analysis that it allows for a valid comparison of solidarity attitudes between countries.

Recently, other scholars have started exploring survey questions, which have been used in the framework of different EU projects. Gerhards et al. (2019), when developing the aforementioned four forms of European solidarity, relied on the Transnational European Solidarity Survey (TESS) - a unique general population survey carried out in 13 EU countries in 2016 - which used 21 items to measure general attitudes towards solidarity. Most relevantly within this article is the conceptualization and measurement of fiscal solidarity. The concept is defined as citizens’ willingness to financially support crisis-affected European countries. They measure it in the national, EU, and global context with the question on the EU being:

In times of crisis, [COUNTRY] should give financial help to other EU countries facing severe economic difficulties.

Other scholars have relied on data from EU institutions. Reinl (2020), when studying multiple facets of European solidarity and its link to Eurosceptic sentiments, integrated some data from the Eurobarometer between 2009 to 2015 focusing on survey questions on the support of Eurobonds, binding asylum quotas within the EU, and support for financial assistance provided for EU countries facing high asylum flows. Also, Ciornei and Recchi (2017, p.6) when measuring international solidarity use a Eurobarometer question on support of Eurobonds, which ‘captures individual opinion on the pooling of sovereign issuance among the Member States and the sharing of associated revenue flows and debt servicing costs’.

Standardly Eurobarometer surveys are produced every few months with data from all EU Member States with variables that have a solid empirical time basis. However compared with surveys such as the EVS, survey research on solidarity in the Eurobarometer is widely underdeveloped. This is surprising as EU institutions while having never established a standardized solidarity question, have historically questioned the idea, for example in the European Communities Study (1973) and the Eurobarometer 6 (1976):

If one of the countries of the Common Market found itself in major economic difficulties, do you feel that other countries, including (your own), should help it or not?

In the Eurobarometer 15 (1981), a similar question was asked in the context of the European Community (EC):

If one of the countries of the European Community other than our own found itself in major economic difficulties, do you feel that other countries, including (your own), should help it or not?

Both questions do not explicitly use the term ‘solidarity’ and focus on the logic of help between EC countries. Here not only is a general disposition to help others measured, but also potential target groups – ‘other countries’ - are listed. Neither of these questions were repeated in later Eurobarometer surveys. More recently, the Eurobarometer 74.1 (2010), the Eurobarometer 76.1 (2011), and the European Election Study (2014) used the following question:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: In times of crisis, it is desirable for (OUR COUNTRY) to give financial help to another EU member state facing severe economic and financial difficulties?

This question has different characteristics. First, it asks about the desirability of fiscal solidarity, focusing on financial help to other Member States. Second, it measures help not within a framework of a more permanent system of burden-sharing, but during a serious crisis. Besides that, the question does not ask about any support for a bailout which could be seen as a possibly lucrative investment (Verhaegen, 2018).

The key advantage of this question is that it has been used by some of the recent works on EU solidarity and redistribution (Kleider and Stoeckel, 2019; Lengfeld et al., 2015; Verhaegen, 2018), also in the context of survey experiments (Kuhn et al., 2018). This question could make such studies, at least in parts, comparable. At the same time, this question reveals an important conceptual shortcoming. While in some studies authors

connect this question to a solidarity practice (Verhaegen, 2018, also the similar question by Gerhards et al., 2019), it is also used in others' studies which refrain from using the term solidarity and instead opt to measure public support for fiscal transfers or European fiscal integration (Daniele and Geys, 2015; Kleider and Stoeckel, 2019). This highlights the potential failure of questions to date. If the term solidarity itself is not used in the question, do responders relate to the concept of solidarity? Is here solidarity being measured or something else? In the following section, I will examine how this question could be improved after contrasting it with social trust and survey methodology research.

The Social Trust Questions

The purpose of this section is to show why social trust is a widely popular variable in public opinion research and which part of its successful application can be used when formulating the new solidarity question. Despite some contradictions on the exact meaning of social trust (Newton, 2001), its popularity – compared to other variables such as reciprocity, social cohesion, or social capital - widely relies on the fact that most studies use the same social trust survey question, widely developed by Rosenberg (1956):

Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?

This question is successful for several reasons. Since Almond and Verba (1963) included it in The Civic Culture Study, it has been widely applied in general surveys such as the European Social Survey (ESS), the World Values Survey (WVS), and the EVS. Further, as Uslaner (2002) has shown, the question works reasonably well to measure generalized

trust. Notably, this question of attitude explicitly includes the term ‘trust’, which can then be easily identified by the respondents. Finally, its former dichotomous response scale which included the answers ‘You can trust most people’ and ‘You can never be too careful when dealing with others’ has been improved in the ESS survey which uses an 11 point-answers scale, which is likely to lead to higher reliability and validity.⁵

Despite its successful implementation, Delhey et al. (2011) point to some ambiguity around the term ‘most people’. It predominantly connotes out-groups and the radius of ‘most people’ varies considerably across countries. In the EU context, ambiguity is avoided since the respondents can point to different nationalities when questioned on ‘Trust in people from other countries’. In the Eurobarometer 6 (1976) or Eurobarometer 25 (1986), the following question was asked:

Now, I would like to ask about how much you would trust people from different countries. For each country please say whether, in your opinion, they are in general very trustworthy, fairly trustworthy, not particularly trustworthy, or not at all trustworthy.

In later surveys such as Eurobarometer 33 (1990), the question was included and then reworded to:

Now, I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in people from various countries. For each, please tell me whether you have a lot of trust in them, some trust, not very much trust and no trust at all.

Although the trust question in the EU context is different from the standard social trust question, both use the term ‘to trust’, to ‘have trust in’, or ‘to be trustworthy’. That was

one of the reasons why the EU Trust question became popular and was considered a ‘Trends’ question between the years 1976 to 1996,⁶ being used in ten different Eurobarometer surveys (Signorelli, 2012; GESIS, 2020).

Insights from Survey Methodology Research

When thinking about improving survey questions, scholars of survey methodology have studied primarily the effects that the wording of survey questions has on the response (e.g. Presser and Schuman, 1996; Sudman and Bradburn, 1983) or guidelines about which kind of scales to use (e.g. Converse and Presser, 1986; Dillman, 2000). Recently scholars have focused more on the problem of translating concepts one wants to measure into a question (Hox, 1997; Revilla et al., 2016; Saris and Gallhofer, 2014; Smyth, 2016).

In addition, Saris et al. (2011) have created the open access Survey Quality Predictor (SQP) software which contains a large database of survey questions and their quality predictions. Measurement quality (q^2) in SQP is defined as the product of reliability (r^2) and validity (v^2), following the True Score Model (Saris and Andrews, 1991), as illustrated in Figure 1 (see Annex 1). It shows the strength of the relationship between the variable of interest and the observed answers. If this relationship is perfect, the quality is 1 while everything less than 1 is due to measurement errors. The predictions SQP2.1 (2015) provides are based on a meta-analysis of 3,483 Multitrait-Multimethod (MTMM) quality estimates explained by more than 50 formal and linguistics characteristics, such as social desirability, the balance of the request or numbers of abstract nouns (as indication of linguistic complexity).⁷

SQP allows the addition of new survey questions, new codes for formal and linguistic characteristics, and obtains quality predictions as well as suggestions for potential improvements, which can be directly applied. For the formulation of the solidarity survey question, I coded the question's characteristics to obtain its measurement quality and compared this to other existing survey questions which helps evaluating its strength. Besides that, after coding the question, the SQP shows on the result screen not only the formal and linguistic shortcomings of the newly developed survey question but also suggests potential improvements, which I have directly used.

A New Question on Fiscal Solidarity in the European Union

In the next section, a new question on fiscal solidarity in the EU is suggested. To do so, I took as a starting point the aforementioned question, which has been widely used in recent research to measure fiscal solidarity:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: In times of crisis, it is desirable for (OUR COUNTRY) to give financial help to another EU member state facing severe economic and financial difficulties?

The first part of this question is reformulated in three steps by contrasting it with the findings from the conceptual discussion, the section on the measurement of solidarity and social trust, as well as the insights from the survey methodology camp.

First, I have introduced changes based on the conceptual discussion. As mentioned in the section on social trust, the success of the social trust research lies not only in the wide acceptance of a standardized question - also described by scholars as the 'trust question' - but also that the term 'to trust' appears in both the question and the

answer scale. Therefore, I argue that an equivalent term describing the solidarity practice in form of ‘to show solidarity’ should be a part of the new question.

Besides that, I have kept the term ‘in form of financial help’ in the question. This concurs with the prevailing notion from the literature review of public opinion research, where EU solidarity means above all, redistribution and financial help (see also the conceptual discussion by Banting and Kymlicka, 2017). Bringing all these points together, I introduce the term ‘to show solidarity in the form of financial help’ in both the question and the response scale.

Second, I have removed the term ‘in times of crisis’ because of academic findings and political developments. Ciornei and Recchi (2017) argue that solidarity should not be measured in times of crises only, but instead defined as burden-sharing. Further, Wallaschek (2019, p. 261) argues that support for solidarity might be different in situations of serious crisis than during normal times. This decision is strengthened by the recent political discussion around the NGEU recovery effort, where a possible introduction of a common debt can make fiscal solidarity in the EU permanent. With that, the solidarity measured is based on self-interest of a group of people (EU), and not on the altruistic version of solidarity in times of crisis.

Third, when contrasting this question with the findings from the survey methodology, I can also address other shortcomings. As argued by Saris et al. (2010), the Agree/Disagree (A/D) rating scales are hugely popular in the social sciences, however, answers to this rating scale tend to be of low quality. Therefore, the introduction text ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement’ should be removed. The new question instead should start with the term ‘generally speaking’ - taken from the standardized social trust question template – which keeps the question broad and generic, allowing for its generalization. Besides that, the term ‘it is desirable’ is problematic

because ‘social desirability’ is considered a major source of response bias in survey research (DeMaio, 1984). The question can be improved by asking the respondent directly: ‘Do you think that...?’. Further, the phrase ‘economic and financial difficulties’, makes the question double-barrelled and should be avoided in case respondents agree or disagree with only half of the question (Sarlis and Gallhofer, 2007a, p. 65). Here, I suggest using only one term, and have selected ‘economic difficulties’ which has been already asked in former Eurobarometer questions. With all these changes considered, the following question proposed is:

Generally speaking, do you think that (OUR COUNTRY) should show solidarity in the form of financial help to another EU Member State facing severe economic difficulties?

Considering the response scale, here I also have built on the social trust research by suggesting the use of the 11-point answer scale of the trust question from the ESS. Thus, a survey participant would respond to the new fiscal solidarity question, by using the following response scale:

Please indicate on a scale from 0 to 10 if (OUR COUNTRY) should show solidarity in the form of financial help, where '0' means ‘(OUR COUNTRY) should not show solidarity in the form of financial help’ and '10' means ‘(OUR COUNTRY) should show solidarity in the form of financial help.’

To test the quality of the proposed solidarity question and its answer scale, I have used the SQP, which revealed a quality prediction of 0.708, which in this case was calculated

by the factor reliability of 0.766 multiplied by the factor validity 0.925.⁸ This quality prediction means that close to 70 percent of the variance in the observed variable comes from the variable that it should measure. It also means that close to 30 percent of the variance is an error. With that, the quality of the question is superior to the quality of the ESS social trust question, which has the quality of 0.687 (see annex 2).

Discussion

The approach presented here contributes to the recently growing interest in the empirical dimension of solidarity and proposes a new solidarity question for measuring fiscal solidarity existent in the EU. While the focus of this article is on the theoretical discussion, I hope that future research will help to evaluate if this question indeed captures fiscal solidarity. That could be done by a pre-test in the form of cognitive interviewing, where people could freely associate their thoughts when they hear this question. The next step could be fielding in the form of a large-N survey, where it could be tested whether the question succeeds in discriminating between what is then assumed to be measuring solidarity.

If once approved, would the Eurobarometer be an adequate place to position this question and make it permanent? Despite the few exceptions examined in this article, the Eurobarometer surveys widely abstain from questions on redistribution within the EU (see also Haverland et al., 2018). Nonetheless, recent academic research argues that there is growing support for solidarity in the EU and maybe the EU's cautious approach should be revised.

There is a great potential for a theoretical discussion on other questions, for example, a question on transnational solidarity or an additional question about support for the widening of future solidarity practices. Further, a question on refugee solidarity

could be considered. These could be complemented by ad-hoc surveys in cases of an EU crisis when necessary.

Future research could also focus on the development of an experimental approach, scarcely used in EU research (Kuhn et al., 2018). It could examine if it would be viable to measure solidarity by developing new lab experiments following the approach of trust and trust-games or to combine the experimental method with both a sample from the general population and the survey method itself (Ermisch et al., 2006).

Conflict of interest: I declare that no conflict of interest exists

NOTES

¹ In July 2020, EU leaders agreed on a package, which aims at rebuilding the EU after the COVID-19 pandemic by supporting above all investment in the green and digital transitions. It combines the multiannual financial framework (MFF) and an extraordinary recovery effort, Next Generation EU (NGEU) and is worth €1 824.3 billion (European Council, 2020).

² Here Article 67.2 states that the EU ‘shall frame a common policy on asylum, immigration, and external border control, based on solidarity between the Member States, which is fair towards third-country nationals’, and Article 80 stating that the implementation of the policies on border control ‘shall be governed by the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility, including its financial implications, between the Member States.

³ In a similar vein, O’Neill (1996) has distinguished between two types of solidarity. On the one hand, bounded solidarity, solidarity among members of a group. On the other hand, humanitarian solidarity (solidarity with), such as a charity or gift, which has a one-way direction.

⁴ Ferrera and Burelli (2019) show that while some practices such as increasing the EU budget to promote social policies are supported, others such as the introduction of Eurobonds have not been so popular. Further, the differences in levels of support of solidarity, namely public support for policies of redistribution and burden sharing between countries are large, where net-payers to the EU budget are less inclined towards transfers (Lahusen and Grasso, 2018). Bremer et al. (2020) measure support for the European integration of core state powers and show that horizontal transfers, in which one state sends money or credit guarantees without using EU resources, such as in the Greek rescue package, receive higher levels of support than vertical capacity-building, which creates European core state powers such as an European Monetary Fund. They also find that the EU’s Southeast is more supportive of transfers in comparison to the EU’s Northwest. Genschel and Hemerijck (2018) explain that solidarity support is highest in relation to disaster aid, but decreases step-by-step on issues of military defense, refugee burden-sharing and unemployment.

⁵ Survey research claims that response scales with more answer points have higher reliability and validity. Although there are mixed results regarding the exact number of scale points, a number between seven and 11 is considered reliable (DeCastellarnau, 2018). In this scale, a 0 reference point means ‘you cannot be too careful’ and a point 10 meaning ‘most people can be trusted’.

⁶ Scientists from the Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (GESIS) have defined ‘Trends’ questions as those that have been asked at least five times in the Eurobarometer survey (Signorelli, 2012).

⁷ For more details on the coding scheme I refer to Saris and Gallhofer (2007b, 2014).

⁸ An exact codification of this question in the Survey Quality Predictor can be found in Annex 2.

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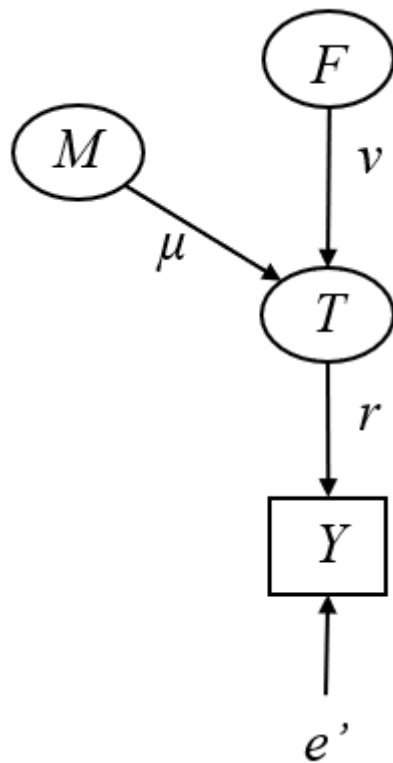
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Annex 1

Figure 1. True Score Model according to Saris and Andrews (1991)



Where F is the construct or the variable of interest (here Solidarity), M is the reaction of the respondent to the method (here 11 - point scale), T is the True Score, and Y is the observed response or variable. The validity coefficient (v) describes the effect of the construct on the True Score, μ is the method effect on the True Score, the reliability coefficient (r) is the effect of the True Score on the observed variable (Y), and e' is the random error. For further specification of the model I refer to Saris and Andrews (1991).

Annex 2

Question on Fiscal Solidarity in the EU

This question can be found at the SQP website under the link

<http://sqp.upf.edu/loadui/#questionPrediction/93595>

The exact Quality Prediction reads as follows:

Reliability = 1 - random error

r^2 0.766

Validity = 1 – method effect

v^2 0.925

Quality = reliability (r^2) x validity (v^2)

q^2 0.708

ESS Social Trust Question

The ESS Social Trust question can be found under the link:

<http://sqp.upf.edu/loadui/#questionPrediction/1084/29>

Reliability = 1 - random error

r^2 0.718

Validity = 1 – method effect

$v^2 0.957$

Quality = reliability (r^2) x validity (v^2)

$q^2 0.687$