

## **Intergovernmental cooperation networks, national policy positions and partisan ideologies: Longitudinal evidence from the Council of the European Union**

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This study describes and explains the evolution of cooperation networks among member states in the European Union. We examine the effects of similarities between states in their policy positions on specific controversial issues, the ideological orientations of their national governments, and the presence of populist parties in national governments. This builds on a prominent explanation of political ties, according to which political actors who share similar characteristics are likely to cooperate. The analysis examines cooperation networks in the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Coreper I), one of the highest-level committees in the Council, in the period 2003-2018. The findings indicate that states with similar policy positions on specific controversial issues tend to form cooperative relationships, while party ideology indirectly and relatively weakly affects the formation of ties. Surprisingly, the presence of populist parties is unrelated to network evolution. These findings have implications for the extent to which cooperation in the Council is shaped by national democratic processes.

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If one word were to encapsulate the politics of the European Union (EU), cooperation would be a strong contender. Cooperation refers to people acting collectively to solve social dilemmas, where maximisation of short-term interests leads to worse outcomes for all than feasible alternatives (Ostrom 1990). Cooperation is a *leitmotif* of scholarship on EU politics. Narratives of the history of European integration describe how Europeans built the edifice of EU laws partly by refraining from short-term rivalries in the pursuit of collective gains (Milward 1992; Moravcsik 1997). Cooperative models consistently outperform non-cooperative models in accounting for decision outcomes in the EU (Thomson et al. 2006; Thomson 2011; Leinaweaver and Thomson 2014). Cooperation is not the same as harmony. Instead, cooperation and competition are two sides of the same coin (Keohane and Nye 2011). Competition among EU member states involves cooperation within distinct subgroups of states and institutions that vie with each other for influence.

We describe and explain the evolution of cooperative network relationships among state representatives in the Council of the EU. Our explanation centres on how key outcomes of domestic political processes affect EU-level politics. The key outcomes we consider are national governments' policy positions on specific controversial issues, national governments' ideological orientations, and the presence of populist parties in national governments. We address a puzzling finding from previous studies of the Council, namely that while governments' policy positions on specific controversial issues appear to be a prominent feature of Council politics, governments' ideological positions are not. We argue and demonstrate that this is due to the way in which the differences between governments' ideological positions have been conceptualised.

The next section puts forward the theoretical argument. It sets the outcomes of domestic politics in the context of an established explanation of social ties, which contends

that homophily, the degree of similarity between people, is the main driver of relationships. The subsequent section then describes the research design. The Analysis section presents the findings, which includes evidence that the similarity between states' policy positions affects the network. If conceptualised and measured appropriately, there is also evidence that governments' ideological orientations have an effect, albeit an indirect and relatively weak one. The Conclusion discusses the implications of these findings.

## HOMOPHILY AS AN EXPLANATION OF COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Homophily is the tendency for people who share similar characteristics to form strong social ties (McPherson et al. 2001). Political scientists have found evidence of homophily as a guiding principle in the formation of political relationships in diverse contexts. Laumann and Knoke (1987) conducted one of the first large-scale applications of social network analysis policymaking in the United States. Their analysis revealed more intense exchange of information and influence among interest groups and public agencies that had similar policy preferences. A prominent study of interest groups in Washington DC found that lobbyists disproportionately lobbied political actors who shared their policy preferences (Carpenter et al. 2001). König and Bräuninger's (1998) research on German labour-market policymaking found that actors exchanged information with others that had similar policy preferences.

The main mechanisms through which homophily positively affects political cooperation in the Council relate, first, to the formation of effective advocacy coalitions and, second, to the procurement of reliable information. These mechanisms are specified two theories, the advocacy coalition framework and signalling theory. Advocacy coalitions are groups of actors, often including civil society organisations, that pursue a common cause,

which usually involves significant policy change (Sabatier and Weible 2007). While broad and inclusive coalitions can have more influence, the ability to communicate coherent policy demands is also essential. This ability is bolstered if the members of the coalition share similar policy preferences. Likewise, state representatives in the Council form relationships with others with a view to influencing third states in the Council and other EU institutions. The advocacy coalition framework implies that cooperation among states is likely to be more effective in terms of influencing decision outcomes if the cooperating states speak with a coherent voice.

Signalling theory explains why homophily occurs in political networks (Austen-Smith and Wright 1992; Austen-Smith 1993). The theory examines the decisions of interest groups and political representatives with respect to initiating and accepting influence attempts. For political representatives, who are analogous to state representatives in the Council, the overriding concern is with securing reliable policy-relevant information, which will in turn help them to identify and enact policies that increase public support. Political representatives select the interest groups to which they give access based on how reliable they expect the information provided by those groups to be. A key proposition of signalling theory is that representatives perceive information to be more reliable if it comes from interest groups that have similar preferences to theirs. This leads to the prediction that relationships of influence, which consist of interest groups' attempts to influence that are accepted by representatives, are found between actors with similar policy preferences. Leifeld and Schneider (2012) find that homophily is most prevalent when actors exchange sensitive political-strategic information, as distinct from technical information. This is relevant to our focus on cooperation networks in the high-level Coreper I, which generally focuses on more sensitive political issues than the subordinate working groups, which focus on more technical matters.

There is *prima facie* evidence that homophily affects cooperation networks in the Council of the EU. Huhe et al. (2018) found that similarity between member states in terms of their policy positions on specific issues positively influenced the formation of political ties in some of the committees they included. We build on and improve that previous study in two ways. First, while Huhe et al. (2018) focus on states' positions on specific issues, we include these and also examine two other relevant outcomes of domestic politics, national governments' ideological orientations and the presence of populist parties in national governments. Second, we examine a longer series of surveys of cooperation networks in the Council. Huhe et al. (2018) examined network relationships at three time points: 2003, 2006 and 2009. We include these and add evidence from 2012, 2015 and 2018, which enables us to examine the evolution of political ties more extensively.

The first set of domestic political outcomes we consider are state representatives' positions on specific policy issues. What level of regulation should there be on specific products and services? What level of subsidies should be granted to specific industries? What levels of funding should particular EU programmes receive? The assumption is that states' positions on issues in the past are reasonable guides to their future preferences. We expect that:

*H1: Member states with similar policy positions on specific issues that were on the EU's past agendas tend to form cooperative relationships in the Council.*

The second set of domestic political outcomes are national governments' ideological orientations. Ideologies are principles with which people interpret the world as it is and how it should be (Denzau and North 2000: 24). The extent to which national governments share similar ideological orientations is a consequence of the partisan composition of those governments. The relevant ideological dimensions are the socioeconomic left-right

dimension and the pro versus anti-European integration dimension. This left-right dimension captures national parties' general stances on the desirability of state intervention in the economy. Here, we exclude parties' ideological stances in the areas of morality politics, such as abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage, as these are not areas in which the EU plays a large role. The distinction between a socioeconomic left-right dimension and a European integration dimension draws on the research of Hooghe et al. (2002) among others, who demonstrate that parties' general support for European integration is not strongly related to their left-right positions on economic issues.

The mechanisms through which ideological similarity may influence cooperation networks are similar to those for policy positions on specific issues. State representatives whose national governments share similar ideological orientations expect that their governments will view current and future policy debates through similar lenses. Such expectations strengthen the expectations that joint advocacy will be coherent and effective, and that the information provided by the other state will be reliable. Consequently, the expectation is that:

*H2: Member states with governments that have similar ideological orientations tend to form cooperative relationships in the Council.*

A puzzling finding from previous studies of cooperation in the Council and on Council politics more generally is that there is mixed evidence for the impact of national governments' ideological positions. To date, no systematic investigation has been conducted of the impact of governments' ideologies on their behaviour with respect to selecting cooperation partners. The main findings regarding the effects of ideology on member states' issue-specific policy positions and voting behaviour in the Council range from no effects whatsoever to modest

and conditional effects (Thomson 2011: 76; Leinaweaver and Thomson 2016; Naurin 2018: 1536-8; Wratil 2018).

We argue that the following two conceptual points must be taken into account if we are to gauge the impact of ideology on Council politics appropriately. The first point concerns the conceptualisation of ideological distances between actors, in this case national governments. Following Hooghe et al. (2002) and other researchers in the field, both the socioeconomic left-right dimension and the European integration dimension are theoretically relevant. However, this leaves open the question of how to conceptualise the similarities and differences between actors on these dimensions. We consider three main plausible answers to this question:

- The absolute distances between governments on each dimension separately, whereby the distances on each dimension are added to the model as separate independent variables.
- The Euclidean distances between governments in a two-dimensional space formed by the two dimensions orthogonally.
- The city block, also known as Manhattan, distances between governments, which is the sum of the distances on each dimension.

The implications of these distinct conceptualisations have been discussed extensively (e.g. Humphreys and Laver 2009; Benoit and Laver 2012). Our theoretical prior favours the Euclidean distance. This is the standard approach used in spatial modelling of multidimensional spaces. Euclidean distance also has the advantage that it indicates a relatively large distance between two actors if they have very different positions on only one of the two dimensions, even if they agree on the second dimension. This reflects the expectation that there only needs to be a marked difference between two governments on

one of the two dimensions for cooperation between them to be less likely. By contrast, the city block distance treats the distances between two actors cumulatively. Treating the absolute distances between governments on each dimension separately has well-known theoretical advantages associated with unidimensional spaces, including the applicability of the median voter theorem. But its disadvantage is that it ignores the possible interdependence between the two dimensions.<sup>1</sup>

The second conceptual point that should be considered in order to assess the impact of ideology appropriately concerns the location of ideology in the causal pathway toward cooperation. Similarities between governments in terms of the ideological principles to which they adhere are relatively “distant” causes of cooperation. Such principles are interpreted in the context of specific policy issues that are the concrete focus of cooperation. Governments’ positions on such specific issues are informed partly by incumbent parties’ ideologies, but at least as much by other considerations, such as the interests of the domestic industries affected. Governments’ policy positions on specific issues, are more proximate causes of cooperation. This implies that governments’ ideologies cause (probably to a limited extent) their policy positions on specific issues, which in turn affect their choice of cooperation partners. This way of thinking about the causal chain implies that we will observe an effect of ideological distance only in a model that does not control for differences between governments’ policy positions on specific issues.

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<sup>1</sup> These three do not exhaust the range of theoretically relevant conceptualisations of ideological distances. Humphreys and Laver (2009) Benoit and Laver 2012) and Eguia (2013) provide extended discussions of other variants.



The third domestic outcome is the presence of populist parties in national governments. Populist parties have grown in prominence in many countries (Schedler 1996; Mudde 2007; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018). Populists claim to be the true representatives of the people, who are portrayed as a homogenous group in contrast to plural visions of society. They typically contend that the people are exploited by corrupt elites, abstract entities such as the EU, and outgroups such as immigrants and religious minorities. Due to populists' divisiveness, they are often treated as pariahs by mainstream parties in their national contexts. Populist parties' entry to national governments, for instance in Austria, Hungary and Poland, caused consternation in other member states. The mechanisms through which populist parties in national governments may influence network relationships among EU member states includes the expectations of reliable information and coherent advocacy coalitions associated with ideological affinity. There may also be an aversion among many state representatives to associating with people who have or who serve others who hold illiberal views. There may also be domestic electoral costs for representatives affiliated with mainstream parties of associating closely with populists of other countries. Therefore:

*H3: Member states with governments that include populist parties are unlikely to be identified as cooperation partners by states with national governments that do not include populists.*

This expectation also implies that pairs of states that both have populists in their national governments tend to form cooperative relationships. Like the effect of ideology, we might expect at least some of the effect of populist parties on cooperation to work through the effect it has on the policy positions taken by governments on specific issues. It is therefore theoretically relevant to compare the effects of populist parties in models that do and do not control for governments' policy positions on specific issues. The analyses also explore the

differences between left-wing and right-wing populists, since it may be the case that these parties behave quite differently.

The analyses also consider the alternative structural explanation, which refers to characteristics of the networks in which states are embedded as explanations of network dynamics (Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993; Schneider et al. 1997; Berardo and Scholz 2010). Specifically, we include controls for key structural effects: namely, hubs, reciprocity, transitive triads and structural equivalence (Huhe et al. 2018; 2020). For instance, the hub effect is the tendency for actors with many ties to become more popular over time. The homophily and structural explanations are not mutually exclusive. However, we argue that the evidence for the impact of domestic political outcomes is stronger for taking into account the structural alternative.

#### MEASURING COOPERATION NETWORKS, ISSUE POSITIONS, IDEOLOGIES AND POPULISM

The data on cooperation networks are from the Negotiations in the Council of the European Union Dataset (NCEU; Naurin et al. 2020). The NCEU project has surveyed a broad selection of committees and working parties in the Council. In this article, we focus on one of the most important committees, the Committee of Permanent Representatives I (Coreper I), which consists of member states' deputy permanent representatives. It is the top coordinating committee in the Council regarding legislative proposals across a range of policy areas,

including internal market, competitiveness, environment, employment, social policy, consumer affairs transport, telecommunications and energy.<sup>2</sup>

The NCEU project held telephone surveys with representatives from all member states in six consecutive rounds: in 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018. The response rates ranged from 73 (2015) to 86 (2009) percent, with an average of 81 percent. In total, 1,343 member state officials were interviewed who participated in different Council committees. Here, we focus on respondents' answers to the question: "Which member states do you most often cooperate with within your working group, in order to develop a common position?" Respondents typically mentioned between three and five other states. As indicated in Figure 1, the data are directional, which means that member state *a* may report a link with member state *b*, while *b* does not report a link with *a*. The absence of a reported link between two member states does not mean there were no contacts between them. However, the responses are indicative of particularly strong relationships.

*[Figure 1]*

The Decision-making in the EU dataset (DEU III) is used to measure the degree of similarity between member states' policy positions on specific issues (Thomson et al. 2006; 2012; Arregui and Perarnaud forthcoming). The full dataset includes 141 proposals, but we exclude the 16 proposals concerning Justice and Home Affairs, because these are not dealt

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<sup>2</sup> Coreper II is another important high-level committee in the Council. Few issues covered in the DEU dataset refer to areas covered by Coreper II, which limits our ability to examine the effects of governments' policy positions on cooperation in that committee.

with by Coreper I. The proposals cover a broad range of controversial issues in the EU during this period, including agriculture, internal market, fisheries, environment, transport, employment and consumer affairs. Proposals were selected if they raised a minimum level of controversy as indicated by European media reports and interviews with key informants. This is an appropriate selection criterion for the present purposes, because non-controversial proposals would not provide information about the relative degree of similarity between states' policy positions.

The DEU dataset was assembled by successive teams of researchers over a 20-year period. They held over 450 lengthy semi-structured interviews with key informants, who were usually participants in the negotiations, mostly from member states' permanent representations. These interviews each focused on one of the legislative proposals, and in them researchers and informants reconstructed the controversies raised by each proposal. The controversies were depicted as policy scales, each ranging from 0-100. Researchers asked informants to indicate the policy alternative initially favoured by each actor after the introduction of the proposal and before the Council formulated its common position. The policy alternatives were placed on the policy scales to reflect informants' judgements of the political distances between them.

The DEU dataset's information on states' policy positions on specific issues is illustrated with an issue raised by a proposed regulation on the free flow of non-personal data in the EU, which aims to achieve a more competitive and integrated internal market for data storage (2017/0228/COD). The main controversial issue dividing member states consisted of the number and scope of the derogations, which would limit the free flow of non-personal data. A majority of member states favoured very limited derogations in line with the legislative proposal (Position 100). Among these states was Estonia, which has a highly

digitized economy and whose government saw great benefits from easing data transfer across borders. On the other hand, a number of states favoured derogations particularly for public data on the grounds of public safety (Position 20), and in a number of additional domains such as public archives, culture and national treasury, partly on the grounds of national security (Position 0). French and German representatives were among those who had concerns about the negative effects of data transfers on intellectual property and cybersecurity. The regulation that was adopted included a number of derogations and a provision allowing member states to impose penalties if national authorities could not access data stored in another member state. The clauses in the final version did not go as far as France and Germany's preferred policy positions, and the key informants located the outcome at position 70 on the policy scale.

We construct a measure of agreement between the policy positions of each pair of member states on all relevant issues that were introduced prior to each of the NCEU network waves in 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018. The measure of position agreement captures the average agreement between each pair of member states across all relevant issues that were on the agenda before the time of the NCEU survey.<sup>3</sup>

National governments' ideological orientations are measured with data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP; Volkens et al. 2019), which examines national parties'

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<sup>3</sup> We measured agreement between two states on a 0-to-1 scale. We calculated the pairwise issue agreement between each pair of states as  $1 - d$ , where  $d$  is the absolute distance between two states on the 0-100 policy scale divided by 100. The overall pairwise agreement score is averaged over all issues that were discussed in proposals introduced before the date of the NCEU survey.

election manifestos. We calculate the ideological orientations of each national government at the time of each wave of the NCEU survey. We weighted the ideological orientation of each national government by the legislative seats that each party held. The following analysis uses the two most relevant measures of parties' ideological orientations. The first is the free market economy dimension proposed by Lowe et al. (2011). This captures the economic left-right dimension. The second dimension is the EU integration dimension, which refers to the extent to which parties support or oppose European integration.

To assess the presence of populist parties in national governments, we draw on data provided by the European Consortium for Political Research Standing Group on Extremism and Democracy (Rooduijn et al. 2019). Country experts identified populist parties that obtained at least 2 percent of the popular vote in any national parliamentary election since 1989. We identify whether any of these populist parties were in government at the time of each of the NCEU surveys. We also identified those governments in which the largest party was populist.

## ANALYSIS

We apply a stochastic agent-oriented model (SAOM, see Snijders 2005; Snijders et al. 2010; Ripley et al. 2020). SAOM simulates network changes by focusing on individual actors, but not their specific ties. It assumes that actors form or dissolve ties as part of a strategy to maximise their utility functions (or, "objective functions" in the language of SAOM). Actors constantly update their decisions to create or drop ties based on their perceived interests in a networked community. SAOM is the state of the art in modelling social networks and deals appropriately with the interdependencies between the observations in networks. In light of this, SAOM is

particularly useful for analysing how cooperation networks of Coreper I have evolved over time.

SAOM begins with the following objective function for actor  $i$ :

$$f_i(\beta, x) = \sum_k \beta^k s_i^k(x)$$

where  $s_i^k(x)$  stands for various effects, such as those we discussed above, including homophily effects of similarity in policy positions and ideological orientations, and structural effects such as hub effects and reciprocity effects.  $\beta^k$  stands for the parameters corresponding to these effects. Each actor  $i$  is modelled to optimise this function by forming or dropping ties. As actor  $i$  is embedded in and constrained by a given network structure, its decisions could alter its expected utility. Actor  $i$ 's decision at time  $t$  shapes the overall network structure at time  $t + 1$ . In this way, SAOM captures dynamic feedback loops between individual actors and the overall networks.

Actors' objective functions may be driven by competing factors, such as their homophily in policy preferences and ideological orientations, or by various structural characteristics, such as the tendency for reciprocal ties to be formed. We assess these factors by introducing the following network terms (Ripley et al. 2020). First, for similarities in policy positions (H1) and ideological orientations (H2), we introduce two similarity effects:

$$s_i^{policy} = \sum_j x_{ij} (p_{ij} - \bar{p})$$

$$s_i^{ideology} = \sum_j x_{ij} (d_{ij} - \bar{d})$$

where  $p_{ij}$  and  $d_{ij}$  stand for the agreement between countries  $i$  and  $j$  in policy positions and ideological orientations respectively, with  $\bar{p}$  and  $\bar{d}$  denoting overall means of policy and ideological congruence. A positive similarity effect then suggests country  $i$  is more likely to form ties with countries with which  $i$  shares higher similarity scores in terms of policy positions or ideological orientations.

In the first test of the impact of ideology, we estimate the effects of ideological similarity between countries on the economic left-right dimension and the EU integration dimension as separate coefficients in the model. In the second test of ideology, we estimate the effect of ideological *distance* as the effect of the Euclidean distance between each of the EU members' governments in the two-dimensional space formed by the economic left-right and EU integration dimensions. In the third test of ideology, we again focus on distance, but this time calculate the effect of the sum of the distances between governments' positions on the two dimensions, the so-called Manhattan or city block distance. As expected, ideological distance and policy position similarity (the latter measured by with the DEU data) are negatively correlated. However, the negative correlation is not so large as to raise concerns about multicollinearity. Across the six waves, the negative correlations (between Euclidean ideological distance and policy position similarity) vary between -.14 and -.26 (all p-values < .01).

The third hypothesis is that the presence of populist parties in governments may affect cooperation. We therefore introduce a populist difference effect:

$$S_i^{pop.diff} = \sum_j x_{ij} |v_j - v_i|$$



where  $v_i$  indicates whether there is a populist party in the government of country  $i$ . The absolute difference effect explores the impact of populist governments in a dyadic manner. It is defined by the absolute value of the alter-ego difference in populist parties over all actors to which  $i$  has a tie. A negative  $s_i^{pop\_diff}$  then suggests that there is a populist homophily, whereby pairs of governments are less likely to cooperate if one has a populist party and the other does not. Of the EU member states included in each wave of the survey, three had populist parties in government in 2003, six in 2006, four in 2009, five in 2012, seven in 2015 and eight in 2018.

We control for network terms for hub effect, transitive triads, reciprocity, and structural equivalence, which are associated with the structural explanation (for more details, see the online appendix). Together, these network effects help us specify actors' objective function. SAOM estimates their corresponding parameters by assuming a Markov process and by minimising the difference between the observed and the expected values.

*[Table 1]*

Table 1 reports the results of our SAOM analyses that are relevant to the three hypotheses. These are the coefficients relating to the variables policy position similarity, three different operationalisations of ideological similarities and differences, and populist parties. Models 1 to 5 include the variables separately, while Model 6 includes all relevant variables. The full models, which include a range of network effects and period effects are reported in the online appendix.

The headline findings are that similarity in member states' policy positions strongly shapes the evolution of cooperation networks, and that ideological difference, as measured

by the Euclidean distance, does so to a moderate extent and indirectly. The first hypothesis refers to the effect of similarity between members states' policy positions on specific issues. The parameters associated with the term "policy position similarity" are relevant to this hypothesis. In line with the expectation, they are both positive and highly significant. Parameter estimation in SAOM is the log odds ratio of the respective probabilities that an actor will choose to initiate a cooperative tie. In light of this, interpreting SAOM estimates is similar to those of logistic regression. Model 1's estimate of the effect of policy similarity is 3.22, corresponding to an odds ratio of 8.76 (i.e.,  $e^{3.22} = 25.04$ ). One-unit change in policy similarity, which is the full theoretical range of this variable, the probability of forming a cooperative tie increases on average by a factor of 25.04. Alternatively, one standard deviation change in policy similarity (i.e. 0.18) would increase the probability of a cooperative tie by a factor of 1.48 (i.e.,  $e^{3.22 \times 0.18} = 1.79$ ). To aid our interpretation of the magnitude of this effect, Figure 2(a) presents the expected effects of policy similarity on the probability ratio of tie formation. In SAOM, the effect of a change in the value of an explanatory variable can take different values at high and low values of that variable. The figure indicates that the policy similarity has a substantively important effect on the probability that a cooperative relationship will develop and be maintained at all values of the variable policy similarity. However, the effect is considerably stronger at higher values of policy similarity. This finding is consistent with that of Huhe et al. (2018), despite examining twice as many waves of network surveys, and controlling for other similarities between states and other structural effects.

[Figure 2]

The evidence also provides conditional support for Hypothesis 2, which refers to the ideological orientation of national governments. Absolute distances between states in terms of their governments' ideological orientations on market economy and EU integration are not associated with significant effects on cooperation networks (Model 2), and this is the same for the Manhattan distance (Model 4). However, we find that ideological differences measured by Euclidean distances shape network formation, albeit moderately. The effects of Euclidean distance are only marginally significant and substantively small. Model 4's estimate of the average effect of the Euclidean distance is -0.023 (i.e., an odds ratio of 0.977). To further explore this, we plot the expected impacts of the Euclidean distance on the probability ratio of tie formation at different values of the variable ideological distance (Euclidean) in Figure 2(b). This indicates no significant effect of ideological distance at low levels of that variable, and small effects at higher values. Furthermore, as shown in the coefficients from Model 6, the marginally significant effect of the Euclidean distance becomes insignificant when controlling for policy positions and populist parties. These findings suggest that while ideological distance measured as Euclidean distance reveals some moderate and indirect impact of national governments' ideologies.

The evidence does not support Hypothesis 3, which posits a significant effect of populist parties in national governments. The coefficients associated with the variable "populist similarity" are insignificant in models 5 and 6. This indicates that national governments composed of mainstream parties do not discriminate against other states that have governments with populist parties in them when it comes to forming cooperative relationships. Moreover, there is no evidence that governments with populist parties band together in the EU Council. Taken together, despite the steady increase of governments with

populist parties from three in 2003 to eight in 2018, this surge has not affected the cooperation network at the EU level.

We conducted a range of robustness tests, some of which are reported in the online appendix. The main findings reported here are robust to these different specifications. We included an alternative measure of ideological similarity, which focused on the general left-right dimension, not only the economic left-right dimension, and obtained the same results. We transformed the ideology variable with a quadratic function, which was insignificant. We also investigated whether national governments with particularly large populist parties influenced the EU-level cooperation networks, which was not the case. We explored varying dyadic effects of left-leaning and right-leaning populist parties. Additional analyses took into account the possibility that Brexit had a significant effect on the 2018 network as suggested by previous analysis (Huhe et al. 2020). It is indeed the case in that member states that had direct ties with the UK in 2015 were more active in establishing new relationships in 2018, indicating that they were working to mitigate the negative effect of Brexit on their political network capital. However, this did not distort the persistent effects of policy similarity and the structural effects we identified here.

We also incorporated a range of effects from the structural perspective (Huhe et al. 2018), which are reported in the online appendix. We find strong hub effects, measured in both outdegree and indegree effects. The significant outdegree effect indicates that member states that are centrally located in the network are more active in maintaining existing and establishing new relationships. The significant indegree effect indicates that these popular states are also more often mentioned by other representations as cooperation partners. The evolution of the network is marked by reciprocity, whereby the cooperative relationships that form are mutual. By contrast, there is no evidence for the effect of transitive triads, at least

not when other network effects are controlled for. Finally, the evolution of the cooperation network is affected by structural equivalence, whereby states that share common partners are more likely to forge cooperative ties.

## CONCLUSION

Member state representations have a broad range of cooperative relationships with other states. Few member states are isolated, and isolation does not persist for long. Moreover, beyond the strongest cooperative relationships that we described, member states keep open lines of communication with all other states. Such an inclusive and dynamic network structure facilitates the intense communication that is required to overcome social dilemmas (Ostrom et al. 1994).

Of the outcomes of domestic politics that we examined, member states' policy positions on specific issues have the most marked effect on network evolution. States with similar policy positions tend to form cooperative relationships. We argued that states with similar policy positions are able to form more coherent and therefore influential coalitions, as suggested by the advocacy coalition framework (Sabatier and Weible 2007). Furthermore, state representatives consider information from other states that had similar policy positions to be particularly trustworthy, as suggested by signalling theory (Austen-Smith and Wright 1992).

The evidence shows that the ideological orientation of national governments has a marginally significant and indirect effect on the evolution of cooperation networks. Detecting this effect depends on an appropriate conceptualisation of the ideological differences between national governments as Euclidean distances between them in a two-dimensional

space defined by the economic left-right dimension and the European integration dimension. This implies that both of these dimensions are relevant to Council politics, and that a marked difference between governments on one of these is enough to reduce the likelihood of cooperation. Ideological congruence between governments appears to affect cooperation through the effect it has on agreement between governments on specific policy issues, with the latter being the more immediate cause of cooperation. This raises the question of what factors determine states' policy positions on specific issues. Research suggests that government ideology may be one relevant factor, but it is not usually the deciding factor (Thomson 2011: 132-56; Leinaweaver and Thomson 2016; Wratil 2018). Consequently, state representations with national governments of the left and right regularly cooperate with each other.

The finding that governments with populist parties are not treated as pariahs by other member states is consistent with previous studies suggesting that Eurosceptic parties have had limited impact on the EU's decision-making processes. The EU has internalized the pro versus anti EU cleavage, and populist parties have not formed effective transnational coalitions (Bartolini 2001; Brack 2012; Cavallaro et al. 2018).

All this suggests that EU-level cooperation networks are to a certain extent insulated from national politics. These cooperative relationships are maintained primarily by senior officials from permanent representations, who work in different levels of the Council and who serve successive national governments with different parties. Critics of the EU may argue that the weakness of partisan effects is an indication of the disconnect between EU and national-level politics. However, such insulation is also functional, as it serves states' long-term interests, which outlast changes in government.

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at [link to source – publisher will add doi  
at proof]

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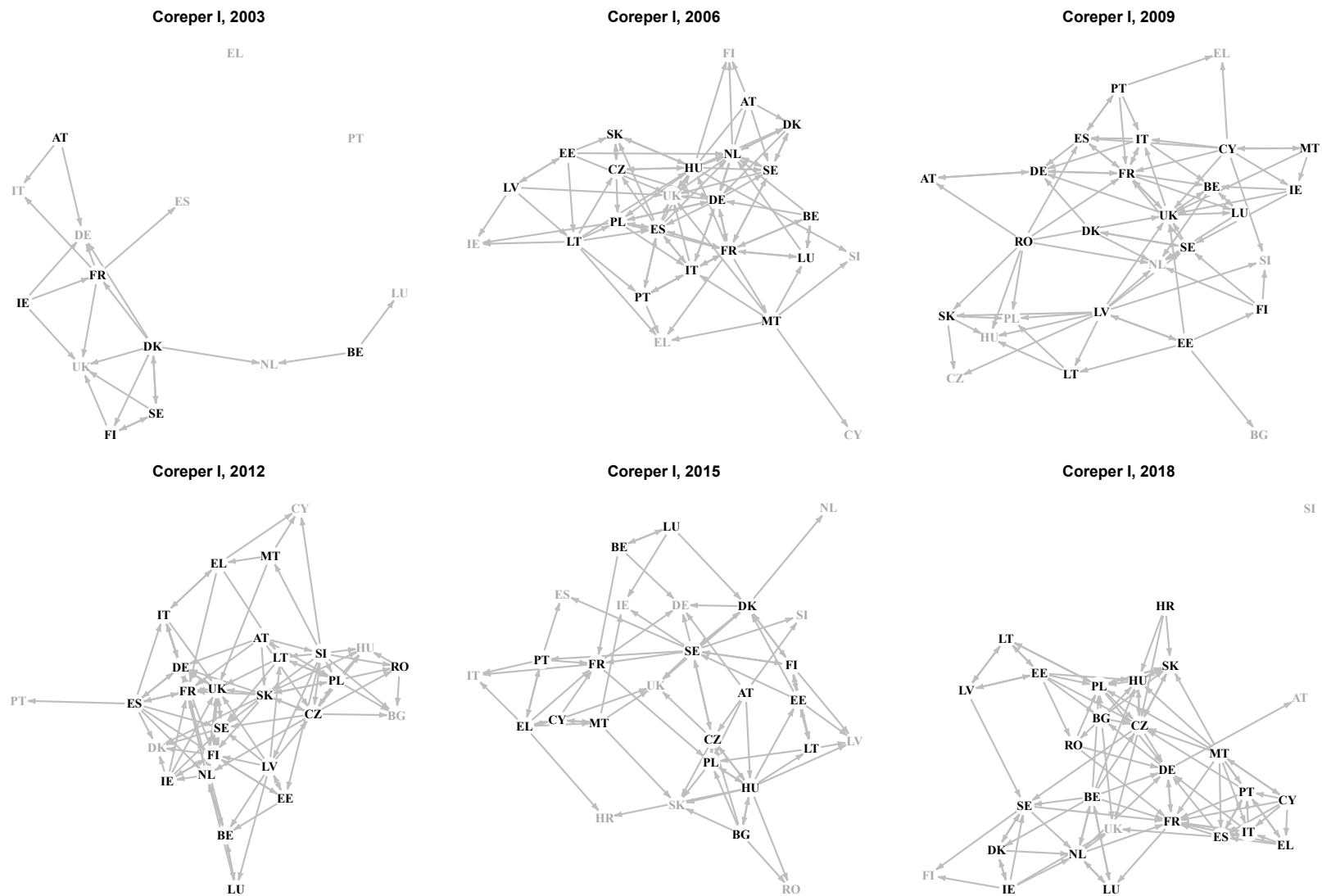
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**Table 1. Extracts of SAOM analyses of cooperation networks**

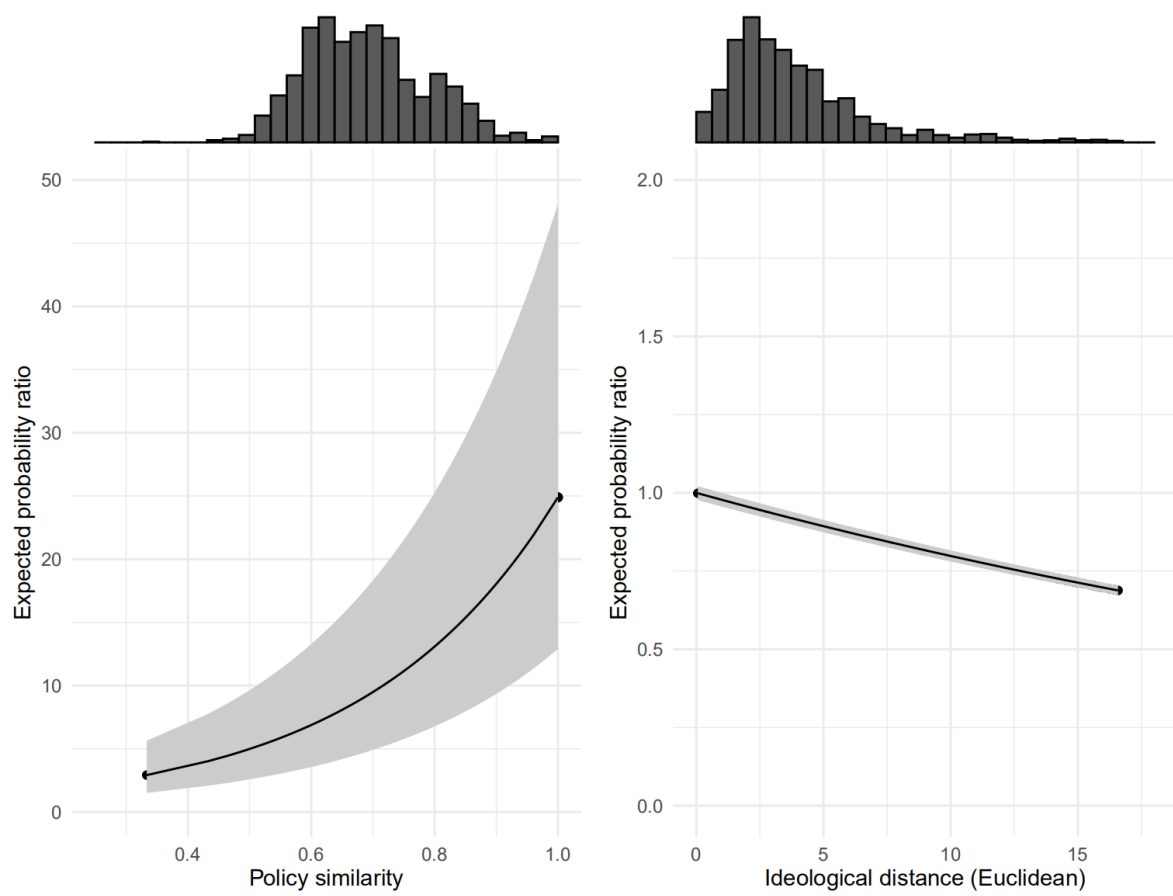
	Variables entered separately b (s.e.)	Variables entered together b (s.e.)
<i>Hypothesis 1: Policy positions</i>		
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 6</i>
Policy position similarity	3.215 (0.401)***	3.370 (0.378)***
<i>Hypothesis 2: Ideologies</i>		
	<i>Model 2</i>	
Economic left-right similarity	0.209 (0.296)	
EU integration similarity	0.326 (0.228)	
	<i>Model 3</i>	
Euclidean distance	-0.023 (0.014)*	-0.021 (0.014)
	<i>Model 4</i>	
Manhattan distance	-0.018 (0.015)	
<i>Hypothesis 3: Populists</i>		
	<i>Model 5</i>	
Populist similarity	-0.030 (0.075)	0.034 (0.107)

Note: Full models are presented in the online appendix. The table contains only the coefficients relating to the hypotheses. The first column of coefficients are from models that contain each of the explanatory variables entered separately. The second column of coefficients is from a model with all theoretically relevant explanatory variables. The full models contain a range of network effects and period effects. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*  $p < 0.1$



**Figure 1. Cooperation networks in Coreper I, 2003-2018**

Note: States not surveyed are in grey.



**Figure 2. Predicted effects of policy similarity and Euclidean ideological distance**

Note: Derived from the coefficients reported in Models 1 and 3 in Table 1.