

**Saying what voters want  
to hear about the EU?**

**January 25, 2018**

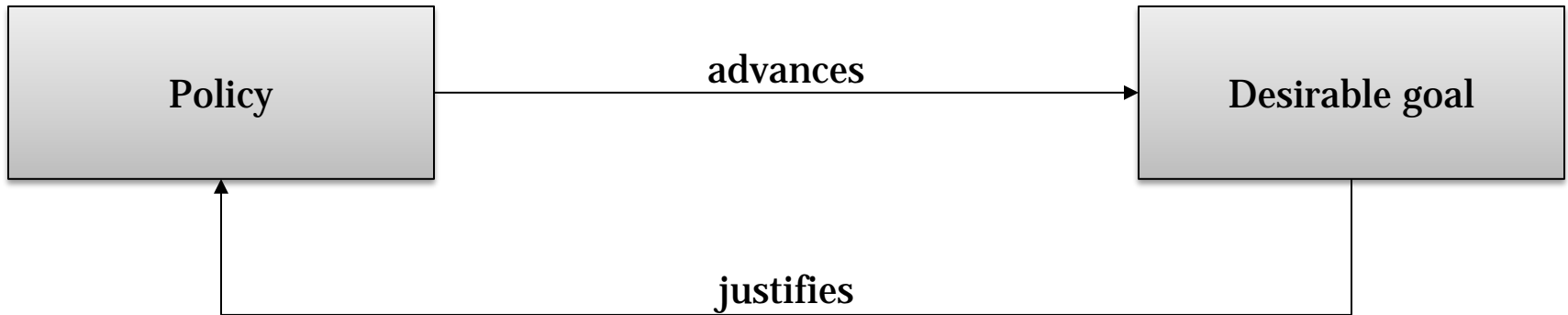
**Conference, The referendum challenge to the European Union**

**European University Institute**

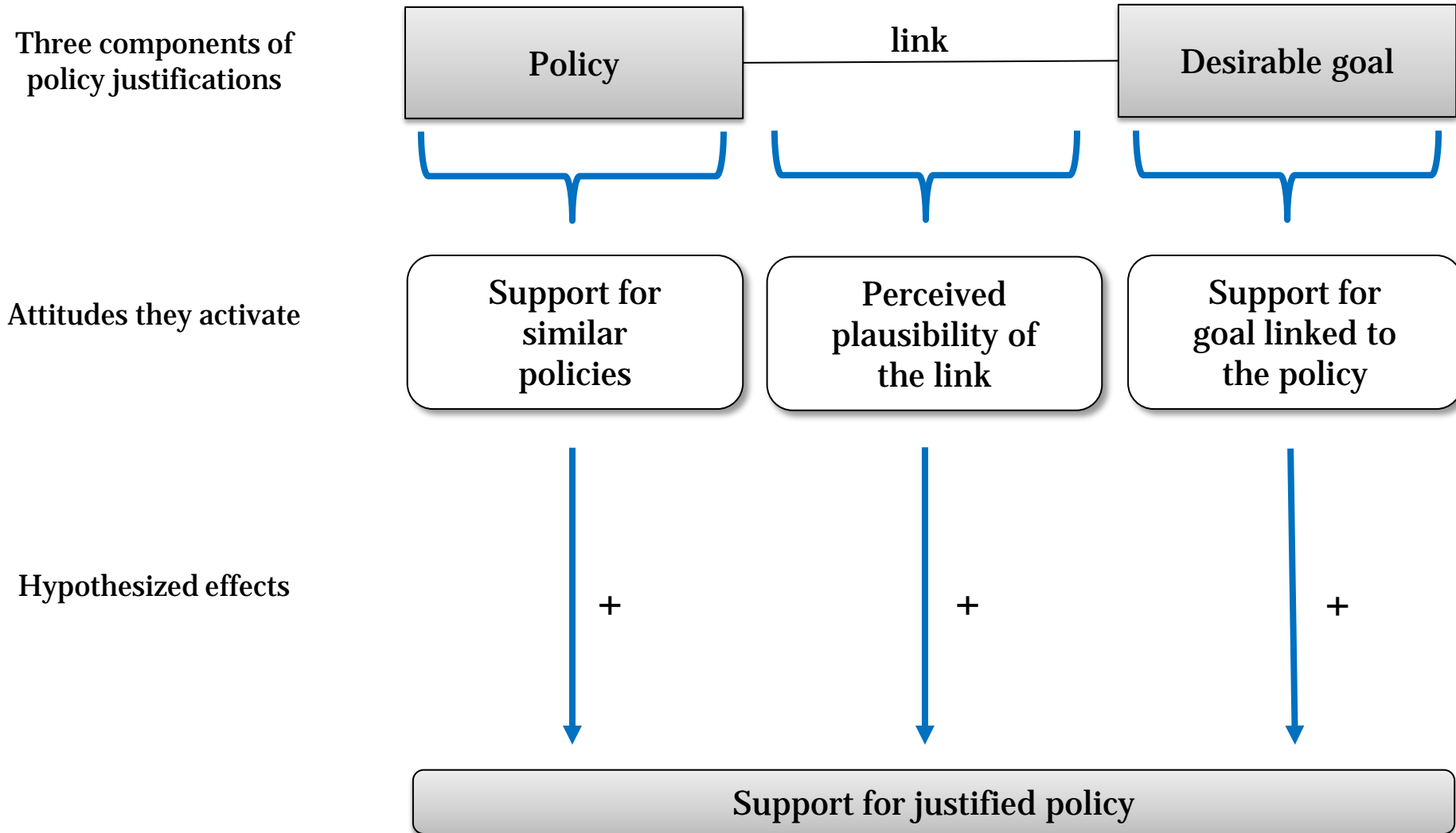
# Referendums, public opinion, and elite rhetoric

- Brexit provides evidence for the impact of elite rhetoric on views about European integration and the referendum votes prompted by these views
- Specifically, the policy justifications for European integration used by the Remain side were an important factor weighing on the Brexit vote
- **How much** politicians talk about Europe: One consequence of Labor's division over Europe: they talked less about it than they could have
- The **goals** politicians invoke to justify Europe: Remainers' focus on negative consequences of leaving meant less emphasis on positive effects of integration (Brexiters invoked more popular goals)
- The **policies** of European integration politicians discuss: Remain campaign failed to highlight specific successful policies and their effects
- The **quality of the arguments** politicians propose about the effects of European integration: Remainers' justifications were perceived as less straightforward than those proposed by Brexit supporters

# Policy justifications



# How do policy justifications affect public opinion?



# Studying policy justifications and public opinion about European integration

Question	Data and methods
<b>How do policy justifications work?</b>	Series of laboratory experiments
<b>How do politicians justify European integration?</b>	Text analysis of politicians' statements in debates about European integration
<b>What are the characteristics of politicians involved in debates about European integration?</b>	Collection of biographical data
<b>What is the impact of policy justifications on support for European integration?</b>	Survey experiment
<b>What explains variation in the frequency, content, and quality of policy justifications?</b>	Combination of data from text analysis, biographical data, and survey experiment



**TODAY**

# Focus of the paper: what explains variation in the frequency, content, and quality of policy justifications?



**Frequency:** which types of politicians use justifications more or less often?

**Content:** which types of politicians justify which types of policies / invoke which kinds of goals?

**Quality:** which types of politicians use more or less plausible justifications?

# Combining three data sources

→ Analysis of speeches of EP members, national legislators, and members of the constitutional convention

We identified the content of 2200 policy justifications used in support of European integration on three thematic occasions: Constitutional Convention, Schengen and migration, sovereign debt crisis

*Variables:* types of policies justified, goals invoked, politicians' number of justifications per 100 words spoken, vagueness of policy references (etc.)

→ Collection of biographical data of politicians involved in these debates

*Variables:* country, age, time in Brussels, party, generalist or EU specialist? (etc.)

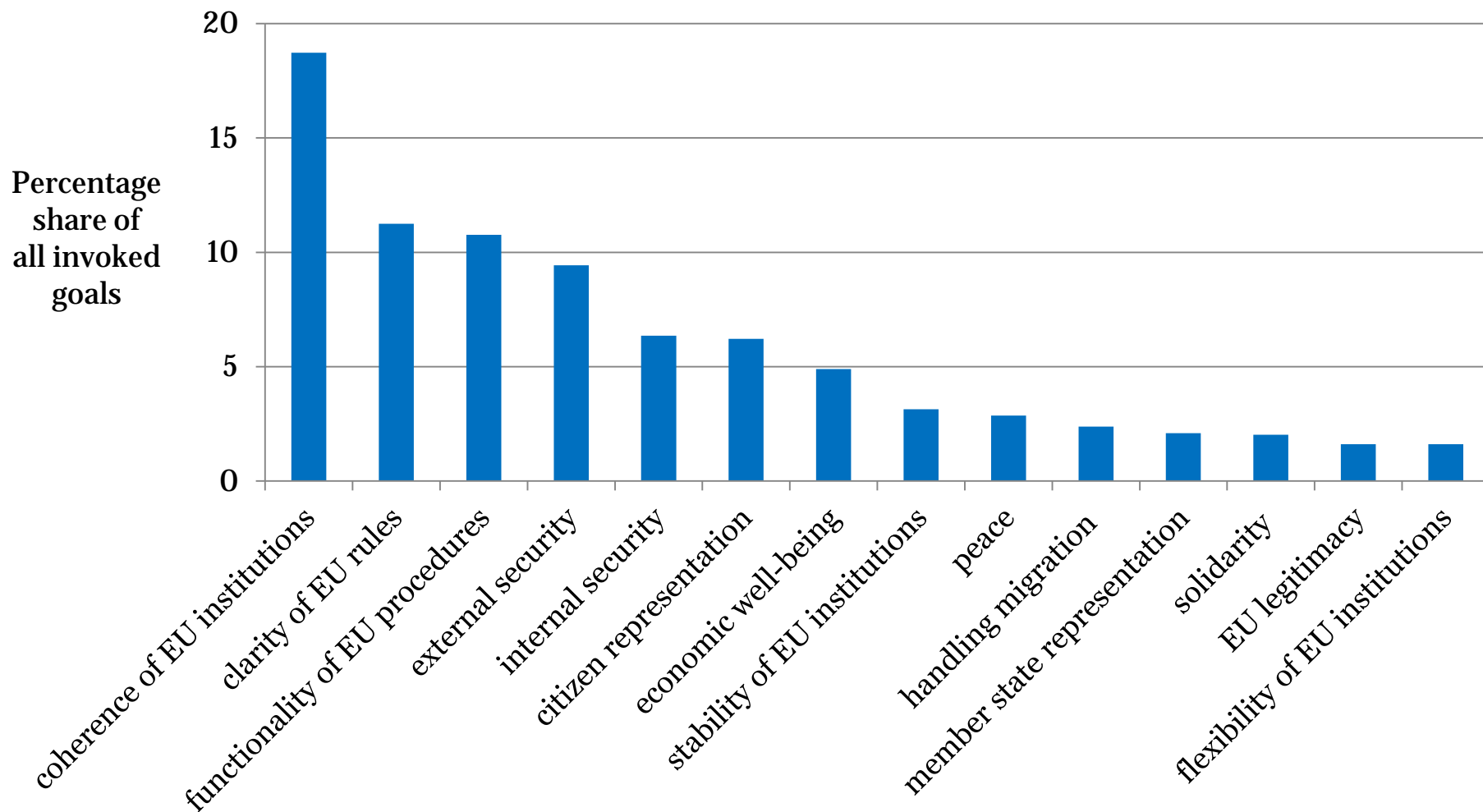
→ Nationally representative survey and survey experiment

We evaluated citizen responses to the justifications politicians actually use (imputed from the text analysis)

*Variables:* popularity of different policies by policy type, popularity of the various goals invoked to justify Europe, perceived plausibility of policy-goal links (etc.)

# Preview of text analysis data: how *do* politicians justify European integration? (1)

## Policies of European integration are good for ....

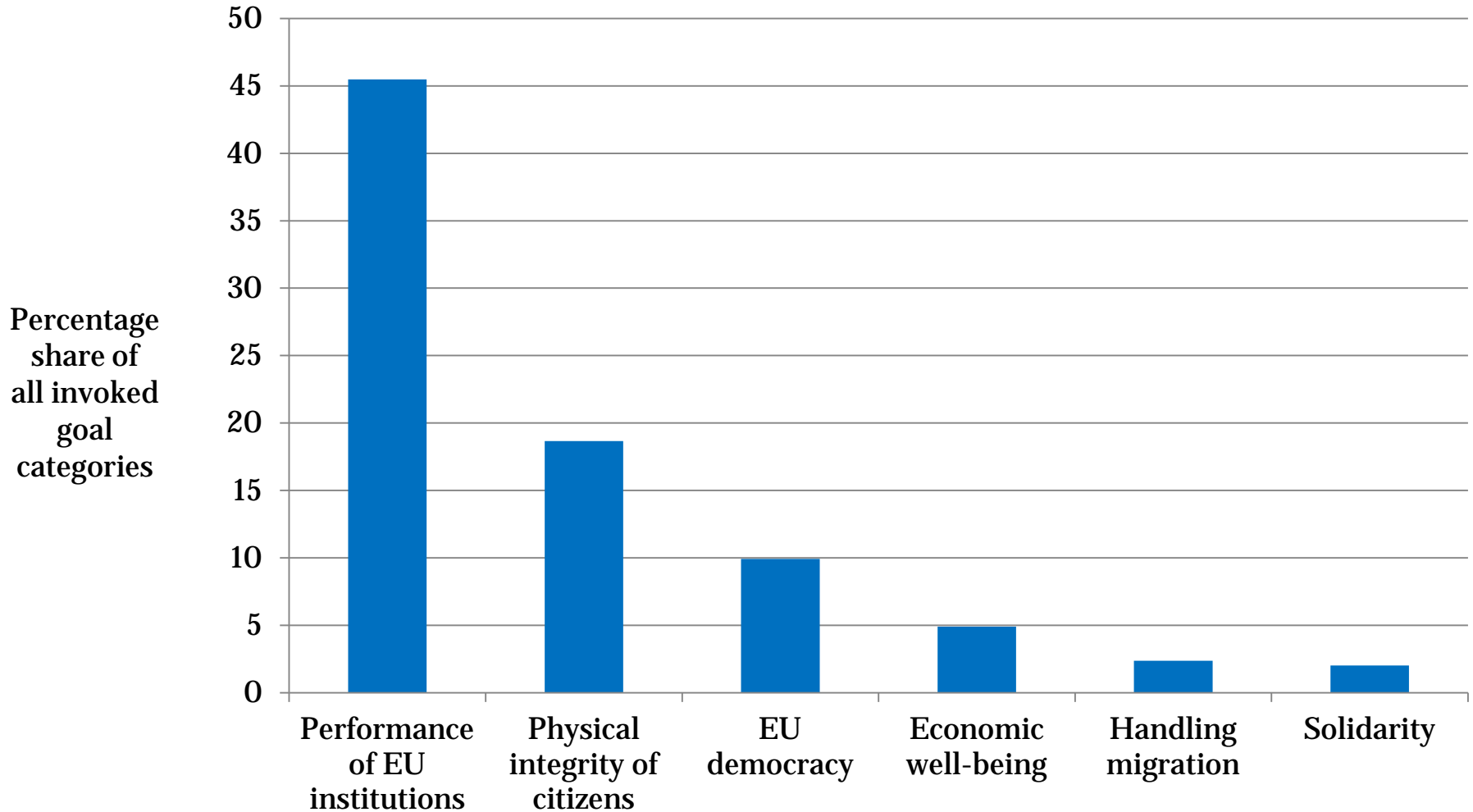


Based on justifications used in debates about constitutional treaty and open borders



# Preview text analysis data : how *do* politicians justify European integration? (2)

**Policies of European integration are good for ....**



# Hypotheses

**Foundation** for the following hypotheses: distinction between positive and negative predispositions of politicians toward Europe (based on party affiliation, Europe specialization, time spent in Brussels etc.)

- Politicians who are positively predisposed to Europe will use policy justifications more frequently than negatively predisposed politicians
- Politicians who are positively predisposed to Europe will invoke popular goals to justify Europe more frequently than negatively predisposed politicians
- Politicians who are positively predisposed to Europe will talk more about general policy areas than specific policies (compared to negatively disposed politicians)
- Politicians who are positively predisposed to Europe will use less plausible policy justifications than other politicians

**Implication** for European integration: Advocates of Europe are harming the process of integration by using suboptimal rhetorical strategies (frequently). Invoking popular goals to justify Europe is not enough.