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"Please hold; you are next in line" Using Experimental Vignette Methodology to gain insight into how EU agencies prioritise between external demands.

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"Please hold; you are next in line."

Using Experimental Vignette Methodology to gain insight into how EU agencies prioritise between external demands.

MSc Thesis Public Administration; Economics and Governance Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs, Leiden University

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Abstract

Bureaucratic responsiveness has been well researched in the national sphere, but research has been lacking at the European level. Bureaucrats in European Union agencies must reconcile many different multidimensional demands– from the European Commission and national agencies to the general public. Bound by finite time and resources, EU agencies must decide which request to prioritise and respond to first. Building on Rimkutė and Van der Voet's (2021) research, this thesis looks at when bureaucrats prioritise external demands. The theoretical framework focuses on three hypotheses corresponding with three dimensions of these demands (1) that requests from political actors will be prioritised over non-political actors, (2) that requests with technical content will be prioritised, and (3) and that salient request will be prioritised. The theoretical framework synthesises existing theories on bureaucratic responsiveness with newer theories on Reputational literature. To test these hypotheses, a mixed methodology, including Experimental Vignette Methodology, was used to analyse 16 EU bureaucrats in real-time while making the choices. Finally, the data is analysed quantitatively and qualitatively, and we find that political actors and salient requests are most likely to be prioritised.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction briefly outlines the two main aspects of the research, namely (1) bureaucratic responsiveness and (2) EU agencies. After this, the current research field, research question and relevance of the thesis at hand are discussed.

The way we interact with our government – and more importantly, what we expect from it – is deeply ingrained in our assumptions about how governance structures should function. Central to this idea is the concept of 'bureaucratic responsiveness'. Bureaucratic responsiveness concerns citizens' opportunity to be legitimately heard and have meaningful access to policy- and decision-makers (Gregg, 2020; Saltzstein, 1992). But not only citizens value responsiveness (Statistics Bureau Netherlands, 2021). From national governments to international political structures - showing responsiveness can also be beneficial to governance structures, which derive a large part of their legitimacy from responsiveness by signalling that they are willing to listen to the public (Foret & Littoz-Monnet, 2014; Mansbridge, 2003; Soroka & Wlezien, 2010). By showing that they are attentive to the public's wishes, governance structures can further solidify their place as legitimate by creating a 'buffer of support' (Linde & Peters, 2018, p. 292).

This thesis focuses on responsiveness in a specific governance structure; the European Union (EU). Scholarship on European governance indicates that the EU cannot rely on the same democratic legitimacy as traditional governments for its policymaking (Eberlein & Grande, 2005; Kelemen & Tarrant, 2011). As a result, the EU needs to look for different ways to legitimise its power and find a connection to its citizens – something the EU has been struggling with since the early 1990s (Majone, 2000; Zhelyazkova, Bølstad, & Meijers, 2019).

Legitimising through EU agencies: the EU regulatory state.

As a result of this struggle with legitimacy, the EU gradually opted for legitimising its regulation through evidence and persuasion (Busuioc & Rimkutė, 2020). The EU exerts control through a complicated multi-level governance network, relying on evidence from data to justify its policy decisions (Busuioc & Rimkutė, 2019; Scholten, Strauss, & Brenninkmeijer, 2020; Rimkutė, 2020; Zhelyazkova, Bølstad, & Meijers, 2019). As part of this formula, the EU's core institutions - the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union - are assisted in their policymaking by forty-six EU agencies (European Union, n.d-a; European Union, n.d,-c; Rimkutė, 2021).

These agencies' have been specifically created to support these EU decision-making bodies and Member States (MS) by helping with information gathering, scientific expertise, standard-setting and regulating (Rimkutė, 2021). They are intended to be separate from politics and provide "independent expertise" - a fundamental criterion for a legitimate regulatory state as the EU envisions it (Busuioc & Rimkutė, 2020). Together, these agencies have become an increasingly prominent part of the executive power and governing of the European Union (Scholten, Strauss, & Brenninkmeijer, 2020; Rimkutė, 2021).

EU agencies and responsiveness

Nonetheless, these agencies do not operate in silos. Instead, EU agencies are also mandated to function as "hubs" working closely with MS and other groups or institutions (Korver, 2018). Moreover, more and more, agencies need to rely upon these networks of stakeholders for information-gathering and help with regulation (Arras & Braun, 2017). In addition, the dynamic position and function of EU agencies in the EU system make them incredibly fascinating bureaucracies to dissect their responsiveness (Busuioc & Rimkutė, 2020; Rimkutė, 2021).

In an ideal world, all governance structures would be responsive to all citizens, with bureaucrats assessing every citizen's request equally and promptly (Saltzstein, 1992). However, being responsive takes time and energy from the bureaucrats within these structures, who must answer these – sometimes

conflicting - questions, requests, and demands. Bound by finite time and resources, EU agency bureaucrats constantly need to choose to whom they respond and when they want to be responsive (Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021). As a result, the relationship between EU agencies and internal or external actors has been controversial (Arras & Braun, 2018; Weingast & Moran, 1983).

1.1 EU agencies and bureaucratic responsiveness: Identifying a research gap.

Explaining when and why agencies are responsive is impossible without paying extra attention to the bureaucrats within the organisation[1]. However, little is known about how these EU agencies bureaucrats make choices, but previous research has tried to explore which actors are more likely to be prioritised by EU bureaucrats (Bagozzi, Berliner, & Almquist, 2019; Rimkutė, 2020; Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021; Van der Veer, 2021). Through this research, drivers and burdens have been identified, such as capacity, resources, organisational culture, political incentives, fear of repercussions, and reputation (Bagozzi, Berliner, & Almquist, 2019; Rimkutė, 2020; Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021). However, three parts of the literature are less well represented than others: (1) the EU dimension, (2) the informal structures, and (3) the multiplicity of demands[2].

First, the interaction of national governments and citizens has been a field of tension that researchers scrutinised extensively over time (Erlich et al., 2021; Linde & Peters, 2018; Lips, 2010; Peters, 1988; Sigel, Barnes, & Kaase, 1980). However, where the research surrounding responsiveness in a domestic setting is abundant, the research on responsiveness in the European Union (EU) remains scarcer (Hagemann, Hobolt, & Wratil, 2016). Nonetheless, developing research specific to the EU context is essential since the EU deals with different factors than domestic bureaucracies (Johnson & Urpelein, 2014; Zhelyazkova, Bølstad, & Meijers, 2019).

[1]This statement is made based on Coleman's 'boat' (Coleman, 1990), a foundational Rational Choice Institutional Theory which theorises that every macro level association should be explained by bringing it to the individual level. The mechanism is as follows: Macro level phenomena lead to situational mechanisms which impact the individual. The individual then acts based on these mechanisms. The behaviour of these individuals then aggregates, ultimately changing the macro-outcome.

[2] The introduction only provides a brief outline of these three gaps, they are also discussed more in chapter 2 and chapter 3.

Second, where earlier research has scrutinised the formal structures impacting responsiveness, EU scholars have taken less notice of how agencies strategically navigate this in an ever-changing field (Bryer, 2007; Busioc & Rimkutė, 2019; West, 2004). As a result, European scholarship has neglected informal structures, such as how EU agencies are aware of their surroundings and utilise effective reputation management (Rimkutė, 2020). Researching these informal structures is vital for a complete understanding of how agencies function in practice.

Third, even though research focusing on responsiveness is present, there has been an inclination toward researching only one specific factor that can potentially affect responsiveness (Costa, 2017; Johnson, 2016; Joosen, 2021). Nevertheless, in practice, 'one-dimensional requests' are not the norm; instead, the bureaucrats are faced with multidimensional external demands – many factors coexist and influence each other (Rimkutė & van der Voet, 2021). A lack of focus on how these various factors interact can lead to inaccurate conclusions over a more extended period (Saltzstein, 1992). Because of this, it is essential to look at how these groups and factors interact and simultaneously affect bureaucratic responsiveness.

These three gaps come together in a specific niche where Rimkutė and Van der Voet (2021) took the first big step in filling the existing research gap by acknowledging the multidimensional nature of external demands when researching bureaucratic responsiveness in the EU agencies. In their article *"When do bureaucrats respond to external demands? A theoretical framework and empirical test of bureaucratic responsiveness"*, the authors aimed to close the research gap when it comes to researching external demands in their full scope within a more true-to-reality setting. Even though these findings bring us closer to understanding how and why EU agency bureaucrats make certain decisions, it also leaves more questions to be answered. For instance, how do they prioritise one actor over the other? Or, why do they respond quickly to certain content?

1.2 Research question

This thesis will build on the work of Rimkutė and Van der Voet (2021) and address some of the questions arising from their initial conclusions. Moreover, this research will further research the correlations found, not only (partly) repeating them but also further exploring how and why these choices were made. This academic work aims to gain more insight into how and why bureaucrats make choices regarding prioritisation and hopes to discover more about the underlying thought processes during bureaucratic decision-making. The research question is as follows:

Under which conditions are EU-agency bureaucrats responsive to external requests?

Specifically, this research will question why and how EU agencies prioritise by looking at three dimensions of requests, namely (1) the actor making the request, (2) the content of the request, and (3) whether a request has salience[3]. First, a theoretical framework will be provided to research these aspects, synthesising multiple responsiveness theories to formulate three hypotheses. Then, to test these hypotheses, the study draws upon interviews with sixteen bureaucrats in EU agencies. These interviews follow the Experimental Vignette Methodology (EVM). Next, a mixed-method methodology is used within this interview where respondents are confronted with different scenarios involving these aspects while being asked to respond to them 'on the spot'. Using EVM is beneficial for an even deeper and more realistic understanding of the processes.

The data provided will be the prioritisation decisions made by respondents and the reasoning they provide. The study then mixes quantitative and qualitative analysis. First, Logistic regression models are constructed to analyse the choices made by respondents and assess the strength of the relations plus their generalizability. The research then uses qualitative data analysis through coding to uncover the bureaucrats' arguments for certain prioritisations.

1.3 Relevance and contribution

[3] Salience is defined as a request receiving negative media attention (Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021).

This thesis has two main goals; (1) to gain further insights into the mechanisms uncovered by Rimkutė and Van der Voet (2021) and (2) to add to closing the literature gap. By doing so, the study will contribute to the academic field and broader society.

Academic field

First, this research aims to close the research gap identified above and further the scholarly debate on the functioning of non-majoritarian supranational institutions like EU agencies (Hagemann, Hobolt, & Wratil, 2016; Rimkutė, 2019). Moreover, this thesis aims to nuance and advance our understanding of how and why EU agencies prioritise multifaceted demands (Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021).

To do so, this research is the first to use EVM in interviews with EU agency bureaucrats to evaluate their choices. Utilising this methodology, a first step will be taken to grasp the potential causal mechanisms lying below the surface of these decisions. Rimkutė and Van der Voet's (2021) study shows the choice between two demands. However, due to the construction of the discrete choice experiment, participants can only select one answer without explanation. If we want to understand better how bureaucratic responsiveness works in practice, we will have to look further. The qualitative aspect of this research will add another layer of depth to the scenario by allowing us to gain data beyond the final choice. Lastly, this research aims to verify earlier research and explore new avenues for future research. Finally, it seeks to spark debates on existing questions and research gaps by providing recommendations on addressing them.

Societal relevance

The academic relevance of the thesis and previous negligence of the topic do not solemnly justify why we should research bureaucratic responsiveness in EU agencies now (Gustafsson & Hagström, 2017). Luckily, this research has a sizable and practical relevance beyond academics. First, understanding the institutions that impact our daily lives is vital. After its creation and more than five decades of expansion, the EU has grown impressively in size and scope, now creating policies affecting every aspect of its 448 million citizens' lives (European Union, n.d.-a; European Union, n.d.-b; Majone, 2000; Raunio & Wiberg, 2010; Töller, 2008). Recently, these agencies have taken a more prominent role in policymaking – marking a change in governing to international, non-majoritarian institutions (Rimkutė, 2020).

Knowing their functioning can be relevant to academics, action groups, citizens and professionals alike – who will then understand how to interact successfully with these bureaucracies.

Second, how citizens interact with bureaucratic institutions will shape their opinions of the government and continue to last long after the last interaction (Bruce, Blackburn, & Spelsberg, 1985; Hooghe & Marien, 2013). Therefore, in an ideal world, all governance structures would be responsive to all citizens (Saltzstein, 1992). However, bound by constraints of time and energy, responsiveness in practice can be lacking and incomplete **(**Bagozzi, Berliner, & Almquist, 2019; Saltzstein, 1992). Recently, the child benefits scandal in the Netherlands – where tax authorities ignored the signals of ill-working policies for years - has shown us that irresponsive bureaucracies can lead to an incredible amount of damage (Guardian, 2021). Academic scrutiny of bureaucracies – such as EU agencies – can create a positive experience for citizens through understanding and correcting agencies when necessary.

1.4 overview thesis

This introduction aimed to familiarise the reader with the two main aspects; EU agencies and bureaucratic responsiveness. Chapter 2 will present the case study and outline EU agencies and the current literature on the strategic environment they operate. Chapter 3 contains an overview of the current literature review and functions as a leeway into the theory section by critically assessing bureaucratic responsiveness and how scholars have defined it thus far. Chapter 4 will outline the main theoretical components and hypothesises. Chapter 5 will provide an overview of the used research methods, and chapter 6 will summarise the findings. Chapter 7 reflects upon these findings. Then, chapter 8 reflects on the quality of the research and how to further the field. Lastly, chapter 9 provides the main conclusion.

Chapter 2: EU agencies

Creating agencies has become a crucial component of EU policymaking, further solidifying its position as the 'regulatory state'. This chapter aims to provide further insight into the functioning of (EU) agencies and their environment – as they are the subject of this thesis.

This chapter illustrates why EU agencies are an interesting case study for responsiveness by looking at their (1) history, (2) organisational structure, and (3) the surroundings in which they operate.

2.1 EU agencies; a quick historical overview

Before explaining agencies and their functioning today more in-depth, we will look at their origin to understand how and why they developed. For example, the first EU agency – CEDEFOP[4] – was established in 1975, and the second one – EUROFOUND[5] – was established shortly after. These agencies are public authorities with their own legal personality, set up under European law (Korver, 2018). In contrast to EU institutions established by treaties, agencies are set up by secondary legislation.

Creating agencies has been strenuous throughout most of the EU's existence due to existing legislation. First, Article 4 of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 lists various institutions and declares that each can only operate in power given to them within this treaty for the next twenty-five years (Majone, 2002). This was primarily seen as the prohibition of establishing new bodies, including agencies. In 1958 the European Court of Justice slightly eased this prohibition with its "Meroni doctrine" (Chamon, 2014). This case law allows the European Commission to delegate certain executive functions to bodies not listed in the Treaty of Rome but still subjects it to severe limitations (Majone, 2002). For instance, the

[4] European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
[5] European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

European Commission cannot delegate authority it does not have, and all the agencies' functions must be explicitly stated and continuously scrutinised once established (Chamon, 2014).

However, despite these legal-constitutional limitations – the EU continued creating agencies where possible. In the 1990s, motivated by ideas of New Public Management and confronted with a so-called 'credibility crisis', the EU started to create more agencies (Schout, 2018). When faced with the quest to govern and regulate the autonomous Member States with limited means in a multi-level setting, the EU chose to regulate over distributive or redistributive policies (Eberlein & Grande, 2005**)**. The agencies were designated a crucial role in legitimising EU policy and were identified as a way for the EU policy network to further mature and gain credibility (Foret & Littoz-Monnet, 2014; Schout, 2018). Bound by their lack of discretionary power, the EU agencies were created with more of a regulatory approach based on convincing through strong evidence to deal with the credibility gap (Majone, 1998; Schout, 2018).

During the 1990s, another nine agencies were created, after which the process exploded in the 2000s, with the EU adding twenty more agencies in the 2000s and fifteen more after 2010 (Rimkutė, 2021). During this time, the rapid tempo of agency-creation in the EU became known as a process of "agentification" (Busuioc, 2009; Majone, 1994; Rimkutė, 2021). In 2002, after the Treaty of Rome expired after twenty-five years, European council regulation (No 58/2003) gave more leeway to create agencies and give them a place in the EU framework. The operating framework for the European Regulatory Agencies was created to streamline specific aspects of new agencies' functioning and creation (Scholten, Strauss, & Brenninkmeijer, 2020). In 2012, the European parliament reduced the fragmentation with a non-biding Common Approach, which outlined a broader, more coherent vision for agencies. This document constitutes a blueprint for the institutional position of agencies and talks about their governing structures and functioning and how they should communicate (Korver, 2018). As a result of this progress, we have an extensive network of forty-six agencies collaborating in the EU Agencies Network (EUAN).

In conclusion, the history and growth of EU agencies make for a fascinating case study on bureaucratic responsiveness. History shows that they were developed with a specific goal in mind; legitimise policymaking.

2.2 The organisational set-up of (EU) agencies

Moving away from the history – we will now examine EU agencies from an organisational perspective. Agencies have a specific, different from most other governance structures. To research decision-making in agencies accurately, it is essential to understand how agencies are structured. The Agency model provides insight into how and why agencies have this specific institutional set-up (Laking, 2006).

'Agency' is a somewhat amorphous label used to describe various entities – from authorities and services to commissions – that perform a specific function within a governance structure (Majone, 2000; Majone 2002). Usually, agencies focus on information gathering, policymaking, regulation, or oversight. However, their mandated tasks can be as disparate as their organisational structure. Nonetheless, what characterises agencies is a certain degree of independence from the (government) department it is related to (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007). Agencies operate outside the organisation's core composition and will usually not have a vertically desegregated relationship with their 'parent' department (Laking, 2006). However, they are not wholly independent, given that the organisation in charge can still adjust their budget or primary goals (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007).

Delegating to agencies at an arm's length of the core departmental framework of a government has multiple benefits (Majone, 2002). First, it insinuates credibility through independence (Ennser-Jedenastik, 2014). For instance, governments can use agencies to rely on facts for evidence-based policymaking from an independent source while still maintaining some control. Second, certain agencies – for instance, the Public Prosecutor's office – need detachment from the government to have a credible claim on enforcing rules and regulations (Strauss, 1984). Third, it can lead to more effective management – allowing agency managers more autonomy to make decisions based on specific agency objectives while not being bound to the larger bureaucratic systems (Laking, 2006). Creating agencies

for credible information gathering and policymaking is a widespread phenomenon – most countries do it (Majone, 2002; Christensen & Laegreid, 2007).

EU agencies: core functions

Now applying these insights to EU agencies. The EU defines agencies as "*bodies governed by European public law that are institutionally separate from the EU institutions, have their own legal personality and a certain degree of administrative and financial autonomy and have clearly specified tasks"* (Korver, 2018, p. 5). Most EU agencies are structured following the Agency model discussed above – operating as largely independent entities while still connecting to the European Commission to ensure their legal basis (Majone, 2002).

The EU agencies are geographically dispersed across Europe, working on different tasks based on specific needs in various policy domains - diverging from information gathering exclusively to direct enforcement (Scholten, Strauss, & Brenninkmeijer, 2020; Vestlund, 2015; Van Schoubroeck, Kamarás, Saunier, Wiliquet, & Gavard, 2016). Nonetheless, in total, five overarching tasks can be identified: (1) providing expert data, (2) gathering information and facilitating cooperation, (3) providing various services, (4) facilitating or supporting different actors, and (5) regulating and enforcing specific areas (Korver, 2018**)**.

All EU agencies have a similar setup, but one distinction can be made; the European Commission loosely defines two types of agencies; executive and regulatory ((COM(2008)135). Their main task is to support both the Member States and European Commission with their regulatory and executive functions by helping with information gathering, scientific expertise and advice, standard-setting and policy (Rimkutė, 2021; Scholten, Strauss, & Brenninkmeijer, 2020). They execute these tasks following the Agency model and operate outside of the EU's core institutions to provide credible, non-political information and regulation (Majone, 2002; Ennser-Jedenastik, 2014; Busioc, 2013; Wood, 2017).

2.3 The environment agencies operate in

EU agencies are different from national agencies due to their unique position in the EU system and the many actors they need to interact with (Busioc & Rimkutė, 2020; Rimkutė, 2021). Each agency operates in a complex international environment with a diverse political landscape (Wood, 2017). Within this environment, they need to establish themselves as authoritative, credible, and legitimate regulatory agencies (Wood, 2017). They do this by being 'political entrepreneurs' and managing their reputations with different stakeholders (Wood, 2017; Rimkutė, 2021). This requires them to position themselves positively across from their stakeholders constantly.

On a day-to-day basis, EU agencies engage with an extensive array of institutions in formal and informal settings to carry out their mandate (Arras & Braun, 2017; Busuioc, 2013; Egeberg & Trondal, 2011). On the one hand, they are quasi-independent policymaking organs, providing core EU institutions with helpful information through so-called 'credible commitment' (Arras & Braun, 2017; Busuioc & Jevnaker, 2020**).** For this role, it is essential that they stick to the Agency Model and do not get too involved with (political) actors - even though their environment is inherently politicised (Wood, 2017). On the other hand, they must interact with the political institutions that created them, live up to their expectations, and show that they can carry out their mandate (Wood, 2017).

Nevertheless, Agencies do not exclusively interact with political actors. On the other hand, they also work with other agencies, representatives of similar national agencies and MS to gather information and regulate (Egeberg & Trondal, 2011; Schout, 2018). They facilitate contact with many different outside actors – from corporations to NGOs - and citizens within this role. Currently, 78% of EU agencies involve stakeholders through formal arrangements like public stakeholder consultation or advisory boards (Arras & Braun, 2017). Moreover, given their sizable task, agencies have limited budgets and capabilities and thus need to work together with different stakeholder bodies to carry out their functions effectively. For instance, they can work together with these private actors, such as companies, unions, or interest groups, to monitor compliance (Arras & Braun, 2017).

Benefits of being responsive.

Nevertheless, being responsive is not just something they should be according to the democratic institutions which founded them; it can also be desirable for EU agencies themselves. This is because responsive can foster a positive reputation – increasing the EU agencies' power (Busuioc & Rimkutė, 2019). Reputational literature[6] looks more into the position EU agencies take within the EU system and indicates that we can see these actors as different audiences (Carpenter & Krause, 2013). They show us that different audiences exist beyond the formal ones (EU, national authorities), and other stakeholders such as corporations and NGOs and media, journalists, scientists, and citizensl, are also of importance (Carpenter, 2010; Busuioc & Rimkutė, 2019). When working together effectively and strategically with private actors, agencies can show their expertise and capabilities for policy making, plus provide strict monitoring on compliance of these policies - leading to a good reputation overall (Arras & Braun, 2017). Fostering a positive reputation can increase the EU agencies' power by increasing the agencies' legitimacy by being considered an 'organisational asset', expanding their security, and safeguarding their preservation over time (Busuioc & Rimkutė, 2019; Carpenter & Krause, 2012).

Conclusion

In conclusion, agencies have developed themselves to be essential companions to the EU's core institutions. They function as 'hubs' working with various stakeholders to ensure accurate information and effective regulation. Because of their unique position – and sometimes conflicting tasks - they constantly need to balance and position themselves in front of different stakeholders, always signalling that they are valuable and credible as institutions. These careful considerations make for an incredibly fascinating case of bureaucratic responsiveness because the agencies need to constantly manage their output, contacts and reputation vis-à-vis these actors. Now that we know more about the agencies, we will aim to understand what responsiveness encompasses as a theoretical concept in the next chapter.

[6] Reputational literature will be discussed extensively in the theory section.

Chapter 3: Defining bureaucratic responsiveness

This chapter functions as a leeway into the theory section by giving a brief outline of existing literature and research conducted on bureaucracies and bureaucratic responsiveness. The chapter mainly focuses on how bureaucratic responsiveness can be defined. The chapter then explores how to determine bureaucratic responsiveness in EU agencies.

Before understanding bureaucratic responsiveness as a theoretical concept, it is essential to understand what bureaucracies are and how bureaucrats function within them. Bureaucracies, an amalgamation of the word *bureau* – meaning desk – and *cratie* – indicating political power or a form of government - are governmental departments in which non-elected professionals work or a group of policymaking administrators (Peters, 1988; Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2019). Bureaucracies can vary in size, shape, and roles but usually have the following characteristics (De Korte & van der Pijl, 2008; Lammers, Mijs, & Noort, 2001).; (1) they have firmly established competencies – which are arranged by mandates and regulations, (2) they have an official hierarchy, (3) the work is practised primarily from behind a desk and revolves around creating and assessing documents, (4) its employees have completed a specific education, (5) the work is performed following specific regulations.

3.1 Academic literature review: Defining bureaucratic responsiveness

The research surrounding bureaucratic responsiveness is vast and shattered across various fields (Erlich et al., 2021; Bryer, 2007; Linde & Peters, 2018; Lips, 2010; Peters, 1988; Sigel, Barnes, & Kaase, 1980). As a concept, bureaucratic responsiveness is rooted in the research field of public administration (Aleksovska, Schillemans, & Grimmelikhuijsen, 2021; Stivers, 1994). The term has not been free of discussion – with various authors discussing and questioning its relevance (Yang & Pandey, 2007;

Stivers, 1994). Moreover, there seems to be little consensus on conceptualisation, categorisation, or operationalisation (Yang & Pandey, 2007).

When assessing the various ways bureaucratic responsiveness has been defined, one can make two classifications: (1) its scale and (2) its orientation. First, starting with either a dichotomous or scale. One way that bureaucratic responsiveness has been defined is "acting out of interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin, 1967, p. 209). This definition is binary, meaning that a bureaucracy is either considered responsive or not by this conceptualisation. Instead, Ostrom (1975) places bureaucratic responsiveness on a scale, defining the degree of responsiveness to citizens as "the capacity to satisfy the preferences of citizens" (Ostrom, 1975, p. 275). Another author taking a similar approach is Saltzstein (1992), who conceptualised the term as "the degree to which civil servants respond to citizens' needs or desires in the implementation of policies" (Erlich et al., 2021; Saltzstein, 1992, p. 213).

Second, the definitions of bureaucratic responsiveness can be externally or internally focused. For example, Sharp (1981) defines responsiveness as "action based on the professional judgement of need" (p. 121). This specific definition, and the earlier mentioned definition by Pitkin (1967), focuses on the bureaucracy's internal processes. In contrast, the definition by Ostrom (1975) and Satlzstein (1992) focus on external output – the effect it has on citizens.

Nevertheless, these definitions remain vague, and in their quest to remain suitable to all, they might accidentally conceal the intricate processes underneath. This contradiction leaves the question of whether defining as one singular bureaucratic concept is helpful at all and whether a broad definition meets the "requirements of relevant writing" (Bryer, 2007)**.** To further specify, Saltzstein (1985, 1992) made characterisation based on three fundamental questions - who, what, and how - to bring further conceptual clarity to the term. She states that the concept of bureaucratic responsiveness should – at least – answer the following three questions about bureaucrats 1) to *whom* they are responsive, 2) to *what* are they responsive, and 3) *how* are they responsive. Similarly, Bryer (2007) identifies six variations based on three ethical perspectives to facilitate theorists' multifaceted understanding of the

concept in various contexts. He then came up with a framework consisting of three ground laying ethical perspectives that disperse into six bureaucratic responsiveness variants.

3.2 Literature on bureaucratic responsiveness among EU agencies

Now applying the insights gained above to the specific case of EU agencies, this research aims to understand the extent to which bureaucrats can be responsive to external actors and what factors influence which actors they prioritise. Therefore, we need a scale-based definition and focus on internal processes. To do so, we mix Pitkin (1967) and Sharp (1981) and use the conceptualisation that the level of Bureaucratic responsiveness is the extent to which "action can be taken based on the professional judgement of need to satisfy stakeholders in their requests."

We will answer the three questions Saltzstein (1985, 1992) provided to specify this definition further. First, when it comes to *whom*, EU agencies need to attend to a wide array of stakeholders in civil society (Busiouc & Rimkutė, 2020; Bryer, 2007). These stakeholders are – among others – individuals, institutions, companies, lobby groups, or citizens' rights advocates created by *and for* the EU's 448 million citizens. However, attending to this many external actors seems impossible (European Union, n.d.-b). Not only would it be impossible scale-wise to attend to all demands, but, in reality, they are also often conflicting (Saltzstein, 1992). This line of thinking incited the idea of 'appropriate inclusion' (Saltzstein, 1992). It seems appropriate to say that EU agencies must attend to relevant stakeholders relevant to the agency in question. This can either be political actors, such as the European Commission or European Parliament, or private actors, such as relevant national agencies, NGOs or relevant companies.

Second, looking at the *what*, EU agencies should be attentive to both the public wishes and their best interest (Saltzstein, 1992). This means that agencies should try to be attentive to the public's desires for as long as it does not interfere with their best interest as the agencies consider.

Lastly, *how* are they attentive. Lastly, Schumakers (1975) categorises five forms of responsiveness (1) access responsiveness, (2) agenda responsiveness, (3) policy responsiveness, (4) output responsiveness, and (5) impact responsiveness. This research looks at how the government can be responsive to ad-hoc responses to various stakeholders in the ways mentioned above.

Conclusion

In conclusion, chapter 2 showed how agencies want to be responsive to navigate themselves vis-à-vis various stakeholders in practice. This chapter shows how scientists have defined bureaucratic responsiveness over time. These two chapters have defined and explained EU agencies and responsiveness, which function as building blocks for the theoretical framework - laying a foundation for our hypotheses. The next chapter will theorise how and why agencies choose to be responsive.

Chapter 4. Theoretic Framework

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework and introduces the three hypotheses tested.

As outlined previously, demands are multifaceted in practice (Rimkutė and Van der Voet, 2021). A request is not just the specific message in isolation but is given by a specific actor and comes with a certain level of salience or negative attention. All these three dimensions can impact the prioritisation decision of the bureaucrat. This theory section makes hypotheses on three dimensions of the demand: (1) actor, (2) message, and (3) the level of salience. Bound by limited time and resources, bureaucrats must prioritise responding to one request over another (Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021). This framework puts forward three hypotheses – based on these three dimensions of the requests - on how bureaucrats weigh the different dimensions to decide which request to prioritise.

This theory section builds on the assumptions of Rational Choice Institutionalism (RCI) to do so. RCI Assumes that people make rational choices to maximise their utility, just like Rational Choice Theory (Schepsle, 2008). RCI combines this insight with the Institutionalist perspective that the payoffs of the different choices are dictated by the rules of the game of the institutions in which they function (Weingast, 2002; Ferejohn, 2002). When applying this to the case of EU institutions, it means that in this theory section, it is implicitly assumed that bureaucrats carefully weigh whom to prioritise responding to while considering the rules and norms of the institutional system they function in. Afterwards, bureaucrats will make choices based on what they believe is essential to respond to first to maximise their utility and gain insights (Schepsle, 2008).

4.1 To <u>whom</u> are EU agencies more likely to prioritise responding to?

The first dimension of the request is the actor – such as a person or institution – who makes the request. EU agencies must attend to a wide array of EU citizens, companies, and political actors with various requests (Busuioc & Jevnaker, 2020). These various groups can be identified as external actors who pressure the bureaucracy to respond (Yang & Callahan, 2007).

Saltzstein (1992) categorised two models to whom bureaucrats are more likely to respond first. The first model theorises that bureaucrats are primarily attentive to their community's general public's wishes (Salzstein, 1992). This can either be through following direct requests from individual community members or the bureaucrats acting as brokers of the 'best interest' of the community. The second model theorises that bureaucrats are primarily attentive to political leaders (Saltzstein, 1992). Both models can coexist; however, this thesis theorises that bureaucrats in EU agencies are more likely to attend to politicians than the public when asked to prioritise between the two. This assumption is in line with earlier research (for example, by Rimkutė and van der Voet (2021) and Aleksovska, Schillemans, and Grimmelikhuijsen (2021)), which has also indicated that bureaucrats are more likely to prioritise political decision-makers.

Internal mechanisms for prioritising political decision-makers

There are multiple arguments for why bureaucrats prioritise political institutions over the general public. Bureaucratic responsiveness comes from a combination of outside pressure and internal structures, which both provide reasons why agencies are more likely to respond to politicians first (Meier & O'Toole, 2006). This thesis identifies two political actors: the European Parliament and European Commissioners (European Commission, n.d.). The first mechanism is internal to the European governance system. The internal systems of agencies of institutions designed still impact the choices that bureaucrats make - no matter how implicit (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Saltzstein, 1992).

The Principal-Agent (PA) model will dissect this hypothesised entanglement. The PA model is rooted in Rational Choice Institutionalism (Shepsle, 2008). The central premise of the model is that one actor

(agent) undertakes action on behalf of the other (principal). The principal delegates tasks to the agent, leading to a loss of control for the principal. The principal will implement various mechanisms to control the agent (Schepsle, 2008).

When this model is applied to the case of EU agencies, EU political decision-makers create EU agencies and delegate them to provide data, oversight, or assistance in policymaking (Korver, 2018). To do so convincingly, these agencies need to be (essentially) independent in their analysis and services from the European Commission and European Parliament (European Commssion, 2018). Even though the agencies are largely autonomous, various links between the EU institutions and agencies continue to exist – from formalised ways to communicate to oversight (Scholten, 2014; Schout, 2018). These links function as pathways for political decision-makers to exert some control over the agencies. For instance, as *Guardian of the Treaties*, the European Commission observes all agencies[7]. In addition, the European Parliament continues to exercise parliamentary scrutiny over EU agencies through budgetary oversight, involvement in appointing executives, annual reports, membership of management boards, and linking members of parliament to an agency (European Parliament, 2018). These links have significant benefits for the EU institutions; they reduce transaction costs and ensure that the agencies execute their delegated tasks correctly and effectively (Schepsle, 2008).

The PA model illustrates that the political environment that created these institutions still has ways to control the organisation even when they are independent. These lines of control implicitly affect EU agencies' impartiality for two reasons. First, bureaucrats can lose more when not attending to political decision-makers than when not attending to the public. Where the public can exclusively sanction through public outrage or a negative reputation, politicians can also sanction formally through the governance system (Aleksova, Schillemans & Grimmelkhuijsen, 2021; Busuioc & Rimkutė, 2020). The control and oversight done by the European Commission and European Parliament give them the power to sanction the agency (European Parliament, 2018) potentially. The fear of sanctioning or losing

[7] Artikel 17 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU)

financial means is a primary incentive for bureaucracies to act accordingly (Hagemann, Hobolt, & Wratil, 2016). To avoid negative consequences, bureaucrats will be more inclined to prioritise the European parliament's and European Commission's requests. Furthermore, when it comes down to attending to specific requests, this will result in more constrained or dictated responsiveness from bureaucrats in the agencies (Bryer, 2007). Thus, resulting in them preferring to attend to politicians' wishes first.

Second, bureaucrats can benefit more from being responsive to politicians than the general public. Both the general public and politicians can contribute to an agency's good public reputation, but only politicians can positively impact the agency's budget and system. The European Commission and Parliament's level of support positively impact these agencies by giving them better access to funds and potential loosening of control (Meier & O'Toole, 2006; 2000; Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999). Moreover, political support potentially gives them more autonomy to manage their tasks and have continuity and leadership stability independently. (Cope & Rainey, 1992; Riccucci, 1995). Therefore, maintaining a solid relationship with political decision-makers is beneficial to the agencies.

External mechanisms for prioritising political decision-makers

External pressures further exemplify the effects of the internal structures mentioned above. All external actors can pressure the agency through negative media attention from individual citizens and companies to European Members of Parliament. Agencies are most responsive to those with the most extensive media and client influence (Yang & Panley, 2007). The majority of EU agencies primarily operate out of the general public's eye. Since clarity is diffused by the multi-level governance structures and less public scrutiny, agencies might feel less seen by the general public and thus feel less threatened (Zhelyazkova et al., 2019). However, EU politicians do have them on their radar. Political decision-makers can get extensive media attention as the 'people's voice'. Therefore, the chance that a politician's request will be a potential public threat is more significant than that of the general public. Moreover, political audiences are perceived as more powerful and potentially threatening. As a result, they will

prioritise due to agencies feeling more pressure to maintain their reputation among these powerful actors to avoid potential damage (Bach, Jugl, Köhler, & Wegrich, 2021).

Hypothesis 1

In conclusion, the institutional set-up of the agencies makes them more likely to respond to political decision-makers because political decision-makers can – aside from applying external pressure through negative media attention – also apply pressure from within the institutional system. Moreover, they are also more likely to see what the agency might be doing, whereas agencies are generally less noticed by the general public. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: EU agency bureaucrats are more likely to prioritise requests from political decision-makers (European Commission and European Parliament) over the general public.

4.2 To what contents of requests are bureaucrats most likely to be responsive?

Nevertheless, it is not only the actor making the request that influences whether bureaucrats choose to be responsive. A second aspect that is influential is the specific content of the request. As outlined in chapter two on the strategic environment in which EU agencies operate, agencies must balance many tasks such as information gathering, regulating, and generating engagement (European Parliament, 2018; Busuioc & Rimkutė, 2019). Within these different roles, the agencies receive various requests about different aspects of their functioning. Based on the existing literature, this thesis assumes that these agencies do not just handle these requests neither randomly nor in exact order (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021). Instead, they make strategic choices based on factors such as (1) what they consider the core task of their agencies, (2) their ability to answer the requests, and (3) the kind of reputation they want to uphold (Bryer, 2007; Yang & Pandey, 2007; Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021). This section theorises that the prioritisation of specific requests depends upon the internal structure of the agency and the reputation they want to upkeep.

Internal mechanisms for prioritising technical requests

First, bureaucrats' responsiveness depends on the agency's unique internal structure, which needs to be considered (Bryer, 2007; Yang, 2007). The literature identifies two relevant organisational factors when agencies want to respond; (1) how control-centred the agency is and (2) its decentralisation level. First, when a bureaucracy tends to be more control-centred, the bureaucrats are bound more by rules or regulations and have less room to respond to individual requests (Bryer, 2007). Second, decentralisation dictates whether bureaucrats can make their own decisions at a lower level without permission from a higher level (Yang & Panley, 2007). Culture and autonomy are vital aspects to consider because bureaucrats cannot be accountable if statutes, regulations, and permission structures prevent them from responding to rules or culture (Yang & Pandey, 2007; Yang & Callahang, 2007).

We will now apply the theoretical insights into the case. Chapter 2 illustrated that agencies are primarily structured according to the "agency model" (Laking, 2006). The agency model states that a core reason for establishing agencies is to be further away from the governing structure, giving them the space and reputation of providing depoliticised, credible information (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007). To safeguard this position, agencies cannot participate in every discussion, especially when outside their mandate (Christensen & Laegreid, 2007; Majone, 2002). Moreover, EU agencies are highly centralised and have strong mandates on their primary tasks (Eckert, 2020). For instance, on the one hand, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) only has the mandate to collect data or write policy recommendations. On the other hand, another agency, European Asylum Support Office (EASO), is also mandated to communicate with member states and civil society actors. Due to their institutional setup, agencies might not have much leeway to respond to requests outside of their technical, mandated expertise (Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021).Thus, regardless of whether they want to reply, bureaucrats need to do so within the space provided in their mandate (Sharp, 1981).

The requests with legal procedural or technical content are more likely to be prioritised because they are more in line with the directives of these organisations and are something they can control. On the other hand, they might be less inclined to respond to criticisms of their moral or performative – because it has been decided for them on a political level by the European institutions that created them.

Second, bureaucrats themselves might not be equally eager to respond to all requests because of the agencies' core mandate and institutional setup. Rourke (1992) stated that bureaucrats should equally balance responsiveness to demands and 'professionalism'. The bureaucrats working in these agencies often have more background in the core tasks of their agency, such as technical expertise, compliance or project management, and focus on the content. Bureaucrats need to balance their will to respond to external pressures with what they can do based on their competencies and their organisational cultures. In aiming to balance these two, they will go for what they can and are allowed to do within their structures. These two aspects line up most for technical demands and legal – procedural close to their mandate and personal expertise.

External mechanisms for prioritising technical requests

Nonetheless, it is not only what they can respond to within the boundaries set by their organisation; prioritisation also depends upon how the agencies want to be perceived. Namely, good relations with various stakeholders are essential to execute their primary tasks and position themselves as an agency (Arras & Braun, 2017). As a result, they need to maintain good contacts with the different actors to be taken seriously, legitimised, and appreciated for what they do. As a result, agencies must constantly manage their reputation with these other actors (Rimkutė, 2020). According to Reputational theory, how agencies handle external demands can determine their reputation (Carpenter, 2010). A good reputation is crucial because it gives them the power and agency needed to survive since EU agencies' legitimacy is dependent on whether they can convince other actors that they can complete their core tasks (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Majone, 1999). For EU agencies, this means that they want to look competent in front of their different audiences (Busioc & Rimkutė, 2019).

Carpenter and Krause (2012) argue that reputation is not just one overall preferred vision of the agency, as dictated by their mandate. Instead, agencies carefully manage their reputation by responding differently to different messages to, for instance, (1) legitimise their conduct, (2) solidify their place in relevant networks, or (3) potentially damage parts of their reputation (Carpenter & Krause, 2012;

Rimkutė, 2020). According to the Bureaucratic Reputation Framework, four reputational dimensions can be identified (Carpenter, 2010). Namely, (1) Performative reputation; can the agency do its mandated job? (2) Moral reputation – does the agency have the correct values – is it compassionate with its client; does it protect them? Are they flexible and honest? (3) Procedural reputation – does the agency follow accepted rules? Moreover, lastly (4) Technical reputation – does the agency have the compacity and skill required for doing its job in its environment?

In line with this, four different messages can be identified. External requests, concerns or demands can question four kinds of aspects of the agencies such as (1) more technical based like how the agency functions and adheres to the highest technical or scientific standards, (2) around the agency's adherence to formal rules and procedures, (3) related to how the agency performs and if it can accomplish its mandated tasks, and lastly (4) its commitment to ethical and moral values (as identified by Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021). The first two are concerned with what they do, and the second two with how they attribute to their *own* and *the EU community* goals. Agencies will be more likely to respond to the first two than the last two for the following reasons. Moreover, agencies might be more likely to respond to reputational threats because they fear this might have more considerable repercussions – when it becomes known that the agency failed at its core tasks (Gilad, Maor & Bloom, 2013).

Agencies must decide which of these four forms of reputation has priority since they cannot pursue them simultaneously; however, not all forms of reputation are equal to the agencies. In a time when 'facts are relative' and reputation is crucial currently, agencies will focus on having their primary reputation positively over all else (Busioc & Rimkutė, 2021; Bach Jugl, Köhler, & Wegrich, 2021). Namely, to have a good reputation on how the agency

They make strategic choices, carefully managing their reputation towards various stakeholders to upkeep their reputation towards those audiences (Rimkutė, 2020). Agencies will actively choose what kind of reputation they want to upkeep and focus on those requests (Rimkutė, 2020). Given the organisation's focus and mandate, their technical mission and adherence to European rules and

regulation are the fundament of the organisation and, therefore, will receive the most focus, whereas other more peripheral criticisms or requests will be less likely to be prioritised when choosing where to direct attention (Bach, Jugl, Köhler, & Wegrich, 2021; Busioc & Rimkutė, 2021). To protect their work and output, they will focus on legitimising their technical reputation (Majone, 1998). This means that the agencies are more likely to focus on their technical reputation, prioritising requests with a more technical context.

Hypothesis 2

In conclusion, agencies will be more likely to prioritise technical conduct because it is most in line with their mandate and the skillset of their personnel. Moreover, it is the reputation they would most like to protect. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: EU agency bureaucrats will prioritise technical demands when facing multiple requests.

4.3 Under which circumstances are they most likely to respond?

EU agencies do not operate in an organisational vacuum (Carpenter & Krause, 2012). Because of this, the prioritisation of a request can also depend on the context in which it appears. This research looks at one specific aspect of context: the presence of salience, the quality *of being particularly noticeable or essential* (Cambridge University, n.d). Salience is operationalised as a request receiving negative media attention (Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021). When a request or demand is accompanied by negative media attention, agencies will be more likely to prioritise this request over others (Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021).

Two arguments can be given for why agencies are more likely to respond to requests with salience. First, once again, referring to the Bureaucratic Reputation Theory, which assumes that bureaucracies are aware of the perception of their stakeholders and will position themselves to be positively perceived (Carpenter, 2010; Rimkutė, 2020). According to Carpenter (2010), organisational reputation is the general view of an organisation's intentions, history and capacities by a network of audiences. This

perspective on the organisation will, in turn, dictate how external parties look upon the organisation. For EU agencies, this perception is essential because they constantly need to appear competent and valuable to remain legitimate (Bach, Jugl, Köhler, & Wegrich, 2021). By doing so, they will maintain their support from outside actors as an agency (Carpenter and Krause, 2012).

As a result, a favourable reputation among relevant audiences is essential for bureaucratic power (Bach et al., 2021). An agency with a good reputation and is perceived as competent or relevant will be taken more seriously than one that does not have this reputation. A positive appearance in these areas is a constant positive affirmation of the agency's competency and legitimacy as a regulatory and information providing actor (Busuioc & Lodge, 2015). Protecting their bureaucratic reputation is a way for agencies to ensure their security and continuity - which is the primary baseline for any other actions after (Aleksovska, Schillemans, & Grimmelikhuijsen, 2021).

Moreover, negative media attention on one issue can draw the attention of its political principles, allowing them to sanction or punish the agency. When an issue gets brought to light, it might only lead to public, political or legal scrutiny. In political science, it has been argued that negative attention from a particular group – for instance, the media – can function as a 'fire alarm', notifying political actors of potential negative behaviour (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984). The agency benefits from not having salient requests linger for too long before they get bigger and potentially trigger other audiences. It, therefore, is beneficial for the agencies to cultivate these audiences to prevent escalation (Carpenter, 2010). Media works on a very different schedule timewise; if the agency wants to comment or do damage control, it might need to act quickly to work with the media cycle, being a reason to prioritise salient requests.

Salient requests are a considerable threat to the agency's appearance and, thus, can either harm or improve the agency's security (Aleksova et al., 2021). Any negative attention, such as public shaming or negative public judgement, is a perceived threat to the agency. As a result, agencies are driven by a negativity bias (Hood, 2011). This potential reputational threat is of such significant impact that agencies

will choose to avoid blame over claiming positive reinforcement (Bach, Jugl, Köhler, & Wegrich, 2021b). Agencies will want to save their reputation before dealing with other issues. Agencies will tend to respond quicker to salvage their reputation and dilute any negative consequences for the agency (Carpenter, 2010; Rimkutė, 2021). Therefore, agencies will prioritise these requests over less salient requests because they feel like they are a more significant potential threat to their functioning.

Earlier research has shown that bureaucracies can become more or less responsive when receiving negative media attention (Erlich et al., 2021). These conflicting results might seem contradictory at first. However, it could be that bureaucracies become less responsive to prevent further damage by saying the wrong things or more responsive to try to get control of the conversation and save their reputation in accountability (Erlich et al., 2021).

Hypothesis 3

In conclusion, agencies will prioritise salient requests to protect themselves from damaging media attention and potentially impacting their security and harming their reputation. Moreover, salience might get the attention of political decision-makers, which can then sanction the agency. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: When faced with multiple requests, EU agency bureaucrats will prioritise the salient requests.

Chapter 5: Method

The method section outlines the fundamental choices, methods, and procedures followed while explaining and justification the approaches taken to arrive at the results in the next chapter.

5.1 Research strategy

The research strategy constitutes a step-by-step rundown of the fundamental choices to research the research question. This research is theoretical in nature, as it aims to verify theoretical concepts (Magnusson, 2003). More specifically, the study aims to find which prioritisation choices respondents make and why they make these particular choices. A research strategy is needed to encompass this complex data and use as much as possible to answer the research and gain insight into their thought processes while making these choices. This research goes beyond correlation and aims to uncover the underlying causal mechanisms using a multi-level, mixed-methods approach. To achieve this goal, the interview contains a combination of different data collection measures and types of analysis. A full breakdown of the data collection, analysis choices and goals can be found in table 1.

Table 1 - Research strategy, divided per section interview

Part of interview	**Type of data collection**	**Type of analysis**	**Method of analysis**	**The main goal of the analysis**
Introduction and explanation	Semi-structured interview	Qualitative analysis	Coding if needed	Only finding background information
Self-ranking of the importance of the types of content by respondents	Semi-structured interview	Quantitative analysis	Calculate an average ranking for each type of content for the request.	Find out which type of content the respondents view as the most important.
		Qualitative analysis	Coding	Find if the reasoning behind the ranking aligns with the theoretical assumptions made earlier.
Ranking of Actors	Semi-structured interview	Quantitative analysis	Calculate an average ranking for each actor potentially making a request.	Find out which type of content the respondents view as the most important.

		Qualitative analysis	Coding	Find if the reasoning behind the ranking aligns with the theoretical assumptions made earlier.
Question of Salience	Semi-structured interview	Qualitative analysis	Coding	Find if the reasoning lines up with the theoretical assumptions made earlier.
Vignettes 1-8	EVM	Quantitative analysis	Model building Y= choice X(1-3)= actor, content, salience	Test if the three factors influence the choice of the respondent. See if significant differences could be extrapolated to cases outside of the respondent group but the rest of the population.
		Qualitative analysis	Coding	Find if the reasoning behind the ranking aligns with the theoretical assumptions made earlier.
Follow-up questions	Semi-structured interview	Qualitative analysis	Coding	Find if the reasoning behind the ranking aligns with the theoretical assumptions made earlier. Gain relevant insights.
Explanation current research	Semi-structured interview	Qualitative analysis	Coding	Find if the reasoning behind the ranking aligns with the theoretical assumptions made earlier.

5.2 Research methods data collection

This section outlines the various methods used for data collection; Experimental Vignette Methodology (EVM) and semi-structured interviews.

5.2.1. Experimental Vignette Methodology

Vignettes are "*short, carefully constructed descriptions of a person, object, or situation representing a systematic combination of characteristics*" (Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010, p. 128). In contrast with, for instance, (factorial) surveys, vignettes are lively scenarios where participants must explicitly make choices in real-time (Aguinis and Bradly, 2014). This means that we give a scenario to the participants – either on paper or by telling them – and ask them what they would do in the situation. The researcher then asks follow-up questions while presenting the choices.

Two research choices were made to specify further how the EVM would be constructed (1) what kind of vignette study would be done, and (2) how the data would be analysed. First, a specific version of EVM will be used, namely ' Capturing and Conjoint Analysis studies'. This version of EVM is often

used to understand and capture (implicit) real-time decision processes. This specific type aims to "*understand the effects of the manipulated variables on the implicit judgment through the ranking of vignettes or by asking participants to make choices and state preferences between them"* (Aguinis and Bradly, 2014, p. 354). Capturing and Conjoint analysis is ideal for this specific research. Namely, in such a diverse and heterogeneous environment as EU agencies operate within, we want to control the variables to start assessing possible causation (Cavanaugh & Fritzsche, 1985). When designing our scenarios, we can include and exclude specific factors. The dependent variable here will be responsiveness, and the independent factors will be the (1) actor making the request, (2) content of the request, and (3) whether the request is salient. Under each of these factors, there will be different options.

A second important choice is to do both in-between and within-person analysis. In EVM, research is either done as comparative research between people or within people (Aguinis and Bradly, 2014). The former means that one scenario is used among many people and then compared the different responses between people. The latter implies that various vignettes are shown to one specific person, so the researcher can see how their choices differ in multiple scenarios. This research will use both forms – showing numerous vignettes to all respondents and comparing the results between participants. The within-person design will be essential to control for between-person differences (van der Hoek, Beerkens, & Groeneveld, 2021).

5.2.2 Qualitative interviews

A qualitative, in-depth interview will complement the EVM research. Here various questions will be asked on how and why the participant made particular choices. Qualitative, in-depth interviews are desirable when the research involves understanding complex topics or reasons (Flick, 2017). This research is about gaining insight into why certain choices are being made. To uncover these mechanisms, respondents need to be prompted to think about why they make certain decisions. An in-depth interview allows the respondents time and space to develop their thought while allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions to get a complete picture. To guide the respondents, a semi-structured interview format will be used.

The in-depth interview started prior to the vignettes – when they were asked to rank the actors, contents and salience. The in-depth interview was continued while conducting the EVM, constantly asking follow-up questions about the choices made and arguments given. Lastly, the researcher explained the initial findings of the earlier study conducted by Rimkutė and Van der Voet (2021) and ask for feedback. Given the integrated approach, the data will be transcribed and analysed in the same way as the vignette study.

5.3 Procedure

The procedure section outlines how the respondents were selected and interviewed.

5.3.1 Participant selection and collection

Respondents were selected based on their job – namely, working for an EU agency or Joint Undertaking. For this thesis, the opportunity was given to join an already existing research project. For their article, "*when do bureaucrats respond to external demands? A theoretical framework and empirical test of bureaucratic responsiveness*", Rimukuté and Van der Voet (2021) already recruited EU agency bureaucrats. The bureaucrats who participated were recruited in June 2021 through an email invitation. After their participation, they were asked to join a secondary interview. An email invitation was sent to those who agreed to an interview in November 2021.

5.3.1 Respondents in the dataset

The participants come from a sample of 14 men and two women. They volunteered to do these interviews from a group of 91 individuals, containing 66 men and 25 women (Rimkutė and van der Voet, 2021 – original data). In the original dataset, respondents were on average 48,6 years old and had 10,3 years of experience within the organisation. Two worked at joint undertakings and 14 at EU agencies from the sample.

5.3.2 Interview process

The vignettes were part of a more extensive interview session done by Dr Dovile Rimkutė, a researcher at Leiden University[8]. All 16 interviews were conducted through Microsoft Teams with a PowerPoint presentation to show the actors and scenarios.

The interviews had the following setup. First, the interviewer introduced the research and process to the respondent. Since the respondents had already partaken in an earlier part of the study – in the form of a survey with similar choices but without explanation – they were already acquainted with the interview topic. Moreover, this way, the respondents participated with informed consent. Moreover, the qualitative interview questions were asked. The researcher showed and explained the three variables to the respondents. Starting with the various actors, the different types of content were shown, and lastly, the concept of salience was explained. After elaborating on each variable, the respondents were asked to share their perspectives. Moreover, the respondents were already asked to rank the types of actors and content from least to most important. Lastly, the respondents were asked if they believed negative media attention was an essential factor in their decisions to respond to a request.

After the initial qualitative part of the interview, the respondent was given eight sets of two requests. Each request is consistent with an actor and a request or concern. In each scenario, the respondent was asked which request the respondent would prioritise and why. When necessary, the researcher would ask follow-up questions to get a clear understanding of the underlying reasons. After every scenario, the same scenario was shown again with the aspect of salience – meaning that it would be revealed that one of the requests had received negative media attention while the other had not. The respondents were then asked whether they wanted to change their initial prioritisation or stick with their original choice.

After the eight scenarios were given, the researcher followed up with a second qualitative aspect. The researcher showed findings from the earlier survey study, during which the respondents had the

[8] For more information on dr. Rimkutė: https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/staffmembers/dovile-Rimkutė#tab-1

opportunity to share their insights. This part had the same structure as the initial qualitative part; first, the findings regarding the prioritisation of various actors were shown, after which the content and salience were discussed.

5.3.3 Overview dilemmas

It is crucial to get as much information as possible through many vignettes and data while still respecting the respondents' cognitive limits when constructing the dilemmas. (Aiman-Smith, Scullen, & Barr, 2002). First, the number of variables was chosen to include the two or three main factors and keep them as broad as possible. This way, the researcher and respondent could further specify the factor when needed, without overwhelming the respondents. Too many variables can have two effects, (1) it can make the design unwieldy, leading and (2) lead to unclarity for the participants. (Aiman-Smith, Scullen, & Barr, 2002). To make the most out of the interview. The following setup was used.

The vignettes have been created combining each of the independent variables in each dilemma. The following combinations have been made. It is important to reiterate that the salience was only shown after making the initial choice between the actor and content.

Each dilemma was constructed with a specific goal in mind. The first dilemma aims to see what actor is preferred between a political actor (Member of the European Parliament) and the general public. It is hypothesised that respondents will choose the request of the political actor over the request of the public. Therefore, the request of the general public is assigned negative media attention to see if this makes a difference in the choice. The second dilemma is to see whether a commissioner is chosen over a member of the European Parliament when both have identical requests. It is assumed that the commissioner will be chosen; therefore, the request by the parliament is assigned salience. The third dilemma is the same as the second, but the choice is between identical requests between the commissioner and the general public. The general public is later assigned salience to see if this makes the respondent prioritise the general public when salience is involved. The fourth dilemma is once again to compare actors with similar messages. The fifth dilemma compares two different requests from the same actor - the general

public. It is assumed that the legal-procedural requests will be chosen, so the moral conduct one is assigned with high salience to see if this changes the choice made. The sixth dilemma is between two European Commissioners who have different requests to see which content is prioritised and research the effect of salience on the content. The last two dilemmas are both between two different actors with different messages.

Table 2 – Vignettes (same as displayed to the respondents).

Dilemma 1	
A Member of European Parliament. *(political)..* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's commitment to the highest ethical standards and moral values. *(Moral conduct)* This request has not received any media attention. *(Low salience)*	The General public. *(non-political)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's commitment to the highest ethical standards and moral values (*Moral conduct)* This request has received much negative media attention. *(High salience).*
Dilemma 2	
A European Commissioner... *(political)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's capacity to effectively accomplish its goals and mandated tasks. *(Performative conduct)* This request has not received any media attention. *(Low salience)*	A member of the European Parliament... *(political)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's capacity to effectively accomplish its goals and mandated tasks. (*Performative conduct)* This request has received much negative media attention. *(High salience)*
Dilemma 3	
A European Commissioner… *(Political actor)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's compliance with formal rules and legal procedures *(Legal-procedural conduct)* This request has not received any media attention	The general public… *(non-political)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's compliance with formal rules and legal procedures *(Legal-procedural conduct)*

(Low salience)	This request has received much negative media attention *(High Salience)*
Dilemma 4	
A European Commissioner… *(Political actor)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's adherence to the highest professional, technical or scientific standards. *(Technical conduct)* This request has received much negative media attention *(High Salience)*	A scientific expert working at a research institute... (Private actor) Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's adherence to the highest professional, technical or scientific standards. *(Technical conduct)* This request has not received any media attention *(Low salience)*
Dilemma 5	
The general public… *(Private actor)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's compliance with formal rules and legal procedures. *(Legal-procedural conduct)* This request has not received any media attention *(Low salience)*	The general public… *(Private actor)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's commitment to the highest ethical standards and moral values *(Moral conduct)* This request has received much negative media attention *(High Salience)*
Dilemma 6	
A European Commissioner… *(Political actor)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's adherence to the highest professional, technical or scientific standards. *(Technical conduct)* This request has received much negative media attention *(High Salience)*	A European Commissioner… *(Political actor)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's compliance with formal rules and legal procedures *(Legal-procedural conduct)* This request has not received any media attention *(Low salience)*
Dilemma 7	
A large corporation… *(Private actor)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's compliance with formal rules and legal procedures *(Legal-procedural conduct)*	A director of a relevant national agency… *(Private actor)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's adherence to the highest professional, technical or scientific standards. *(Technical conduct)*

This request has received negative media attention *(High Salience)*	This request has not received any media attention *(Low salience)*
Dilemma 8	
A scientific expert working at a research institute… *(Private actor)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's adherence to the highest professional, technical or scientific standards. *(Technical conduct)* This request has received negative media attention *(High Salience)*	A director of a relevant national agency… *(Private actor)* Has expressed serious concerns about your organisation's compliance with formal rules and legal procedures *(Legal-procedural conduct)* This request has not received any media attention *(Low salience)*

5.4 Analysis: Transcription and coding

After the interview, the interviews were transcribed in a 'verbatim manner'. The interview is written out entirely when transcribed verbatim, but small things such as stutters, laughs, and repetitions are not transcribed (Hennink et al., 2015). Afterwards, the texts are separated into two parts (1) the scenarios (2) the qualitative research. The former will be used first for the EVM methodology. It will be supplemented with qualitative research to understand better how and why specific requests are prioritised over others. Nonetheless, the researcher will code both parts by marking keywords and phrases in Atlas.ti.

This research uses two coding methods, first having a set of codes based on the hypothesis, which will be discussed on the next page. Moreover, since this research is partly explorative, the coding was repeated inductively. This means that for the second round, we did not start with a predetermined set of codes that was looked for in the data; instead, codes will be developed during the transcripts' analysis (Saldana, 2019). Adding this approach to the theoretical approach has two benefits. First, it allows us to be more open in interpreting the data (Thomas, 2006). This is suitable since we are not hypothesis testing but rather exploring the factors first. Second, it allows us to create codes that fit the terminology used by the bureaucrats.

5.4.1 Used Codes

The following codes were used to analyse the data. First, the text was coded for the different actors, messages and levels of salience. After, the text was coded with the codes made based on the theoretical framework from chapter four. Lastly, the texts were evaluated and assessed if any parts were systematically missed in the coding and should be added as a code. In the end, some pieces of text were coded with multiple codes, meaning that one sentence could have the codes '(1)European Parliament, (2) Perceived control, and (3) legitimacy critic'. All used codes can be found in table 2.

Table 3- Overview of used codes

Round	Category	Code	Definition
1	Actors	European Parliament	All quotes involving the European Parliament
		European Commission	All quotes involving the European Commission
		General public	All quotes involving the General public
		National agencies	All quotes involving National agencies
		Scientists	All quotes involving scientists
		Corporations	All quotes involving corporations
	Message	Technical	All quotes about adherence to professional, technical or scientific standards
		Legal – procedural	All quotes about compliance with formal rules and legal procedures.
		Performative	All quotes about the performance of the agencies
		Moral	All quotes about the agencies adherence to ethical standards and moral values
	Salience	Salience	When respondents explicitly referred to salience or negative media attention.
2	Hypothesis 1: actors	(perceived) control	When respondents state they perceive a level of control from an actor. For instance, through finances, regulation, or institutional setup.

		Democratic considerations	Respondents talk about prioritising requests from democratic actors.
		Institutional closeness	Respondents talk about they way they easily work with other EU institutions.
		Financial considerations	Respondents talk about budgets, grants and other financial considerations.
	H2: Message	Core mandate	Respondents talk about the agency's core tasks
		Reputation	Respondents talk about managing their reputation towards stakeholders and how this can potentially affect the agency.
		Protocol and rules	Respondents talk about following rules and
	H3: Salience	Reputational Damage	Respondents specifically talk about a fear of reputational damage (often coded with Reputation).
		Urgency	Respondents talk about feeling urgency to act quickly.
3		Legitimacy critic	Respondents talk about actors and messages in terms of being a genuine threat or

5.5 Operationalisation of variables for statistical analysis

The dependent variable is bureaucratic responsiveness, which is operationalised as the prioritisation made by the respondent between the two scenarios.

The independent variables were constructed as followed (Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021). For the actors, six actors were identified (1) European Commissioner, (2) Member of European Parliament, (3) The general public, (4) A corporation, (5) a Director of a relevant national agency, (6) A scientific expert working at a research institute. The first two actors are political actors, whereas the last four are non-political/private actors. The hypothesis tested in this thesis only looks at the difference between political and non-political actors. Therefore, the variable was recoded into '0= non-political' and '1=political'.

The second independent variable 'message,' was operationalised in four different forms (1) Technical conduct – whether the organisation can adhere to the highest professional and technical standards, (2) Legal procedural conduct – whether the organisation is compliant with formal rules and legal procedures, (3) Moral conduct - organisation's commitment to the highest ethical standards and moral values, and (4) performative conduct - organisation's capacity to effectively accomplish its goals and mandated tasks. This operationalisation is based upon the conceptualisation of the four reputational dimensions by Carpenter and Krause (2012) and the operationalisation of that by Rimkutė and Van der Voet (2021). To add this categorical variable to the analysis, four dummy variables were created, which each indicated the presence of one specific message.

Lastly, salience has been defined as a request having either received no media attention (low salience) or much negative media attention (high salience). The variables have deliberately been kept vague, so they apply to all respondents. This operationalisation was first made by Rimkutė and Van der Voet (2021).

5.6 data analysis in Excel and SPSS

After coding all of the data and the qualitative data analysis, quantitative models were built to see if the data could be generalised beyond the group of respondents. This was done in two steps, first noting all of the respondents' choices in an Excel file. After, a custom dataset was created in SPSS. SPSS was then used to construct the variables and do the analysis.

The impact of the vignette structure on the data analysis

Two design choices of the vignette methodology heavily impact the data analysis. The first design choice is regarding the transfer of the choices made in the interview into the SPSS dataset. All respondents (total N=15 respondents) chose between two requests in eight vignettes in two rounds – first without salience and then with salience (total N=240 choices). However, to build models with this data and compare the choices, a choice between two actors with their own message was split up into two observations. Each observation – comparable to a line in SPSS - contained the factors – actor, message,

salience – and the prioritisation decision as a binary variable '0=not prioritised, 1=prioritised'. This means that we no longer had 16 choices but 32 observations on prioritisation per participant – which are seen as independent from each other (total N=480 observations) [9]. This means that we first had to calculate whether there is dependence in the data.

Second, the design of the vignettes is not entirely symmetrical or identical – as it was not distributed randomly. As explained above, the vignettes did not all contain the same choice with the same combination of factors. Instead, the respondents chose between different options, such as different actors but the same message or the same actors. Because we cannot assume that these choices can be made for all, the models can only be applied to the observations related to specific vignettes. Because of this, the data was constantly filtered only to use specific vignettes. This means that different models were used to test the different hypotheses, and different sets of data were used. For instance, hypothesis 1 on actors only uses vignettes 1.1, 3.1, and 4.1 because these are the vignettes where the respondents had to choose between a political and non-political actor. For hypothesis 2 about the message, only vignettes 6.1 and 6.2 were used for the last hypothesis, all vignettes were used.

Determining the independence of the data

Moreover, the data is not only dependent when it comes to observation. In general, the data is multi-level, and observations are nested at three levels (1) the respondents, (2) within the vignettes and (3) within the choices (Schoeneberger, 2015). To account for this potential lack of independence, an extra step had to be taken to determine the level of dependence in the data before constructing the appropriate model. First, an empty multilevel logistic regression was used to assess if one of the most important assumptions was violated due to the data structure: "lack of correlation of the residuals" (Bressoux, 2010; Sommet & Morselli, 2017, p. 206). When working with multilevel logistic regression, we need a minimum of 50 observations in 40 respondents (Schoeneberger, 2016). This was not the case, as we only had 15 respondents doing the vignettes. Because there are only 15 participants, the model's

[9] Downsides tot his approach will be discussed in the Discussion section

parameters were estimated with a 'restricted maximum likelihood' to create more realistic and robust estimates and standard errors (Hox, Moerbeek, and Van de Schoot 2018).

Then, an empty model was built to evaluate to what extent de Log-odds vary between the different clusters (Sommet & Morselli, 2017). The ICC was calculated by hand and turned out to be zero – meaning that 0% of the variation in choices could be accounted for by level 2 (the participants and their characteristics). To double-check the ICC score, it was also calculated through SPSS, here, the ICC was rounded to 0,01. This means that the systematic decisions of the respondents accounted for 1% of the variation in choices. Together this means that multilevel analysis was not necessary since the data was independent enough (Sommet & Moressli, 2017). Therefore, we can use a standard logistic regression model. Ten models were made in total.

Logistic regression models

Three steps were taken to construct and analyse the model. First, the data was prepared. Since we want to know the general effect of the factors (lower-level predictors) instead of the specifics within-person, the input variables for political or non-political actor, and the dummy variables for the messages were all centered using grand mean centering (Sommet & Morselli, 2017). This means that the general means of only the observations of vignettes 1.1, 3.1, 4.1 were subtracted from the variable scores. Then, prior to the logistic regression, univariate and bivariate distributions were examined. To test the first hypothesis, three models were created. The first model contains only the independent variable 'political actor'. The second model also includes the dummies for the message. The third model also includes the interaction of the message and actor. The same steps were then repeated for vignettes 1.2, 3.2, and 4.2 – to see how salience would affect the relationship between actor and prioritisation choice. Here a fourth model was made to add salience as a variable.

For hypothesis 2, the same steps were repeated but for vignettes 6.1, 7.1 and 8.1, which looked at different messages. To test the second hypothesis, three models were created. The first model contains

only the four dummies for ‘message’. The second model also includes the variable actor. The third model contains the interaction between the two.

Lastly, for salience vignettes, 1.2, 2,2, 3.2, 4.2, 5.2, 6.2, 7.2 and 8.2 were used. The first model contains only salience. The second model contains the actor and message; the third model contains the interactions.

Assumption testing

The models were then evaluated for their fit using the Chi-square test and Deviance. The fit will be discussed in the result section.

Chapter 6: Results of analysis

This chapter showcases the results that came out of the mixed-methods approach. The result section first outlines the descriptive statistics of the dataset – showing the characteristics of the respondents and data. Here, the self-raking of the critical variables, actors and content are shown. After this, the quantitative and qualitative research is shown for each hypothesis.

6.1 Descriptive statistics

The dataset comprises 16 interviews, of which 15 responded to the vignettes. The dataset contains 14 men and two women, of whom 14 worked at an EU agency and two at a Joint Undertaking[10]. Those respondents each responded to 16 scenarios (first without salience (8) and later with salience (8)). This led to 246 choices[11] between requests and 512 observations on their choices. For the third respondent, two scenarios are not answered – meaning that out of 512 observations in the SPSS dataset, we have eight missing values in the dataset. The prevalence of the different variables is displayed in table 1. These divisions are primarily due to the interview set-up but provide us insight into the prevalence of the variables that will be analysed. For the qualitative analysis, the codes described in the method section were applied collectively 786 times, to were applied to 16 transcripts.

Table 4 – descriptive statistics quantitative research

Variable	N	Percentages	Min	Max
Choice (dependent)	480 (8 missing)	50% prioritised (1) 50% Not prioritised (0)	0	1

[10] The respondents volunteered to do these interviews after already being part of the study by Rimkute and Van der Voet (2021). This original dataset contained 91 individuals, containing 66 men and 25 women (Rimkute and van der Voet, 2021 – original data). In the original dataset, respondents were on average 48,6 years old and had 10,3 years of experience within the organisation.

[11] An overview of all choices per participant can be found in Appendix 2.

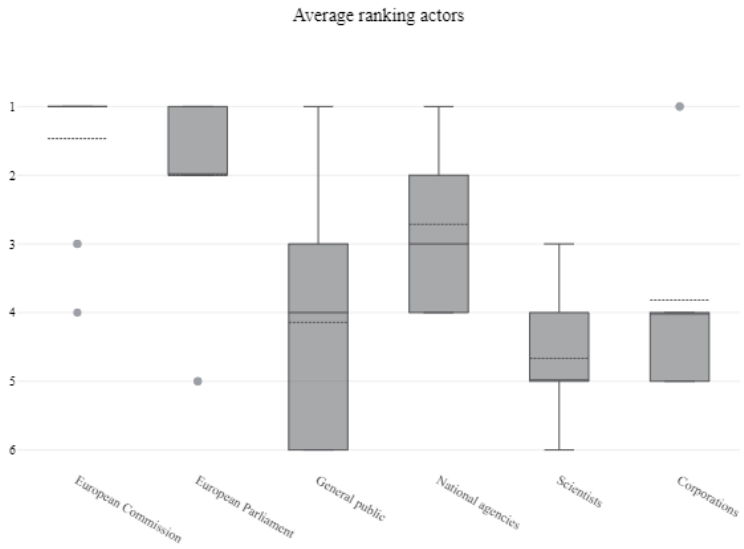
Actor	480	31,3% European Commission (n=150) 12,5% European Parliament (n=60) 12,5% National Agency (n=60) 25% General public (n=120) 12,5% Scientists (n=60) 6,3% Corporations (n=30)	0	5
Actor political	480	43,8% Political actors (n=210) (0) 56,3% non-political actors (n=270).	0	1
Message	480	31,3% Technical conduct (n=150) 37,5% Legal-procedural conduct (n=180) 12,5% Performative conduct (n=60) 18,8% Moral conduct (n=90).	0	3
Salience	240 (240 missing[12])	24,0 % no salience 26, 0 % salience 50% missing values (vignettes without salience taken into account)	0	1

[12] Due to the structure of the vignettes, half of the vignettes did not contain salience, these were coded as system missing, but are not considered missing values since the respondents did not have the option to respond to them.

6.2 Self-evaluation of the variables by the respondents

During the first three questions asked in the interview, the respondents were asked to rank the two main variables; (1) the type of content and (2) the type of actor. These rankings provide a better overall understanding of how the interviewees view the variables – making it easier to understand the nature of the choices and data.

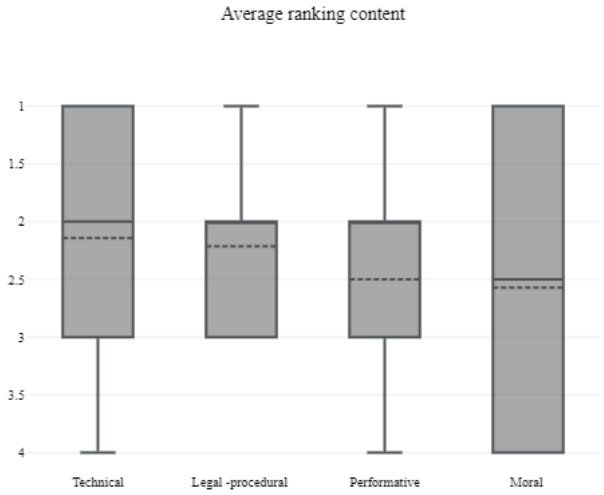
First, all respondents were asked to rank the six actors in the studies. As shown in graph 1, on average, respondents rank political actors higher than non-political actors[13]. The ranking is as follows: (1) European Commission, (2) European Parliament, (3) national agencies, (4) general public, (5) national agencies, and (6) corporations. Where the European Commission was ranked first by almost all participants, the size of the boxplots shows that the ranking of the general public and national agencies significantly differed among bureaucrats.



[13] All individual rankings and calculations for the bar plots in the graph can be found in appendix 1.

Graph 2 - Ranking by respondents[14]

Second, the respondents were asked to rank the included potential contents of requests. The ranking of the various contents varied heavily across the respondents, making their average ranking extremely close, as can be seen in graph 2, on average Technical content (1) and Legal-procedural content (2) were ranked slightly higher than Performative (3) and Moral (4) [15]. nonetheless, the ranking was extremely close.



Graph 2 - ranking respondents' content of criticism or requests

Lastly, the respondents were asked whether salience was an important actor. All respondents said yes.

Insights on the nature of the data from the self-ranking

The self-ranking provides us with three key insights into the nature of the data that need to be taken into account when analysing the scenarios. First, it is essential to note that respondents interpreted the

[14] Some respondents did not explicitly rank the actors. The author then made a ranking based on the answers they provided. If they did not mention an actor at all or provided no indication for a ranking the actor was marked with an x and not included in the calculation of the averages.

[15] The average ranking was: Technical: 2,1; Legal-procedural: 2,2; Performative, 2,5; Moral: 2,6. Full calculations can be found in Appendix 1.

question and ranked the actors based on different premises. Some respondents ranked the actors by their importance when putting in a request, whereas others focussed on how often they interacted with the various actors. A different version of the same reasoning was found when asked to rank the contents of the requests. Some respondents ranked the content by evaluating what criticism they thought was most likely to happen instead of having a significant effect. Therefore, we must be careful when interpreting the models – not all respondents might have answered the questions based on the same assumptions.

Second, the respondents were hesitant to rank the actors and content. One point stretched by all respondents consistently throughout is that their organisational structures allowed them to deal with various requests simultaneously. For instance, respondent 15 said that different departments, such as communication or compliance, would deal with different requests simultaneously. Respondent 16 also touched upon this and noted that they are "*prepared to go for all [requests] simultaneously*".

Third, the different natures of the respondents' agencies and jobs significantly impact their choices. This means that even if they have the same thought process – they can still make different choices because they are in different agencies or focus on different things based on their role description. For instance, various respondents considered different contents such as technical or performative - 'the core of their agency'. This means that we need to consider the background of the actors when assessing their choices.

6.3 Vignette study/hypothesis testing

This section discusses the vignettes in the EVM study. This section is structured by the three hypothesises. For every hypothesis, we will first discuss the prioritisation decisions made by the respondents and evaluate the models (quantitative analysis). Afterwards, it will be dissected why the respondents made these choices by evaluating common themes in the respondents' reasoning laid bare through coding the transcripts (qualitative analysis).

6.3.1 Hypothesis 1: Actors

The first hypothesis theorised in the theory section is that *EU agency bureaucrats are more likely to prioritise requests from political decision-makers over the general public*. We use three vignettes to test this hypothesis, 1, 3, and 4, focused explicitly on choosing between a political and non-political actor.

Table 5 showcases each respondent's prioritisation with the main reason(s) why they made this choice – if stated by the respondent. The analysis was done in two rounds; first, only the two variables, actor and message, were displayed, and in the second round, the third variable, salience, was revealed.

Round 1: Only Actor and Message

First, the data gathered when reviewing the choices shows the following. When the respondents were confronted with identical requests from a political actor (European parliament or European Commission) and a non-political actor (General public or a scientific expert), the large majority chose to prioritise the request by political actors over the request by non-political actors. In the first vignette, all actors (100%) prioritised the request of the European parliament over the request of the general public. In the second vignette, 93,4% of actors chose to prioritise the request of the EU commissioner over the general public. In the third vignette, 67,7% of the respondents prioritised the EU commissioner over the request of the public.

To further test the strength of this relationship and whether the study can be extrapolated to the population, Binary Logistic models were constructed – model 1 with only the variable actor and model 2 with the *content of the message* as a control variable. All models can be found in table 5. Evaluating the models' fit with the Deviance and Chi-square test, we can see that both models have the same deviance (R^2=70,681), meaning both models explain the same amount of variance. Moreover, model 1 significantly explains more of the variation than a model with only a constant ((χ^2(1)=54,085, p<0,001), But model 2 does not explain more than model 1 ((χ^2(2)=00,00, p<0,001). Therefore, the model that best fits the data is model 1, without the *message content* as a control variable.

Here, there is a significant relationship between political actors and the likelihood of prioritising in the first vignettes. The odds ratio (OR) of political actors in the model is 52,562 (b= 3,962, p<0,001). Using the formula in graph 3, it was calculated that when confronted with a political and non-political actor, there is a 99% chance they will prioritise a political actor and a 1% chance they will pick a non-political actor. Adding the message content into this equation does not significantly affect this relationship.

*P= e^0+(3,962*political actor)/1+ e^0+(3,962*political actor*

Graph 3 – Calculation of probability prioritisation of a political actor

Round 2: actor, message, and salience

To test the strength of the preference for prioritising political actors, the respondents were asked if they would change if the request were put forward by the non-political actor when it received 'negative media attention'. This added factor altered the prioritisation of political actors drastically. In the first vignette, all but one change their prioritisation decision. As a result, only 27% of the respondents prioritised the European parliament (political actor) over the general public. In the second vignette, most respondents also change their prioritisation, with only 33% now prioritising the European Commission over the general public. Lastly, the change is less prominent in the third vignette, and 33,7% of respondents prioritise the political actor. The full results can be found in Table 4.

When adding salience to the model, salience has such an enormous impact on the choices that they could be added together in the model due to their high correlation with the actor and the high VIF. This is also shown because the variable actor and salience correlation is 1-1, meaning almost complete overlap ($F=1{,}00$, $p=0.02$). In conclusion, this means that both salience and actor have a substantial effect; however, when adding salience to the non-political actor, the change is so significant that the actor no longer explains it. It is difficult to derive a conclusion and dissect their exact combination. To gain further insight into this, we can evaluate the fit of the models –lower deviance means a better fit. However, the model with salience and only the actor have the same deviance; therefore, their fit is the same.

This means that they are significantly related in the population to the extent that they cannot be separated from each other, which has to do with the data structure. Therefore, we will not calculate probabilities for this round.

Table 4 - Results qualitative evaluation EVM scenarios for H1 without salience.

Vignette	Request 1	Request 2	Prioritizes request 1	Prioritizes Request 2	Percentage prioritizing request from political actor	Perceived control Commission/ Parliament	Institutional understanding/ closeness	Reputational threats/damage	Democratic considerations	Legitimacy critic
1.1	EU Parliament Moral conduct	General Public Moral conduct	RES1, RES3, RES4, RES5, RES6, RES7, RES8, RES9, RES10, RES11, RES12 RES 13, RES 14, RES 15 RES16		100%	RES1 RES3 RES4 RES6 RES7 RES8 RES9 RES13 RES14 RES15 RES16	RES4	RES1 RES5 RES6	RES3 RES5 RES6 RES7	RES8 RES11 RES13
1.2	EU Parliament Moral conduct No salience	General Public Moral conduct Salience	RES3 RES13 RES14 RES15	RES1, RES4, RES5, RES6, RES7, RES8, RES9, RES10, RES11, RES12 RES16	26,7%	RES8 RES9 RES13 RES15		RES4 RES5 RES6 RES7 RES9 RES11 RES16		
3.1	EU commissioner Legal procedural	General public Legal Procedural	RES1, RES3, RES4, RES5, RES7, RES8,	RES6	93,4%	RES1 RES4 RES14 RES15 RES16	RES5 RES7			RES5

			RES9, RES10, RES11, RES12 RES14 RES15 RES16						
3.2	EU commissioner Legal procedural No salience	General public Legal Procedural Salience	RES1 RES3 RES11 RES14 RES15	RES4, RES5, RES6, RES7, RES8, RES9, RES10, RES12 RES13 RES16	33,3%	RES1 RES9 RES14		RES4 RES5 RES7 RES8 RES9 RES11 RES13 RES16	RES5
4.1	EU commissioner Technical conduct	Scientific expert Technical conduct	RES1 RES4 RES5 RES6 RES7 RES9 RES10 RES12 RES13 RES16	RES3, RES8, RES11 RES14 RES15	66,7%	RES9 RES12 RES16	RES1 RES8	RES8	RES11 RES13 RES14 RES15
4.2	EU commissioner Technical conduct No salience	Scientific expert Technical conduct Salience	RES4 RES7 RES12 RES13 RES14	RES1 RES3 RES5 RES6 RES8 RES9 RES10 RES11 RES15 RES16	33,7%	RES1 RES4 RES8 RES9	RES7	RES1 RES5 RES8 RES9 RES16	RES4 RES5 RES11 RES14 RES15

Tabel 5: Binary logistic models for H1 – showcasing all the parameters.

	Model 1 *1.1, 3.1, 4.1*			Model 2 *1.1, 3.1, 4.1*			Model 3 *1.2, 3.2, 4.2*			Model 4 *1.2, 3.2, 4.2*			Model 5 *1.2, 3.2, 4.2*			Model 6 *1.2, 3.2, 4.2*		
	b *(SE)*	Odds-ratio	*p*	*b* *(SE)*	Odds-ratio	*p*	*b* *(SE)*	Odds-ratio	*p*	*b* *(SE)*	Odds-ratio	*p*	*b* *(SE)*	Odds-ratio	*p*	*b* *(SE)*	Odds-ratio	*p*
Constant	0,00 *(0,377)*	1,000	1,000	0,000	1,000	1,000	0,693 (*0,316*)	2,000	0.028	0,693 (*0,316*)	2,000	0.028	-0,693 (*0,316*)	0,500	0.028	-0,693 (*0,316*)	0,500	0.028
Actor	3,962 *(0,754*)	52,562	<0.001	3,744 (*0,620*)	42,250	<0,001	-1,386 (*0,447*)	0,250	0.002	-1,386 (*0,447*)	0,250	0.002						
Technical conduct				0,000 (*0,760*)	1,000	1,000				0,000 (0,*548*)	1,000	1,000				0,000 (*0,548*)	1,000	1,000
Legal-procedural conduct				0,000 (*0,760*)	1,000	1,000				0,000 (*0,548*)	1,000	1,000				0,000 (*0,548*)	1,000	1,000
Moral conduct				0,000 (*0,310*)	1,000	1,000										0,000 (*0,310*)	1,000	1,000
Salience													1,386 (*0,447*)	4,000	0,002	1,386 (*0,447*)	4,000	0,002
Deviance	70,681			70,681			114,573			114,573			114,573			114,573		
X^2-toets	54,085[16]		<0,001	0.00		1.000	10,194[17]		0.001	0.00		1.000	10,194		<0,001	10,194		<0,001

[16] In comparison to the model with only the constant
[17] In comparison to the model with only the constant

Why did they prioritise these actors?

When asked to explain why the respondents prioritised political actors, five main reoccurring arguments come up across all three vignettes. First, the most prevalent reason is 'perceived control by the EU commission or European parliament'. This label functions as an umbrella for all the different statements made by the respondents on how they felt that their prioritisation decisions were impacted by the control the EU commission and European parliament have over their institution. All fifteen respondents mentioned feeling some form of authority from the political institutions, such as *'feeling accountable'* to a political institution or fearing repercussions (Quote from respondent 15). For instance, when asked why a political actor was prioritised over the general public, respondent 14 stated, *"the general public has less impact on your performative capacity for the next year(s*)".

However, the European Parliament and EU commission exhibit different forms of (indirect) control, as explained by the respondents. On the one hand, the European Parliament is seen as the people's voice and plays a prominent role in overseeing and setting budgets for agencies. When asked about this impact, Respondent 8 says, "*The European Parliament is the agency that sets our budget. And that is so you would see a direct interest [to prioritise a response]"*. On the other hand, the Commission has (perceived) control over the agencies through its connection to the agencies. While justifying their choice in a vignette, respondent 12 states, "*I think a lot has to do with accountability lines [..] I mean when you look at the European Commission, the Commission is the guardian of the Treaties*". This formal role as 'Guardian of the Treaties' means that the European Commission dramatically impacts the agency's functioning. Around 93% of the respondents state that they perceive this control from the Commission[18].

Moreover, the data yielded that formal control is not the only way the European Commission has gained its authority. The European Commission is also seen as a day-to-day partner of agencies involved in the agency's functioning and management. As a result of these close connections, various respondents note that the European Commission has more technical and in-depth knowledge.

[18] This number was calculated by assessing how many respondents (15 out of 16) gave this reasoning.

All respondents say they perceive a level of control from either of these institutions, which skews their prioritisation choices to prioritising political actors. Moreover, some respondents also add that making strategic choices can benefit or harm future partnerships. For instance, when discussing parliament, Respondent 3 states, *" once you solved the issue [for the Commission], if a topic comes up again, they can be an ally in responding to further requests "*. In the transcripts, three examples were found of respondents hinting that they considered the future of their partnership with the political actors. On the other side, when analysing the transcripts, the findings suggest that respondents also considered potential negative financial repercussions from political institutions.

The analysis of the vignettes found evidence for a second argument for prioritising political actors, namely 'institutional closeness' to the political institutions – which also can be seen as a form of mutual understanding. This label encompasses the agencies' understanding of other EU institutions, making it easier to respond to those institutions quicker. The data analysis also insinuates that this institutional closeness might be a reason for prioritising due to the removal of transaction costs. For instance, Multiple respondents commented that '*Parliament is more answerable'* (Respondent 4) or '*knowing how and when to respond because [they are dealing with] a 'known organisation'* (Respondent 1). Moreover, institutional closeness also manifested in being able to share confidential information. Respondents 13 states, "*maybe indirectly contributing to this would probably also be that we will be able to provide much more detail to the European Parliament than the general public"*. Institutional closeness is a vital driver for prioritisation for some respondents because it gives a sense of security to know whom they are dealing with.

The third reason often provided for the prioritisation is an assessment of the 'legitimacy of the critic'. Noteworthy is that this code was not explicitly formulated in the theory section and was not in the original codes. Instead, the theme surfaced during the analysis as a reoccurring theme. When assessing two different requests, deciding which requests were prioritised was whether they felt the actor posed a threat due to their expertise or position. For instance, a technical request from the EU parliament would not be seen as urgent because the respondent would indicate the general were like knowledgeable enough to know the technical specifics. Therefore, they would see it as a minor threat and were less

likely to prioritise it. So, when assessing the requests, the 'credibility of the actor' is essential in determining the urgency of criticisms. For instance, respondent 6 reflects upon the agencies' relation to national agencies versus scientists and states the following. "*Well, since it is our peers, our partners [national agencies], we need to take it seriously to avoid future conflicts and perhaps not being able to work together with them. Whereas a scientific expert well, maybe they are subjective theory opinion, we do not know how soundly based it is*".

Nevertheless, it is not only the perceived legitimacy of the actor; it is also the relation the actor has to the agency. For instance, respondent 14 prioritises a request by the scientific community "*simply because the scientific community is a very important stakeholder for us* ". The importance of the relationship can be found repeatedly throughout the data.

When adding salience, the following reasoning comes up for prioritising actors. Whether this preference for attending to political actors first is as strong, there was a powerful urge to attend to salient requests before they got out of control. This also provides more insight into the strength of the relationship in the first place. Respondent 1 reflects upon this *"Because there was not such a big difference between the two of them in the first place. And then, of course, if there is negative media attention, you need to respond quickly to make sure it does not spin out of control. So it would be like an amplifier".*

The following arguments are often repeated when further dissecting the reasons for the change in prioritisation after salience. First, the respondents fear that negative media attention will lead to consequences for the EU commission when it is not handled abruptly. This means that they prioritise the non-political actor over the political actor because they think this is what the political actor would want them to do. By doing so, the respondents still prioritise the political actor. This dynamic is well illustrated by Respondent 1, who states, *"We have a serious public case, and the Commissioner will fully understand that we would need to make it. We would need to because by covering the thing, which is negative in the media, we are also covering him."*. Multiple other respondents also touch upon this subject in a similar matter.

6.2. Hypothesis 2: message

The second hypothesis theorised in the theory section is that *EU agency bureaucrats are more likely to prioritise technical requests.* . We use three vignettes to test this hypothesis, 6, 7, and 8, which focus explicitly on choosing between technical and legal-procedural content. Table 7 showcases each respondent's prioritisation with the main reason(s) why they made this choice – if stated by the respondent. The analysis was done in two rounds; first, only the two variables, actor and message, were displayed, and in the second round, the third variable, salience, was revealed.

Round 1: No salience

First, the final prioritisation decisions made will be analysed. In the first vignettes, where the respondents were confronted with requests from different contexts from identical political actors, the majority chose to prioritize the legal procedural request over the technical request - in total, 26,7% prioritised technical only. In the second vignette, 50% preferred the technical request by the national agency over the Legal-procedural request from the corporation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that many respondents made this choice not based solemnly on the content of the request but also on the actor. In the eight' vignette, 42,8% of the respondents chose the scientific expert's technical request over the national agency's legal procedural request. All prioritisation decisions and reasoning can be found in table 6.

Binary Logistic Models were constructed to see if technical content was related to prioritisation, as shown in table 7. Four models were constructed. When looking at model 1 without salience, we can see no significant relations found in the research, meaning that these results can not be projected on the rest of the research by the EU agencies. Moreover, model 1 does not have more explanatory power than a model with just the constant – its deviance is 0. Therefore, there is no found relation between technical content and prioritisation.

Round 2: with salience

First, the final prioritisation decisions made will be analysed. In the first vignettes, where the respondents were confronted with requests from different contexts from identical political actors, 74% prioritised

technical content when it became salient. In the second vignette, 50% preferred the technical request by the national agency over the Legal-procedural request from the corporation. However, legal-procedural requests from the corporation had received negative media attention; only 28,6% of respondents chose the technical request over the legal-procedural request. In the eight' vignette, 71,4% of the respondents chose the scientific expert's salient technical request over the national agency's non-salient legal procedural request.

When assessing the models for round 2 – models 2 and 3 in table 6 – we see no relationship between technical conduct and prioritisation when only adding technical conduct to the model. However, we see a slight relationship between technical conduct and prioritisation when adding actor and salience as control variables (b=1,031, P=0,036). This means that there is a 3,1% higher chance of prioritising the request when the content is technical. When comparing model 4 to model 3, we also see that this model fits better due to the lower deviance (R2=98,445). Also, when assessing the Chi-square test – which compares the fit of model 3 to the fit of model 2 – we see that the fit is slightly better ($(\chi^2(3)=12,789$ $p=0,002)$.

Table 6 - choices and reasoning vignettes H2

Vignette	Request 1	Request 2	Prioritizes request 1	Prioritizes Request 2	Percentage prioritizing Technical request	Account-ability lines	Legitimacy critic	Mandate/core function	We can't be following the rules – no one will care how well we do	Salience/urgency	Reputational threats	Protocol	Financial considerations	Relation to actor
6.1	A European Commissioner Technical conduct	European Commissioner Legal-Procedural conduct	RES5 RES10 RES11 RES12	RES1 RES3 RES4 RES5 RES7 RES8 RES9 RES13 RES14 RES15 RES16	26,7%	RES16	RESP6 RES1	RES12 RES8 RES1 RES4 RES5 RES11 RES14	RES1 RES7 RES14 RES15 RES16	RES3				
6.2	European commissioner Technical conduct High Salience	European Commissioner Legal-procedural conduct Low salience	RES 3 RES 4 RES5 RES6 RES7 RES8 RES9 RES10 RES11 RES12 RES16	RES1 RES13 RES14 RES15	73,3%		RES6	RES4 RES14	RES1 RES15 RES13	RES6 RES3 RES7 RES9 RES16	RES8 RES16			
7.1[19]	Corporation Legal-procedural conduct	National agency Technical Conduct	RES1 RES6 RES9 RES10 RES 13 RES15 RES16	RES4 RES5 RES7 RES8 RES11 RES12 RES14	50%	RES12 RES9		RES1 RES5	RES15 RES13		RES8 RES1	RES8 RES4	RES6	RES7
7.2	Corporation Legal-procedural conduct High Salience	National agency Technical Conduct Low Salience	RES1 RES5 RES6 RES7 RES8 RES9 RES10 RES13	RES4 RES11 RES12 RES14	28,6%	RES12 RES16	RES4	RES1	RES13	RES5 RES7 RES9	RES14		RES6 RES8	

[19] There is 1 less respondent for 7 and 8. Meaning that N =14

			RES15 RES15									
8.1	Scientific expert Technical conduct	National agency Legal-procedural Conduct	RES1 RES5 RES6 RES8 RES11 RES14	RES4 RES7 RES9 RES10 RES12 RES13 RES15 RES16	42,8%	RES12 RES9 RES1	RES6 RES4 RES5 RES7				RES8	RES6 RES4 RES14 RES15
8.2	Scientific expert Technical conduct High salience	National agency Legal-procedural Conduct Low salience	RES1 RES5 RES6 RES7 RES8 RES9 RES10 RES11 RES13 RES14	RES4 RES12 RES15 RES16	71,4%	RES12 RES1 RES16	RES6 RES4		RES7 RES9		RES8	RES6 RES15

Table 7 - Binary logistic regression models h2

	Model 1 6.1,7.1,8.1			Model 2 6.2,7.2,8.2				Model 3 6.2,7.2,8.2		
	b (SE)	Odds-ratio	*p*	*b (SE)*	*b (SE)*	Odds-ratio	*p*	*b (SE)*	Odds-ratio	*p*
Constant	0,047 (0,227)	1,048	0,838	0,047 (0,227)	-0,208 (0,238)	0,812	0,383	-1,233 (0,427)	2,803	0,036
Actor								-0,368 (0,541)	0,497	0,692
Technical conduct	0,000 (0,431)	1,000	1,000	0,000 (0,431)	1,248 (0,453)	3,484	0,006	1,031 (0,491)	2,803	0,036
Salience								1,755 (0,515)	5,785	<0,001
Deviance	119,175			119,175	111,237			98,445		
X^2-toets	0,000		1,000	0,000	7,985		0,005	12,789		0,002

Why were these choices made?

The coded data brings forward the following insights. First, it should be noted that in the justifications of the prioritisations, the respondents still tended to focus on actors and salience. The four most prominent rationales for prioritising one content over another were: (1) in line with their mandate, (2) perceived legitimacy of the critic, (3) the salience or urgency, and (4) the need to follow the rules.

First, starting with the choices based on their mandate, multiple actors made their prioritisation based on what aligned more with their core function and mandate. Nonetheless, different variations of this rationale were given by different respondents in different vignettes. On the one hand, some would prioritise this request because it was most in line with their agency – and they would attend to this one first. On the other hand, some would prioritise these requests because they feared reputational damage. For instance, respondent 4 said, "*Yes, I think the technical [request] would affect our core business. It would put into question that we are making good decisions, so we need to explain why, whereas for the other one, if it has not received media attention, we can spend a bit more time to give a concerted and reasoned answer."* A similar rationale is put forward by – among others – respondent 11, who stated that he would choose technical requests because "We are a technical agency first and foremost".

However, what is interesting is that – contrary to the assumption made in the theory section that technical conduct would always be the 'core function' of the agency – it was often not interpreted this way by the respondents. For example, various actors would state that they considered another request closer to their mandate. For instance, a respondent said, " *I would say that I would stick to the legal procedural conduct because it is again something that directly impacts the agency's functioning*". Moreover, some considered the technical conduct the core conduct of their agency but still stated that the technical reputation 'would not matter if the legal were not okay" and saw following the rules as their core mandate. 'Y*ou can be as high-functioning as you want, but you do not comply with the rules – you are out*" (Respondent 16). Here it was a matter of looking at reputation and credibility from different angles.

This dispersion in perspective could depend on the nature of the agency and the respondent's position in question. Instead, the message likelier to be prioritised relies not only on the agency but also on

respondents' position within the agency. Respondent 4 reflected upon this and said, "*So, I would say, uh, well in my opinion, to summarize, it is the technical conduct, but it is this. This answer is biased because of my belonging to the organisation's research department, right?"*

Moreover, a third argument related to the second is also often brought up, namely the idea that content or technical values do not matter if the rules are not followed. The performance or technical expertise could be different about, wheres the rules were a fundamental requirement to be part of it. For instance, respondent 16 states, "If there is a technical, you want a different interpretation of a methodology or even a mistake in the use of data, we would have more time to rectify [*and*] explain. It is not as immediate as getting a legal proceeding immediately by a party that our action has damaged". This is also put forward by respondent 15, who says that legal procedural is more important than technical because "at would get priority because again technical we have evidence-based [research], we will have discussions and even if it's technical, there is no black and white; sometimes it's grey. Legal procedures are key. For us, it also forms a reputational risk, forms a legal risk". However, not all respondents had the same perspective regarding legal-procedural as a base requirement. Others felt protected by the rules and felt like they were unlikely to get criticised for this.

Fourth, the perceived legitimacy of the critic once again played a significant role in the respondents' decision-making. In one way or another, seven out of ten respondents mentioned that their perceived legitimacy of the actor influenced their sense of urgency in the request. Often this would be like, 'oh, if this actor makes this kind of comment, this must be something important.

Lastly, the perceived salience played a significant role. The often-switching positions of the respondents indicate this. This specific argument also interacted with the sense of urgency, as respondent 6 illustrates in the following quote *"so if it has many negative means, really a lot of negative media attention, there might be something wrong".*

7.3. Hypothesis 3: salience

The third hypothesis theorised in the theory section is that *EU agency bureaucrats are more likely to prioritise salient requests.* . We use all vignettes with salience for this. These vignettes have already been shown in the Tabel 4 and 6, which showcase each respondent's prioritisation with the main reason(s) they made this choice – if stated by the respondent. This analysis was done in one round.

What decisions were made?

The model shows that there is a significant relationship between salience and prioritisation. In Table 8, the models can be seen. Here, there is a significant relationship between salience and the likelihood of prioritising in the first vignettes. The odds ratio (OR) of political actors in the model is *14,135* (*b*= 2,649, *p*<0,001), meaning that when a request comes with salience, bureaucrats are more likely to prioritise this request than when they come without salience. When confronted with a salient and non-salient request, there is a 1,5% chance that they will prioritise a non-salience request and a 98,5% chance they will pick this actor when there is salience. Adding the content of the message into this equation does not affect this relationship.

*P= e^0+(2,649*salience)/1+ e^0+(2,649*political actor)*

Figuur 4 – likelihood prioritisation salience

Why is salience important?

The third hypothesis is that salient requests are more prioritised. The research data overwhelmingly shows that this is the case. Two primary arguments are given for this. First, salience or negative media attention is often given as a reason to justify a prioritisation discussion. However, we can dissect why salience is often a reason by diving deeper. Respondent 12 reflects upon this, "*I mean, it is not only that you want to be seen in a good light, but this can also damage your reputation"* Here, the respondent provides us with two meaningful broader insights reflected in the data. First is the notion that reputation management is a legitimate concern many of these agencies have. For example,

statements indicating a fear of reputational damage were found in most interviews, often accompanied by a notion that salient requests must be dealt with quickly to prevent them from "getting out of control".

However, this is not exclusively because the respondents think this is more important; some explicitly mention that they would prioritise mainly because of the strict timeframes of media. Respondent 16 says, "*Considering the media cycles and if we did not react quickly to negative media attention, our views would not be represented or reported by journalists. So, we would miss a window of opportunity. Where for the other one, we probably [have] more time. [..] the media can publish with no comment, which is never good for an organization*".

Stopping salient requests before getting out of control was a big reoccurring theme. For instance, respondent 13 states, "*there is a timing of the media, the time of the media consumes the news very quickly and can mount [pile up] very quickly, so [the request that receives media attention] has to be stopped and be clarified tempestively in this case. I would not say that this is more important, probably it is more important than the first one, but it had to be addressed with the timing of the media*."

Whether this preference for attending to political actors first is as strong, there was a powerful urge to attend to salient requests before they got out of control. This also provides more insight into the strength of the relationship in the first place. Respondent 1 reflects upon this *"Because it was not so much difference in the first place, between the two of them, right? And then, of course, if there's negative media attention, you need to respond quickly to make sure it doesn't spin out of control. So it would be like an amplifier"*.

Table 8 – Binary logistic models to test h3: salience.

	Model 1 *All with salience*			Model 2 *1.1, 3.1, 4.1*		
	b *(SE)*	Odds-ratio	*p*	*b* *(SE)*	Odds-ratio	*p*
Constant	-1,018 (0,213)	0,361	`<0,001	-0,939 (0,233)	0,391	`<0,001
Actor				0,062 (0,359)	1,064	0,862
Technical conduct				0,257 (0,525)	1,293	0,624
Legal-procedural conduct				-0,339 (0,535)	0,713	0,526
Moral conduct						
Salience				0,175 (0,568)	1,192	0,758
	1,940 (0,292)	6,956	<0,001	1,877 (0,324)	6,537	<0,001
Deviance	277,702			274,437		
X^2-toets	49,463		<0,001	3,900		0,379

Chapter 7 – Discussion

This chapter critically discusses and contextualises the findings shown in the results section and evaluates whether the three hypotheses need to be rejected. Besides, it compares the results to the study of Rimkutė and Van der Voet (2021).

This research aimed to provide insights into under which conditions EU agency bureaucrats are responsive to external demands. To do so, three hypotheses were formulated (1) that political actors would be prioritised over non-political actors, (2) that technical messages were prioritised over the legal-procedural messages, and (3) that salient requests were prioritised over the non-salient requests. All three hypotheses will be discussed; the final research question will be answered after.

7.1 Hypothesis 1: Actors

The first hypothesis theorised that political actors would be prioritised over non-political actors. There are three types of data to refer to when testing this hypothesis. First, the self-assessments by respondents show that when asked, respondents will – on average – prioritise political actors over non-political. However, comparing the results of the self-ranking and the choices made during the vignettes, it becomes clear that when confronted with the choices during the vignettes, some respondents made choices conflicting with their initial ranking. Nonetheless, this provides valuable insight into how bureaucrats of EU agencies think about various actors present in their field and how they evaluate their importance – an essential first step.

Secondly, evidence was found for this claim using the EVM, especially those that did not include salience. In these vignettes, most respondents chose the political actor and indicated that the actor played an essential role in choosing to prioritise the request. These results align with the research from Rimkutė and Van der Voet (2021), who also found that political actors were more likely to be prioritised. Finally,

the findings support the notion that the content of the message does not influence the found relationship between actor and prioritisation.

However, we also find that salience does significantly affect this relation. Namely, when adding salience to the vignettes, the relationship between political actors and prioritisation completely turns around. The reason for this sudden change seems to lie in the heavy correlation between salience and non-political actors. All non-political actors are marked as salient in the second round. Nonetheless, the sudden change insinuates that salience might decrease the relationship between an actor being political and its request being prioritised. Moreover, it could also be that salience has an even more significant impact on the prioritisation decision made by EU agency bureaucrats than actors. The models used for this thesis were not equipped to dissect this relationship thoroughly, but we find reasons to believe that salience is stronger than the actor.

Moreover, the qualitative analysis of the vignettes provided more insights into why respondents prioritised political actors when there was no salience involved and why they did not prioritise them once the non-political request became salient. In the theory section, three main arguments for prioritisation were set out. First, it was theorised that political actors would be prioritised over nonpolitical actors'; European political institutions would have more control over the agencies through budgets, institutional set-ups, and other constraining mechanisms (Busioc & Rimkutė, 2020). These possible sanctions would then function as an incentive for bureaucrats to prioritise their requests (Hagemann, Hobolt, & Wratil, 2016). Various groups also mentioned this sentiment and stated that possible negative consequences due to the institutional setup were something they considered when making their choices.

Lastly, it was hypothesised that the political actors would have more media due to their influence, making them more dangerous to the agency's reputation (yang, 2007). Data indicating supporting this mechanism was present was not found. Nonetheless, we did find two another external mechanism worth noting. First, that of audiences functioning as 'fire alarms' (McCubbins & Schwartz, 1984). Often, non-political but salient requests were prioritised over political, non-salient requests. When asked why, some

respondents indicated that they would deal with the salient request to protect themselves and protect the other European institutions – especially the Commission. Moreover, they would state that negative media attention would potentially alert political actors, leading to potentially adverse consequences. Second, respondents would sometimes not prioritise political actors because it was 'what the political actor would have wanted'.

In conclusion, when evaluating all data, we see that political actors are actively considered when making choices. In general, political actors seem to be prioritised over non-political actors. The model from the vignettes without salience also provides robust quantitative backing for this hypothesis. However, when involving salience, the findings become more complicated. The models here indicate that salience has a more significant impact on the prioritisation decision. However, when reading the qualitative data, we find that even when not prioritising political actors, they still consider them and what these actors would want. Therefore, we do not reject hypothesis 1.

7.2 Hypothesis 2: message

The second hypothesis was that technical messages would be prioritised over others because they were closer to the agency's mandate. The technical content came out as the most important message content for a request in the self-ranking. However, it is essential to note that the rankings were incredibly close. The quantitative data from the vignette is somewhat conflicted. There is no relation between a request being of technical nature and the likelihood of prioritising in the vignettes without salience. Nonetheless, the model constructed for the second round, including salience, showed a slight relation between technical content and prioritising the request, which was insignificant. We see that salience has a significantly more significant effect in explaining the prioritisation than the content in the same model.

In conclusion, when comparing all the data – we find no clear overall tendency towards technical content in the vignettes. Therefore we reject hypothesis 2. This means that the findings in this study can not be extrapolated to the rest of the population. When revisiting the research by Rimkutė and Van der Voet

(2021), they found that technical concerns were more likely to be prioritised than performative concerns. They also found that legal procedural was more likely to be prioritised.

Nonetheless, this does not mean that the theoretical framework is entirely off. We find hints of a potential relation between technical content and prioritisation in the qualitative data. For example, some respondents do prioritise technical conduct over legal-procedural conduct. Some respondents did consider technical the core function of their agency and therefore prioritised it over other contents. However, this rationale is just not shared among all respondents. The respondents each had different connotations with different contents - related to the content in different ways. Some would prioritise technical as the core function of their agency, whereas others would prioritise legal-procedural as a base requirement for functioning as an agency. No clear distinction was found between these two.

Moreover, prioritisation based on content seemed to be more related to whether the criticism comes from a legitimate critic from whom we do not expect it. In this way, the respondents were still very focused on the actor.

7.3 Hypothesis 3: Salience

The last hypothesis theorised that salient requests would be prioritised over non-salient requests. Overwhelming evidence was found for this hypothesis. As in line with previous research by Rimkutė and Van der Voet (2020), the results overwhelmingly indicated that salience was a deciding factor in the prioritisation decisions made by the respondents. In the scenarios where salience was a factor, it seemed to be the main reason for most respondents. However, even though the effect was always strong, the effect of salience differed per scenario. Two reasons were theorised for this. First, the research on reputation management stated that the agencies' reputation would safeguard their security (Aleksova et al., 2021). Evidence was found for this. Second, agencies would be more prone to deal with negative issues than positive ones (Hood, 2011). Anecdotal evidence was found for this, but this was not explicitly tested because all requests were harmful. Lastly, the theory briefly mentioned the importance of following media cycles when respnding to media requests. Evidence was also found for this mechanism.

However, one big note needs to be given to this result. Various respondents stated that prioritisation should, in this case, not be seen as a request being more critical but as more urgent to address. We, therefore, do not reject hypothesis 3.

8.4 Main research question

The main research question was, "*Under which conditions are EU-agency bureaucrats responsive to external request?*. The analysis of the three hypotheses shows that EU agencies are more likely to respond to external demands when these requests are (1) salient or (2) coming from a political actor.

Chapter 8: Limitations and further research

This chapter reflects upon further research and limitation.

In many ways, bureaucratic responsiveness in EU agencies has been researchedrom independent case studies to analysing datasets (Bagozzi, Berliner, & Almquist, 2019; Rimkutė, 2020; Rimkutė & Van der Voet, 2021). However, none have used the EVM methodology to dissect casual mechanisms further. Using this method allowed us to see the reactions of the bureaucrats while they were making the choices. Moreover, it also provided us with an incredible amount of quantitative and qualitative data that can be drawn upon extensively. Moreover, due to the richness of the dataset, this research has discovered valuable insights. Nonetheless, like any other research, especially when trying new methodologies, there are problems and limitations found along the way.

8.1 Limitations

The generality and accuracy of the results can potentially be impacted by design choices outlined in the method chapter. This section reflects upon these choices and will discuss them in two parts: (1) the set-up of the interview and (2) the transformation of the answers into data. Each piece will give an honest reflection of the up-and downsides of this aspect in this interview. Afterwards, we will use these reflections to give recommendations for further insights.

First, the design of the vignette study allowed the researchers to get as much valuable information as possible in a short amount of time. Namely, the vignettes were created and set up so that one of the variables would be specifically manipulated to see how this would affect the prioritisation decisions of the respondents. This is a tremendous upside of the Experimental Vignette Method and allowed us to gain more insight into any potential mechanisms happening in the respondents' brains. This setup was

of great value to the qualitative research part of this study. However, this setup made it more difficult to compare the different vignettes as they were not equal or symmetrical. This means that we could not derive general conclusions about the choices in the dataset as a whole but only on the specific decisions within the vignettes constructed the same way. As a result, we had fewer cases to work with for each hypothesis, and the models were based on fewer numbers.

Another design choice made in constructing the vignettes was constructing the specific questions. Two choices were made here; (1) to ask general questions applicable to all, or (2) to ask the same genal questions to all participants. Positive upsides of this were that this made the data more generalizable, and we were able to create a dataset of choices made instead of just comparing case studies. However, this might have a slightly more negative effect on the accuracy of the quantitative data. For example, during the interview, it became evident that the structure and position of the different agencies impacted the choices they made. For instance, some respondents considered not the technical but the legal procedural as their core agencies. This research setup has not accounted for these differences. Nonetheless, in the mixed-methodology setup of this study, we could see these nuances in the qualitative data – but using only the quantitative data from this might lead to misinterpretation of found relationships.

Lastly, Salience is an essential factor but could also be amplified due to how the questions were asked. Namely, prioritisation is not the most important, but what needs to be dealt with first. Often the respondents would say, “I would deal with this first”, even if the other were more important – just with salience.

Moving to the analysis part, first, Transforming the answers into data that could be used for the model building came with various complexities that might have impacted the outcome of the results. First, the data had to be split into observations, as explained in the method section. This can be problematic for accuracy because we implicitly assume these are independent assumptions, where they are connected and do not exist without their counterpart. The observations were only compared to those in similar

vignettes to combat this potential inaccuracy. This means that vignettes with one political actor and one non-political actor would be reached – one time with and one time without salience. However, this became a problem with the data because of the similar patterns of the vignettes (the same variable would get salience every time); certain variables would be so heavily correlated that it was no longer possible to put them in the same model. Because of these structures, it became difficult to explain how much these variables added to the models, an explicit limitation of the study.

8.2 Further research

Two strands of further research can be recommended (1) expanding the data and (2) focusing on specific cases, and (3) discovering new relationships within the data. First, Future research can collect more data and continue to build this dataset to create more robust models. Second, focusing more on the details of each case will uncover much more insight through being aware of the agency's structure and asking specific questions based on their unique situation, which can provide valuable insights and add to the current findings. This could be done in comparative studies on regulatory agencies versus information agencies or case studies on one specific agency. Third, this research also found new rationales for prioritisation, such as the legitimacy of the critic. These reasonings might hint toward interactions between the variables actor and message that have yet to be uncovered. Future research could look at how the three dimensions (1) actor, (2) content, and (3) salience interact with each other.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

This chapter summarises the findings and contributions and reflects upon their purpose in a broader light.

The vital role of bureaucracies in societies has sparked interest in their functioning among citizens and scientists alike. From Marx Weber to Elliot Jacques, research into the functioning of bureaucracies and bureaucrats is as old as the concept of bureaucracies itself. Over time, different bureaucracies have been created and dissolved, and thus, some of the most insightful analysis has been done inspired by institutions that no longer exist (Peters, 1988). However, where bureaucracies disappear, others start to exist. EU agencies are an example of one of these new bureaucracies - meaning much about them is still to discover.

Recently research regarding EU agencies has expanded in scope and size, with scholars looking at agency behaviour through many lenses (Egeberg & Trondal, 2011; Hagemann, Hobolt, & Wratil, 2016; Rimkute, 2020). The intended contribution of this thesis was to build further on these authors, using a new methodology (EVM) to contribute a more nuanced understanding of how and why EU agency bureaucrats make prioritisation choices. Moreover, it aimed to answer the question; Under which conditions are EU-agency bureaucrats responsive to external demands?

This thesis draws on interviews with 16 EU agency bureaucrats to test three aspects of the demand: actor, content, and salience - seeing how these aspects affect their responsiveness. The results show us that agency bureaucrats seem primarily attentive to requests that come with negative media attention. Even though the bureaucrats were more responsive to political actors, this relationship was less robust than salience. These findings add to existing research by providing further inside into existing mechanisms. On the one hand, the mixed-methods approach allowed to discover trends among the

respondents and test their strengths – while also using the qualitative aspect to gain a more nuanced understanding of how and why the respondents made these changes. On the other hand, it also allowed us to verify whether the theoretical relations are actual causal mechanisms instead of merely correlations.

Two theoretical perspectives were prominent in the theoretical framework; Rational Choice Institutionalism and Reputational Theory (Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Schepsle, 2008). First, the data shows that respondents make strategic choices within their institutions' constraints, often balancing the best payoff option. Moreover, the respondents mentioned the still existing measures of control laid bare by the PA model. Second, the findings also align with reputational theory – which states that agencies will prioritise how they come across. Finally, the reputational lens offers us a better understanding of the strategies with which agencies operate – it shows that agencies are aware of their audiences – especially in salient situations (Carpenter, 2010).

Nonetheless, this research only scratches the surface of what is possible within this data and merely functions as a starting point for others to expand upon in the future. Mainly because research into this field continues to be of great importance to scholars and EU citizens, namely, agencies continue to impact us in the future. Namely, 'agentification' is far from over, and EU agencies will continue to grow in the coming years (Rimkutė, 2021; Scholten, Strauss, & Brenninkmeijer, 2020). Maybe not in the form of creating more agencies for different fields, if only for the fact that for most necessary policy fields, EU agencies already exist (Rimkutė, 2021).). Instead, agencies are granted new, more complex mandates consistently – deepening the scope and reach of these agencies – and thus the European Union in its Member States (Scholten, Strauss, & Brenninkmeijer, 2020). Moreover, as we continue to be impacted by agencies, scholars must continue to increase their understanding of how and why bureaucrats respond to various requests and wishes.

Chapter 10: References

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Appendix 1: Self-ranking

Individual rankings by respondents for the actors:

Respondent	EU commission	EU parliament	general public	national agency	scientist	Corporation/private actors
1	1	1	3	4	5	5
3	1	2	x	3	4	x[20]
4	4	5	3	2	x	1
5	3	2	1	4	6	5
6	1	2	2	4	5	4
7	1	2	4	4	4	4
8	1	1	3	4	6	5
9	1	5	6	2	3	4
10	1	1	6	1	5	1
11	1	2	6	3	5	4
12	3	1	4	1	x	x
13	1	2	6	2	x	x
14	1	2	4	x	3	5
15	1	1	6	3	5	4
16	1	1	4	1	5	x
Average ranking	1,5 (1)	2 (2)	4,1 (4)	2,7 (3)	4,7 (6)	3,8 (5)
Mean ranking	1	2	4	3	5	4

[20] Some respondents did not discuss one all actors. Actors not discussed are indicated with an x.

Calculations for the boxplots :

Groups:	**European Commission**	**European Parliament**	**General public**	**National agencies**	**Scientists**	**Corporations**
Sample size (n):	15	15	14	14	12	11
Minimum:	1	1	1	1	3	1
Q1:	1	1	3	2	4	4
Median:	1	2	4	3	5	4
Q3:	1	2	6	4	5	5
Maximum:	4	5	6	4	6	5
Mean ($\bar{x}$):	1.466667	2	4.142857	2.714286	4.666667	3.818182
Skewness:	1.887367	1.762529	-0.263049	-0.283056	-0.558528	-1.464421
Excess kurtosis:	2.261904	2.512821	-0.869629	-1.492737	-0.309375	1.079726
Outliers:	4, 3, 3	5, 5				1, 1

Individual rankings content

respondent	Technical	legal -procedural	performative	moral
1	4	2	3	1
3	2	3	1	4
4	1	2	2	2
5	2	3	4	1
6	1	2	2	3
7	3	1	2	4
8	1	3	4	2
9	3	1	2	4
10	1	3	2	4
11	x	x	x	x
12	2	2	1	3
13	4	2	3	1
14	1	2	2	4
15	1	3	4	2
16	4	2	3	1
Average ranking	2,1 (1)	2,2 (2)	2,5 (3)	2,6 (4)
Mean Ranking				

Calculations

Groups:	**Technical**	**Legal - procedural**	**Performative**	**Moral**
Sample size (n):	14	14	14	14
Minimum:	1	1	1	1
Q1:	1	2	2	1
Median:	2	2	2	2.5
Q3:	3	3	3	4
Maximum:	4	3	4	4
Mean ($\bar{x}$):	2.142857	2.214286	2.5	2.571429
Skewness:	0.553133	-0.321352	0.254413	-0.0571185
Excess kurtosis:	-1.339692	-0.632909	-0.904602	-1.786909
Outliers:	None	None	None	None

Appendix 2 – choices respondents

respondent	scenario	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	4.2	5.1	5.2	6.1	6.2	7.1	7.2	8.1	8.2
1		1	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1
2																	
3		1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1				
4		1	2	1	**1**	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2
5		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1
6		1	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1
7		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	2	1	2	1
8		1	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1
9		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	1
10		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1
11		1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	1
12		1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	2
13		1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	1
14		1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1
15		1	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	2	2
16		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	2
Amount of times option 1		15	4	13	4	14	4	11	5	7	4	4	11	7	10	6	10
Amount of times option 2		0	11	2	11	1	11	4	10	8	11	11	4	7	4	9	4