
Public perceptions of the EU as a system of governance

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Abstract

Since its inception, the European Union has stimulated many vigorous debates. This Living Review provides a state of the field perspective on the academic work that has been done to address the question of the perceptions of the European Union as a system of governance. It takes a broad scope in assessing the efforts of scholars and highlights significant theoretical and empirical contributions as well as identifying potential avenues for research. In order to understand perceptions of the EU, scholars have employed national-level frameworks of popular support, particularly partisanship and instrumental self-interest. As the number of members has increased, further research has taken a broader scope to include national identity, institutions, and attitudes regarding the normative and empirical function of both national and EU institutions. Additional works address political intermediaries such as parties, media, and elites. Finally, all of the works are fundamentally concerned with the supportive popular sentiment that underpins the EU's legitimacy as a political institution. While there are far more works that can be practically included in this review, we have attempted to construct an overview based on the dimensions that define this research as set out by significant contributions at the core of this literature.

Keywords: political science, governance, legitimacy, public opinion, enlargement

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16 December 2011: This Living Review was substantially updated by adding 19 references, expanding several paragraphs to reflect new developments in the field, and including several new examples of recent contributions to this literature. In addition, a paragraph was inserted to incorporate the growing body of multi-level analysis that addresses the systematic inclusion of country characteristics as part of mass attitudes towards the EU. Further, there is a new discussion outlining developments in the literature concerning new member states.

14 March 2013: This Living Review was revised by adding six references on current research.

Page 11: Added reference to Clark and Hellwig (2012).

Page 13: Added reference to Fuchs and Schneider (2011).

Page 17: Added short paragraph on financial crisis and reference to Serricchio *et al.* (2013)

Page 22: Added reference to Azrout *et al.* (2012).

Page 24: Added reference to Guerra (2013).

Page 27: Added reference to Fitzgibbon (2013).

Contents

1	Introduction	5
1.1	Conceptual basis	5
1.2	Significance and relevance of this research	5
1.3	State of the field	6
2	Explaining attitudes about European integration	9
2.1	Instrumental self-interest	9
2.2	Social location	10
2.3	National vs. European identities	11
2.4	Institutions and institutional performance	14
3	Role of intermediaries	18
3.1	Elites	18
3.2	Parties, partisanship, and ideology	19
3.3	Mass media	22
4	Central and Eastern Europe	24
5	Conclusion	26
	References	28

1 Introduction

1.1 Conceptual basis

At the outset of the European Union (EU) project, a ‘permissive consensus’ among Europeans emerged based on the widespread, popular belief that the reduction of barriers – both physical and financial – between states and adherence to the fundamentals of liberal market practices would cultivate a mutually prosperous economic community. This accommodating popular opinion provided elites with the freedom needed to organize and implement a Europe-wide economy over the past several decades. By the early 1990s, economic integration had largely been achieved in a majority of member states and had begun to give way to integration that increasingly focused on both enlarging the political and social policy responsibilities of the Union and developing a Europe-wide polity. This unprecedented development in supranational governance has not only challenged Europeans’ long-held attitudes and orientations to the EU but the EU itself has come to recognize its reliance on them for continued legitimacy. The EU exists on little more than the collective agreement among Europeans, making this ‘agreement’ important to understand.

This Living Review will provide a systematic overview of the literature on the popular perceptions of the EU as a system of governance. As the EU has expanded beyond its original economic realm, researchers have been asking whether popular consent is still aligned with the EU’s implicit or explicit guiding principles, whether the EU institutional structures are perceived as sufficient to bring about these goals, and whether these institutions have been able to achieve this in a fair, transparent, and relatively effective manner. Accordingly, this review demarcates branches of the study of public opinion in regards to the principles of the EU and its institutional design and performance.

1.2 Significance and relevance of this research

The EU continues to be a focus of study for several reasons. Foremost is the unique character of the EU. Unlike federal structures (e.g. the US) or trans-national organizations (e.g. MERCOSUR or NAFTA), the EU experiment has transcended its original economic imperative and now exerts a role in the political and social realities of Europeans in 27 countries¹ with expansion and deepening continuing questions. While some scholars have cited the inability of the EU to transform itself into a national-parliamentary or even federal type of democracy (Chrysochoou 1998; see also Decker 2002), other more enthusiastic ones are peering into the future through the lens of the EU as a pioneering model of supranational institutional possibilities.

Second, as the former point makes clear, the EU’s current form depends on the popular support of Europeans. That is, rather than a once-removed copy of national-level institutions with their enforcement and accountability mechanisms (Mair and Thomassen 2010), the EU is functionally weak and empowered only through second-order European Parliamentary elections (van der Eijk and Franklin 1996). As Caldeira and Gibson (1995) have pointed out, with no means of law enforcement and mainly shame to force transgressors into compliance, the European Union depends on supportive popular sentiment for its continued existence. Clearly, if Europeans believe that EU institutions fail to adequately represent their interests and are no longer transparent, this undermines the core of the EU’s *raison d’être*, certainly in the long run.

Popular support for the EU appends itself to the broader literature on regime support at the national level. However, growing evidence suggests that the support of citizens of the European Union are not conceptually fungible with citizens of their respective nation-states, as the EU has

¹ The European Union includes 27 member states as of December 2011: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

come to represent a unique institutional experiment that has altered the meaning of citizenship in the EU context.

Specifically, in congruence with the national-level literature, support for EU integration and its continuity rest on popular perception of regime legitimacy and political representation. A political regime must not only be responsive and ideologically congruent to those it ostensibly represents, it must also function in a manner deemed appropriate to achieve its stated goals. However, it is at this juncture that an important difference between the EU and national-level politics is laid bare.

The wellsprings of individuals' national-level orientations are the kaleidoscope of national norms, values, and tradition – that is, national culture. Inasmuch as a national culture is a precondition for a well-functioning system, we note that for the EU, shared political values and norms have only begun to emerge. From the beginning, this literature focused on the EU's economic performance, which was logical given its economic purpose. Evidence from the Eurobarometer surveys has demonstrated fluctuations of support for the EU that have coincided with primarily economic crises. The Eurosclerosis of the 1970s saw popular support drain away but return in the 1980s to previous levels as the EU began to find its economic footing again. However, later downturns coincided with crises less economic in nature. Popular sentiment in the 1990s reflected the anticipation, and anxiety, of absorbing the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and a growing sense of the complexities of expansion (see Norris 1999). Using data from 1973–2004, Eichenberg and Dalton (2007) also note the declining effect of traditional macro-economic performance on EU support in eight long-term member countries, a pattern particularly pronounced in the post-Maastricht period. Saliency seems to be shifting from growth to distributive economic concerns, which suggests a change in the criteria of citizens' evaluations and that Europeans have begun to identify themselves once again as stakeholders in a common, pan-European undertaking. Yet, with weakly coagulated EU parties, cross-nationally inconsistent issue concerns, and a shallow well of shared cultural norms (particularly following the 2004 enlargement), we find few similarities across national political cultures, an absence that marks the most distinctive divergence from the study of regime support at the national level.²

1.3 State of the field

To this point, scholarly examinations of the popular perceptions of the EU as a system of governance have taken several routes to discern the origins of these attitudes. The next sections will outline the work that has been done to this point. For the greater period of study, popular perception of the EU has been guided by national-level theories of popular support (see above). At the individual-level, European orientations (including systemic factors), instrumental self-interest and social background, and institutions have been the mainstay of this research. Theoretically separate but emerging in the EU institutions argument is the study of the perception that not only are institutions not performing as intended but also failing to operate in a transparent and fair manner (this is known as the 'democratic deficit'). We then discuss the role of intermediaries such as parties, elites, and the media. Finally, given the expansion of the EU in 2004 and 2007, a brief review of the Central and Eastern European literature is included.

Public perception of the European Union contains several dimensions and scholars have suggested numerous typologies to conceptualize them. Expanding David Easton's (1965; 1975) concepts of specific and diffuse support, Norris (1999) asserts five objects of political support (political community, regime principles, regime processes, regime institutions, and political authorities). Similarly, Boomgaarden *et al.* (2011) cite preliminary evidence for five attitudinal dimensions of EU attitudes, including performance, identity, affection, utilitarianism and strengthening (and that these are differently explained by existing predictors). Fuchs and Klingemann (2002), in turn,

² This underscores one branch of investigation, mainly the role of national political values, such as nationalism, in affecting EU support. This is discussed in greater detail below.

operationalize a democratic political community through culture, structure, and process. In this view, a democratic culture, for instance, generates the collective values of rejecting an autocracy and a preference for freedom and equality (see also Dahl 1989).³ We follow these general ideas by focusing our discussion on how citizens evaluate key dimensions of the EU: principles and both institutions and their performance.

Conceptually, popular perception for the basic principles of the EU is a normative assessment of its 'mission'; or in a broad sense, approval of the integration project. What has the EU been assembled to achieve? What are the underlying intentions? These assessments are typically measured by indicators that ask citizens to evaluate the desirability of European integration.

Citizens' orientations to the EU also include the evaluations of the institutions of the EU. These assessments tap approval for the design of the institutions of the EU, most commonly assessed by asking respondents about their level of 'trust' or 'confidence' in various institutions. Using Schumpeter's (1943) procedural definition of democracy as a method for making political decisions, institutional design and its popular approval is critical. Institutional trust, as one indicator of this, is explicitly linked to regime stability through the subjective probability of a citizen believing that the political system will produce preferred outcome (Klingemann and Fuchs 1995; Mishler and Rose 2001).

Finally, evaluations of the EU are also captured by evaluations of the performance of the EU. Performance evaluations are usually measured by respondents' satisfaction with the EU and its institutions, and the approval or disapproval of outcomes of the policy processes (e.g., whether integration increases economic growth).

All in all, then, our Living Review is thus grounded in the tradition of a political culture approach which assumes that a polity can function effectively in the long run only if publics support it. Without such support, it is hard to imagine how a system can be considered legitimate (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999). The dimensions of principles and both institutions and their performance flesh out the concept of legitimacy. The idea is straightforward: the more citizens hold positive views about these dimensions, the more the EU is considered legitimate from the perspective of mass publics. If publics support the principles of a regime, endorse the institutions, and evaluate its performance positively, a regime is in good shape. If publics reject the principles of a regime, dislike its institutions, and are unhappy with outcomes, a regime is in dire conditions. Most regimes fall between these two ideal-typical scenarios, based on publics' actual views about these three dimensions. This work assesses where the EU falls on these dimensions of support.

A note about the organization of this article: methodologically, the study of popular perceptions of the EU as a system of governance is made more problematic by the variety of measures used to assess popular support. For such a rich literature, this Living Review faces the difficult task of presenting this in a coherent order.

One could structure this review by the dependent variable as it is operationalized; that is, by the choice of question to tap citizens' attitudes regarding the EU in its many forms. However, we quickly recognize that researchers have used a number of survey questions to tap the same concepts. For example, the following represent only some of the survey questions meant to capture individuals' support for the EU (see Marsh 1999: 94–95).

- *In general, are you for or against efforts being made to unify Europe?*
- *If you were told tomorrow that the European Community had been scrapped, would you be very sorry, indifferent, or relieved?*
- *Generally speaking, do you think [your country's] membership of the Community has been a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?*

³ Structure is the manifestation of the democratic rules, institutions, and norms. Process is ability to participate in the democratic political order.

- *Some people consider the Common Market as being a first step towards a closer union between the Member States. Personally, do you yourself think the movement towards the unification of Europe should be speeded up, slowed down, or continued as it is at present?*
- *Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (your country) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Community?*

Adding to these variations of support questions, researchers have used a variety of data sources and even those who have used the same data sets have had to manage their increasing complexity. The Eurobarometer series serves as good example for this growing complexity. The earliest questionnaires included only a few questions regarding public opinion of the EU.⁴ In the early to mid-1980s, the Eurobarometer series began to expand the number and diversity of questions regarding the EU to include citizens' estimate of the European Parliament and its role in the EU as well as a general continuation of the EU support questions. In the 1990s, the breadth of questions increased to include individuals' satisfaction with democracy in the EU, satisfaction with democracy in their own country, the perceived and desired speeds of integration, the role of the EU's institutions, and institutional trust. Further increasing the complexity, other questions were discontinued (e.g., several indicators about representation and a Europe-wide government dropped were almost completely eliminated after 1996).

In the hands of interested researchers, these expanding data sets⁵ were used to achieve greater analytical precision and more substantial empirical evidence (this as well correlates with the advent of individualized computing abilities in the social sciences). However, in doing so, the variables of interest were adjusted to fit the needs of the analysis and the broadening of the theoretical approaches to these questions. The result has been increased complexity in the choice and use of indicators to capture these concepts and, for this review, has created a conceptual grey area around those dependent variables that are unlikely to find easily agreed upon demarcations.

Therefore, as this Living Review attempts to summarize what we know about popular perceptions of the EU as a system of governance, we structure this article around the different theoretical distinctions established by the sources of EU attitudes, using four broad distinctions among analytical approaches.⁶ First, we discuss the literature based on economic self-interest. Second, we then discuss the role of social status, followed, thirdly, by the growing attention paid to social and national identities. Fourth, we discuss the role of intermediaries, in particular political parties.⁷ Finally, we briefly discuss what we know about publics in Central Eastern Europe.

⁴ "Generally speaking, do you think that (your country's) membership of the Common Market is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good or bad?" was the core question regarding support for the European Union. The 'Common Market' in this question has also been the 'European Economic Community', the 'European Community', and the 'European Union'.

⁵ The Eurobarometer series was not the only one. The European Elections Studies series and the World Values Surveys as well grew in complexity to accommodate this growing interest.

⁶ Despite this complexity, we allow common sense to rule the day and readers are encouraged to attend to the sub-field variation in conceptualization and operationalization of the dependent (as well as independent) variables as this remains a large and growing field of inquiry. When authors have uncommonly operationalized indicators, we have tried to make a note of it.

⁷ Although we have included a relevant Section 3.3 below, we do not focus on the media given that another Living Review article discusses this literature (de Vreese 2007).

2 Explaining attitudes about European integration

2.1 Instrumental self-interest

Far beyond the other approaches, the economic considerations of citizens of the EU have been the most thoroughly examined. In Western Europe, attitudes regarding EU membership have been explained by personal economic situations (Gabel 1998a,b) and individuals' perceptions of their own economic well-being and national economic performance (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993, 2007; see also Gabel and Whitten 1997). Similarly, the broader classification of citizens into integration's economic 'winners' and 'losers' has been argued to affect EU support in the West (including education and occupational groups, see Gabel 1998a). Essentially, these explanations rest on the notion that support for EU membership comes from the implicit cost/benefit analysis of individuals' likely economic benefit to be gained from integration.

Given the EU's origin as an economic organization intending to bring economic efficiency and affluence among European states, support for the continuation of this project has often been understood in economic terms (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Anderson and Kaltenthaler 1996; Duch and Taylor 1997). However, *which* economic factors are the most relevant continued to be a matter of debate. Early work tended to cite national economic performance in the form of rates of growth, inflation and unemployment (Anderson and Kaltenthaler 1996), country net benefits from EU (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Anderson and Reichert 1995; Carrubba 1997; Gabel 1998a), and more general 'economic perceptions' (Eichenberg and Dalton 1993) as key economic variables that influenced citizens' perceptions about the EU.

Throughout the 1990s, scholars attempted to discern the precise source of this evaluative proxy mechanism. Appealing to the outright 'costs of non-Europe', many found favorable national-level economic evaluations to be the source (Anderson and Kaltenthaler 1996; Eichenberg and Dalton 1993) and others addressed regional and sectoral economic variation (Smith and Wanke 1993).

A distinct facet of the sociotropic approach is the assessment of being a net beneficiary of the net transfers from the EU to the nation (Anderson and Reichert 1995; Gabel 1998a; Carrubba 1997, 2001; Gabel and Palmer 1995; Smith and Wanke 1993). While economic in nature, the underlying assumption is that further EU expansion implies continued market liberalization. As such, citizens of EU member states are able to capitalize on the availability of human and national-level resources according to their own socio-economic profiles. However, what became increasingly clear was perceptions about one's own economic situation was often more powerful than 'objective' measures of occupation, class, or income.

Therefore, these sociotropic approaches gradually gave way to a more specific process of egocentric utilitarianism. Born out of the economic voting literature (Lewis-Beck 1988), this individual-level approach tried to explain why objective economic predictors (GDP, inflation rates) only weakly related to attitudes about the EU. For example, Gabel and Palmer (1995) examined how different economic benefits of integrative policy relate to individual-level differences in public support for integration. Not only did they find support for this economic explanation but also coherent and accompanying socio-economic status (SES) and social location effects in the form of education, age, income, and occupation (see below). In another effort, Gabel (1998b) refuted the sociotropic economic argument of Eichenberg and Dalton (1993) demonstrating that declining unemployment and inflation, and rising GDP are associated with less support for integration. Furthermore, when Gabel and Whitten (1997) included both objective national-level indicators and subjective individual-level indicators, they found the latter to be a stronger predictor of EU support.

This fairly simple economic model of EU support was a precursor to the broader approach of understanding individuals' cost/benefit analysis. More recent analyses now include explicit theorizing about these socio-economic perceptions but combine them with social location variables that lead to a more complex assessment of how economic assessments affect EU attitudes. The utili-

tarian cost-benefit approach states that as material gains within a country increase – particularly through the liberalization of trade within the EU – support for the EU will increase. Importantly, in contrast to simple macro-level economic indicators, this was particularly true of those who are positioned to take advantage or further integration, distinguished by specific SES and social location variables (Gabel and Palmer 1995; Gabel and Whitten 1997; Gabel 1998a,b). In short, this argument rests on the assumption that individuals in different socio-economic locations experience integration differently, some as winners and some as losers (Gabel 1998a).⁸

This instrumental approach approximates individuals' cost/benefit analysis associated with integration and in addition to advantageous economic positions, education, occupational skills, and proximity to borders impact individuals propensity to support continued EU expansion (Anderson and Reichert 1995; Gabel and Palmer 1995).⁹ Conceptualizing the EU as an international economic policy, Gabel (1998a) used economic factors that explain support for the EU but in addition to shoring up further support for the utilitarian approach, he delineates sources of support across occupational differentiation in the support for EU membership. Higher income earners benefit from continued integration as it creates increased investment opportunities while lower income earners are subject to diminishing welfare brought about by increased capital liberalization. Correlated with this are individuals' sectoral location and occupational differentiation, for example, younger Europeans are also more likely to benefit from continued integration as they are more cosmopolitan, mobile, and flexible (see also Inglehart and Rabier 1978). The approach tapped the distributional consequences of economic integration for individuals and demonstrates that both winners and losers can be identified and can be shown to differ in their support for the EU project (Gabel and Palmer 1995; Gabel 1998a,b); this explains not only differentiated support but also an individual-level process of 'calculating' the personal impact of further integration.

2.2 Social location

In addition to the utilitarian approaches above, others have demonstrated at least perceptible differences across individual attribute variables. In its earliest form, post-material theory suggested that individuals' incremental political sophistication created a value system of appreciation for the democratic organization (Inglehart 1970; Inglehart and Rabier 1978; Janssen 1991) and eventually extended to support for the EU (Inglehart 1990, 1997). In the post-materialist language, this development was accorded to a more highly refined rejection of materialist considerations and a resultant capacity for the abstract consideration of the EU project. However, the process of sophistication was predicated on the notion that individuals' cognitive mobilization increased political awareness which lessened the 'threat' of integration. Studies in this approach operationalized cognitive mobilization with high levels of political awareness and skills in political communication and were based on assumptions that higher levels of cognitive skills are necessary but needed to understand the highly abstract nature of the EU project and that more information about integration would cultivate support for the EU project. While post-materialism as a determinant was ultimately demonstrated to be at best a weak relationship (Anderson and Reichert 1995; Gabel 1998a), the underlying implications of cognitive mobilization, increases in education and political interest and the ability to receive and manage incoming and increasingly accessible information, have resonated in a broader approach. Recent research suggests this is so as individuals' lack of knowledge about the EU affects support for EU authority in political issues, although less so

⁸ For a multi-level process, Brinegar and Jolly (2005) argue that lower skilled workers are more averse to EU, but this depends on the nature of national redistribution and capitalist systems.

⁹ Human capital is argued to also have a gender component as women are less interested in foreign policy, more compassionate and display less competitive values, more economically vulnerable to economic integration (Nelson and Guth 2000) and women are the likely 'losers' from market liberalization because of their position in the labor market (Gellenny and Anderson 2000). This is discussed further below.

for economic issues (Clark and Hellwig 2012). As citizens developed more cosmopolitan outlooks, their apprehension to the EU project fell accordingly and has been supported by empirical evidence of the positive correlation between political involvement and knowledge and support for the EU integration (Janssen 1991).

This is but a part of the social basis from which political skills develop. Age, income, occupation, and political values are not merely controls in this analysis but rather contribute to individuals' cognitive development and thus understanding of the EU project (Inglehart, Rabier, and Reif 1991). Education, age, gender, and the socio-economic status of individuals have consistently been found to be salient contributors to individuals' support for the EU (Weßels 1995). Occupation has been found to be relevant; although, not in a clear pattern (Hooghe *et al.* 2007). Gabel (1998a) pointed to several socio-demographic characteristics and political ideological preferences as sources of support for the EU, particularly center (vs. strong left/right) ideological positions (see also Anderson and Reichert 1995), that were meaningful in the instrumentalist approach discussed above.

However, beyond socio-economic status variables as components of a singular economic consideration of support, some have explicitly theorized these SES variables as separate processes. In particular, one study suggests a modest gender gap exists with women being less enthusiasm about EU integration (Nelson and Guth 2000). More significantly, Nelson, Guth, and Fraser (2001) have pursued religion as a determinant of support for the EU. While they find that Catholics are far stronger supporters of integration than Orthodox, Protestant, and ultimately the least supportive atheists and agnostics (see also Nelson and Guth 2003), their approach steers clear of the more provocative role of religion in the EU, namely the increasing Muslim population and conflict that has accompanied the more insular diasporas in the Netherlands, France, Germany, and Denmark (as recent examples), as well as the on-going debate over Turkey's admittance.

The shortcoming of socio-political or socio-economic approaches is that while we can assign individual-level attributes to varying levels of support in the national contexts, this ignores the supranational character of European integration. Although, this fixation on a materialist explanation in the 1990s eclipsed the rising number of 'new politics' issues, the economic approach makes the most intuitive sense as the greatest impacts from EU policies have been economic or directly affect economic considerations. However, this utilitarian approach is limited to the output based conception of representation, that is, limited to the explicit capacity of the EU to deliver the goods. While this instrumentalist approach has explained a great deal of support into the mid-1990s, the EU has continued its expansion into non-economic policy areas (Franklin and Wlezien 1997) with consequences for how public support for integration is analyzed.

2.3 National vs. European identities

One result is that national identities have increasingly become the focus of EU analyses. The classical conception of 'Europe' forces upon its members a question of what it means to be European. Member states such as the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark have begun to confront these issues through specific policies of immigration and migration, national policies that are likely to become more prominent in EU discussions and politics at large. Therefore, these crises may have more to do with the Europeans themselves than the EU. Again returning to the legitimacy of the EU, it is the seeming absence of a European *demos* that limits citizens of thinking of themselves as Europeans, or as Schmitt and Thomassen put it, represented are "the people of Europe" not the "European People" (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999: 256).

If legitimacy refers in part to the belief that the existing political order is right, then popular support for the EU is a matter of value congruency; that is, an affective recognition of the EU as necessary and representative of the collective will of the peoples of Europe. This of course is premised on the actual existence of a 'collective will' of a European *demos*, placing a heavy

demand on the citizens of Europe to identify themselves as the legitimate origin of the EU and to define its scope and function (Cederman 2001). However, the difficulty of the *demos* question lies in addressing the continuing ambiguousness of representation at the EU level: to whom are EU decision makers accountable?

Some argue that the institutional uniqueness of the EU as a supranational body, not a national one, weakens the congruence between the representatives and their constituents by its distance not only to the constituents themselves but in the daily affairs of individuals. Yet, over the past two decades, the EU has not only expanded in the number of members but also in breadth of its involvement at national-level and European publics responded to what they accurately perceived as an increase in both the number of policy areas for which the EU is partially or completely responsible (Schmitt 2005: 654) as well as a substantial increase in the volume of legislation that the EU now produces (Franklin and Wlezien 1997). Not only have Europeans noticed the increase but have – in general – responded negatively to it. At the same time and sharing the same origin, the EU has been seen to be encroaching on state sovereignty.

Although attempts have been made to address this (the introduction of the three Pillars¹⁰ and the Principle of Subsidiarity), the expansion of the role of the EU in national affairs (e.g., through harmonization and EU enlargement) has catalyzed popular debate as to its necessity in doing so. Originally designed to aid the progress in areas related to implementing the complete economic package of the Single Market and accompanying the Single European Act, the Council of Ministers exchanged unanimity for majority voting. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, this undermined the ability of national parliaments to examine the actions taken by other countries' representatives (i.e. national ministers acting in the Council of Ministers) and was perceived as a forfeiture of an uncomfortable degree of national sovereignty, particularly as there was no real trade off in parliamentary power.

Explicitly addressing the contest between the EU and states, the “subsidiarity principle” guides EU decisions to be taken as closely as possible to the citizen, that the EU does not take action (except on matters for which it alone is responsible) unless EU action is more effective than action taken at national, regional or local level.¹¹ Some have argued that it is through this principle that the EU has reinvigorated national sovereignty by highlighting national-level competencies and economic abilities (Moravcsik 1993); however, it is the subsidiarity dispute that has turned the scope of EU government into a salient issue in the larger debate on the support for the EU (de Winter and Swyngedouw 1999: 47). Set against this backdrop, the term ‘European identity’ is not merely publics’ general and ambiguous feeling about ‘Europe’ but, more importantly, a constellation of attitudes regarding the role and nature of the EU and the strength of their attachments to state sovereignty. This question has been approached in two ways.¹² The first includes a version of national identity that is important to individuals’ choice to support or approve the EU (see Fuchs

¹⁰ The Three Pillars divide EU policy considerations and their responsible bodies among three domains. The ‘Community’ domain covers most of the common policies, where decisions are taken by the Commission, Parliament and the Council. The ‘Common Foreign and Security Policy’ domain deals with issues of common security for which decisions are taken by the Council alone. The ‘Police and Judicial Cooperation in Criminal Matters’ domain takes up issues with intra-EU enforcement where the Council makes the decisions. These changes are contingent on the enforcement of the Lisbon Treaty.

¹¹ Schmitt and Thomassen (2000: 319) argue that, depending on the policy area concerned, EU governance shifts between inter-governmental and supranational mode, and does so with laws in an increasing breadth of influence. This principle has further received empirical support for the EU project as the distribution of political authority over differentiated policy areas may be more efficient than blanket centralization (Hooghe and Marks 2003).

¹² At the aggregate level of public opinion, nationality or national cultural heritage is important through long-established political traditions or national specific cultural legacies (Gabel 1998a; Bosch and Newton 1995; Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Smith and Wanke 1993). Unfortunately, the notion of ‘national context’ does little to pull back the curtain on underlying complexities; although, one author has linked aggregate support with significant moments in EU history, particularly the emergence of treaties (Çiftçi 2005) thereby implying a relationship between the EU policy process and support.

and Schneider 2011: for a complete descriptive evolution of identity politics as a basis of support for the EU). This more threatening form of national identification resonates from perceived cultural threats and exhibits hostility toward other cultures; that is, feelings of national attachment and perceptions emerge out of threats to the nation state (Kritzinger 2003). Carey (2002) has demonstrated that not only is the intensity of feeling toward one's own country or the level of attachment to the nation important but so is the fear of other identities and cultures (see also Deflem and Pampel 1996)¹³ or more specifically a fear of immigration (de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005) and a preference for cultural unity (Sides and Citrin 2007). Hooghe and Marks (2005) examine the role of ethnicity in Western Europe and find qualified support for the influence of ethnic conflict on support for the EU (see also Luedtke 2005; de Master and Le Roy 2000 on 'attitudes toward minorities'; and de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005 for 'anti-immigration sentiments'). This is not unprecedented as earlier works argued that Euroscepticism was born out of identity politics such that the nation-state is the appropriate reference point for identity and the continuing EU project undermines this (Taggart 1998).¹⁴

Another approach to this topic pursues the competing self-identification of Europeans as nationals or Europeans. Scheuer (1999) presents a set of criteria of this form of nationalism arguing that in place of nationalism is the identification of Europeans as citizens of Europe and the implicit pride in being European. That is, rather than an appeal to the soil and toil of 'nationalism', it is born out of a sense belonging in a political community in which mutual trust and the inclusion of new members is an aspiration (the 'we' feeling). A version of this is the loss of national identity to the EU itself (Christin and Trechsel 2002) such that integration is a symbolic threat to national sovereignty.

In considering the first branch and finding the latter, McLaren (2002) examined the perceived threats posed by other cultures (or 'hostility toward other cultures') and the support for EU; however, her examination concludes that the threat is not exclusively third country nationals but also other EU member states and their encroachment through continued EU expansion (for evidence of this in Greece, Portugal, and Spain, see Llamazares and Gramacho 2005). However, in his later work, McLaren (2004) suggests that while there is rather widespread fear of a loss of national identity and culture, it is not central to the resistance of citizens toward continued EU enlargement. Alternatively, others have conceptualized encroachment at the individual-level – particularly during periods of instability. De Vries and van Kersbergen (2007) suggest that a "double allegiance" of economic and identity-based explanations can be not only reflections of underlying security (economic and social-psychological, respectively) issues but also combined into a single framework to understand support for EU integration as key determinants in EU support.

Clearly, the literature on European identity has proceeded on the idea that national and European identification are competitors in a zero sum game. This has a significant impact on the thinking about support for the EU. But as Bruter suggests, not only is a European identity necessary to combat the deficit of legitimacy in the EU but also that national and European identities do not have to be competing but rather can be expected to be *positively* correlated (Bruter 2003: 1154). Further arguing that little attention has been paid to the conceptual basis of identity, Bruter (2003) demonstrates that the above conceptualization of European identity is fundamentally problematic, limiting scholars' ability to get at what national and European identities actually mean for the legitimization of the EU (see also Bruter 2005; Habermas 1992). He bifurcates European identity into civic and cultural components and suggests that the broader – that is, cultural –

¹³ However, their argument for the role of national identity is not based on a direct testing of national sentiments (specifying it within the model) but rather on the variation in the size of country dummies coefficients.

¹⁴ Weßels (2007) distinguishes eurosceptics (those who demand a better performance from the EU vs. those who seek to limit or stop EU expansion and those who would like to see it rolled back entirely) and suggests that not distinguishing among these produces conflicting repercussions for our understanding of European integration.

European identity is driven more substantially by the shared symbols.¹⁵ Therefore, this twofold definition would suggest that what is often meant – and empirically captured in the common operationalization of European identity – is the civic component of identity of the feeling that respondents are citizens of a European *political* system.

2.4 Institutions and institutional performance

Almost from the beginning of the EU project, it has been the popular perception that EU institutions were largely insulated from direct public access. As such, the process has suffered from a “representation deficit” or an insufficiency in its ability to accurately gauge and act in accordance with the will of the governed. In addition, even at the functional level of providing a level playing ground, the institutions have failed to generate equitable distributions of power within the EU itself and among its member states.¹⁶ Whether symptomatic or deterministic, there has been a steady decline in participation of European Parliamentary elections since 1979. This decreasing participation roughly indicates a behavioral manifestation of political interest, engagement, and enthusiasm and has been linked to the empirical legitimacy of the EU (Blondel, Sinnott, and Svensson 1998). In contrast, the link between declining turnout in European Parliamentary elections and declining legitimacy of the EU has instead been argued to be a strict function of structural factors (Franklin 2001; see also van der Eijk and Franklin 1996).

Reliance on a national-level ideal type of institutional arrangement (and subsequent performance) continues to limit the ability to develop a working framework to accurately define political representation at the EU level (Coultrap 1999). Models of party government are premised on three broad assumptions: all major decisions are made by elected officials; policy proposals are formulated and policy decisions are made within parties which then act cohesively to enact them; and elected officials are recruited and held collectively accountable through party. Two examples illustrate the shortcomings of these national-level theories. The inter-governmental model of the EU blurs the path of representation at each political transmission from each nations’ electorate to national sets of parties to variously arrayed national parliaments and finally to – what at best can be – refracted representation in the European Council and Council of Ministers (Newman 1996). In contrast, a federal model of European political representation suggests a European electorate with European parties that weakly represent their interests in European Parliament and government, again making the tenuous assumption of a coherent European-wide constituency.

In the former, the pathway linking representatives to their constituents is convoluted. In the latter, as EP elections are considered ‘second order’, citizens’ participation (aside from the scattered mandatory or ‘same day’ elections practices) is much lower given that ‘much less is at stake’. Therefore, one facet of popular perceptions of empirical legitimacy is the perception that the EU is a representative institution that poorly reflects the collective voice of Europeans.

Evaluations of institutional performance include both the input component, that the EU government is both selected by popular sanction and institutions are sufficiently democratic in their process, and the output component, which is the ability of the EU to deliver on policy and enforcement. However, as Schmitt and Thomassen (1999: 14) note, “. . . there is not a single undisputed normative theory of political representation”.¹⁷ While the ability of the EU to function in supra-

¹⁵ As examples, the EU has issued a European model of passport (in use since 1985), has an anthem (Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy”) and a flag (a circle of 12 golden stars on a blue background), and even EU model driving licenses (since 1996).

¹⁶ As one example, the institutional impact of national-level variations in electoral laws and coordination with EU level elections advantages some countries such that countries are represented disproportionately at the EU-level (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999).

¹⁷ However, they do offer a loose definition of political representation as the concept of representative democracy, including both the institutions of responsible government and the process of political representation (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999: 4). Regardless, this problem persists via the issue of an identifiable European *demos* (see

national capacity has grown, there remains the perception that an "... effective system of political representation is ... missing" (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999: 3). Further muddied by the EU's institutional distinctiveness, there remains a lingering dispute over criteria for political representation at the EU level.

Although scholars have debated the validity and sufficiency of democratic practices, constituents of the EU have cited a general un-responsiveness and eroding democratic practices as the bases of what has come to be known as the democratic deficit (Scharpf 1997). The democratic deficit cites the failure of EP elections to accurately translate elections into the distribution of power and is a twofold issue. First, the only elected body of the EU is not the most powerful institution. Second, beyond popular elections, the processes by which policy proscriptions are reached fail to meet an adequately democratic standard.¹⁸ For the former concern of the weak linkage between peoples and the EP, the deficit not only indicates the weak EP but also the nature of the EP elections.¹⁹ These 'second order' elections fail to accurately link EP representative with their constituents (and their agendas) effectively handicapping their role in the policy making process at the EU level (Reif and Schmitt 1980; Hix and Marsh 2007). The EU's internal institutional structure further dispenses policy responsibilities across these under-representative groups: a weak European Parliament, an un-elected European Commission, and that both the Council of Ministers (or the Council of the European Union) and European Council.

Scharpf (1999) has re-conceptualized the dual notion of legitimacy as input/output legitimacy (see above). Not only should institutions be 'democratic enough' but also produce policies that are congruent with publics' own preferences (see also Rohrschneider 2002). As scholars have noted, these are not properly controlled or accountable to national institutions or constituencies (Newman 1996: 173). Although, in contrast to the intensity of this debate, others have argued that the democratic deficit is largely an academic exercise as the EU is institutionally 'democratic enough' (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999; see also Majone 1998; Moravcsik 2002) or as Crombez (2003: 101) argues: "The institutional set up of the EU does not lead to policies that are fundamentally undemocratic and that the composition of its institutions is not inherently less democratic than that of the US political institutions."

Do national-level variables play a more significant role in shaping popular perceptions of the EU? Many authors have answered that not only are they important, they obscure the individual-level variation and may be thought to be developed in the national level context (Deflem and Pampel 1996; Kritzinger 2003). Several works have presented evidence that popular perceptions of the EU are conditioned by national institutional factors (Anderson 1998; Martinotti and Stefanizzi 1995; Norris 1999; Sánchez-Cuenca 2000; Rohrschneider 2002). The most fertile branch of this argument has been that individuals' evaluation of the EU depends on the nation-state performance. Specifically, early work in this area demonstrated that support for integration depended on the legitimacy and efficiency of the nation-state (Anderson 1998; Janssen 1991).²⁰ While satisfaction with the EU performance has been understood as a function of satisfaction with incumbent government (Franklin, van der Eijk, and Marsh 1995; Ray 2003a) and positive evaluations of national government (Franklin, van der Eijk, and Marsh 1995), the argument has resulted in a discussion over the use of national governments as proxies for explicit supranational performance-based assessments (Anderson 1998; Franklin, Marsh, and Wlezien 1994b). Support for national governments

Section 2.3).

¹⁸ It also refers to the ability of the European executive to avoid accountability to the EP, including Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) of the Council of Ministers and the secrecy of their deliberations (Katz 2001: 55).

¹⁹ Gibson and Caldeira (1995, 1998) add the European Court of Justice as an EU institution other than the EP as another potential source for continuing perceptions of low legitimacy.

²⁰ Anderson (1998) further undermined a central assumption by taking a cognitive approach arguing that on nearly all measures of awareness and knowledge about integration, most people are uninformed across nearly all measures of knowledge and awareness about the basic aspects of the integration process, ultimately undermining their ability to employ proxies as a means to arrive at an opinion of the EU.

and their parties has been understood as a heuristic through which citizens could make proxy assessments of the performance of the EU.

More recent works suggest that this institutional proxy argument does have limits. Karp, Banducci, and Bowler (2003) argue that political sophisticates can distinguish between national and EU institutions and that they are assessed *on their own criteria*. Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) demonstrated that in some cases, the proxy argument works as a contrasting lens producing an inverse perception between national and supranational institutions. Rather than see both national governments and the EU as a singular, or overtly similar, set of political institutions, Sánchez-Cuenca argued that lower national institutional evaluation was correlated with support for the EU through not only the lower opportunity costs of transferring sovereignty to the EU but also the appeal to a less corrupt – as were many national governments were perceived as being – version of democratic governance. Rohrschneider (2002) refines this line of reasoning by arguing that individuals' perceptions of how well governments are representing their interests are somewhat shaped by the performance of arbitrating institutions – specifically bureaucracies and judiciaries – as citizens' interactions are likely to be with these institutions and through this experiential institutional exposure, they generate their orientation to the EU. As these work show, increasing amounts of the work on understanding the role of institutions in shaping individuals' support and perceptions about the EU are being done in the literature associated with the democratic deficit.

While Karp and Bowler (2006) find that 'hesitant' Europeans' attitudes, in contrast to the overt supporters and resisters of integration, are driven by economic and EU performance factors,²¹ two contributors to this debate have more explicitly linked the democratic deficit to the proxy argument from above. Both Rohrschneider (2002) and Sánchez-Cuenca (2000) argue that evaluations of EU institutions emerge from individuals' assessments of the quality of national institutions; however, they do so in ways that contradict other works on proxy evaluations. Sánchez-Cuenca's argument is somewhat different from the core of popular perceptions of the EU as a *system of government* than Rohrschneider's. In the former, the dependent variable is related to the speed of integration (the Dynamometer) and is explained by variations in individuals' perceptions of national level corruption and social protection. That is, rather than evaluate the EU as an extension of national level institutions, they are the bases for comparison. In the latter, Rohrschneider more directly links citizens' perception of the lack of representation at the EU level and demonstrates that their support for the EU is reduced independent of economic perceptions. More provocatively for the case against the proxy argument, this is particularly true in countries with well-functioning institutions suggesting a mediated comparison between the function, or quality, of democratic institutions at the different levels.

Contributing to a growing body of multi-level studies (Anderson 1998; Gabel 1998a; Sánchez-Cuenca 2000; Whitefield 2006), Rohrschneider and Loveless (2010) have explicitly modeled country characteristics as crucial components to understanding mass attitudes towards support for the EU. They start by noting that the fundamental expectations of models of predicting individuals' perceptions of the democratic deficit are contradictory. For the EU, given that economic and political performance are highly correlated, models using prospective economic prosperity (whether individual or national) and models of national political performance suggest conflicting expectations of individuals' level of EU support in the same countries. For countries with both high performing economic and political institutions (i.e. Western Europe), the economic performance model produces higher evaluations of EU democracy, whereas the political performance model produces lower levels. For new member states, the expectations are simply reversed but no more clear. They take advantage of the expansion of the EU to introduce even greater national level variation and

²¹ Other attempts to explain variation in euroscepticism, for example Lubbers and Scheepers (2005) work, include a wide variety of macro-level performance variables, including the use of the introduction of the Euro, GDP, changes in media attention on the EU, countries' EU budget balances, and size of country as well as individual-level left-right ideological placement and education. However, it fails to congeal into a systematic theory.

argue that different country contexts influence the salience of economic and political factors and thus the criteria citizens use to evaluate democracy in the EU. The main finding is that citizens in less affluent nations evaluate the EU mainly on the basis of economic prospects and those in more affluent nations rely on political criteria to evaluate the EU's democracy deficit.

While the above work continues to be relevant in our understanding, little work has been done to systematically address the dramatic change of the economic affairs in the EU. Existing research shows that there is surprisingly little evidence that the financial crisis in 2008 and the resulting economic slowdown produced a resurgence of economic factors – sociotropic or egocentric – as determinants (Sericchio *et al.* 2013); although they do find that in the countries most affected by the crisis, support for the EU has waned more evidently.

At the core, the democratic deficit is founded on the idea that it is difficult for Europeans to care about a Union whose identity was for so long nebulous or at least limited, but which over time appears to increasingly impinge upon every aspect of their existence. The essence of liberal democracy rests on many foundations including the idea that government is designed to respond to its constituents, whether in the form of policy output or regular re-construction (Miller and Listhaug 1990). If people believe they are being fairly and accurately represented in government, their support for that government is likely to increase or be high and when this is not the case, little support is expected (Kornberg and Clarke 1994; Pitkin 1967). However, while the effect of feeling represented is necessary, it is not sufficient for widespread support. In sum, the democratic deficit represents both the substantive and procedural components (Dahl 1989; see Rohrschneider 2002), such that the substantive component is the output of government that, for the most part, the majority is able to get the government to do what it wants and the procedural component is related to representation such that the institutions are inherently 'fair'.

3 Role of intermediaries

For most Europeans, the complexity of the EU and its distance from everyday experiences has led many researchers to consider the role of political intermediaries; group-level processes such as elites, parties, and the media.

3.1 Elites

There are competing means by which we understand the process of elite-mass attitudinal congruence. One is the top-down, elite-driven process whereby elites (also sometimes understood as parties) take on an issue position and mass publics align themselves according to their own ideological orientation, issue salience, and attitudes. The second approach is that parties/elites position themselves in accordance with mass opinion in order to capture a larger constituency and thereby prove more competitive in the electoral marketplace (see Carrubba 2001). It is the former theoretical approach that underscores the traditional understanding of this process in terms of support for EU integration as the EU has generally been regarded as an elite driven project. Germane to our discussion here, it has long been thought that mass opinions about European integration are a function of elite and/or party positions; therefore, the following two sections parse this overlap to focus on the explicit role of elites and parties, respectively.

The degree to which mass publics' and elites' views converge on a range of issue dimensions is imperative to the perception of appropriate representation (Dalton 1985, 1987; Iversen 1994). While the source of citizens' perceptions about the EU's legitimacy have included citizens' own institutional evaluations and media exposure (de Vreese 2002), elites have demonstrated not only a higher preference for continued EU integration and for the project in general but have also been cited as opinion leaders. Weßels (1995) has argued that due to the complexity of the EU project and distal proximity from the daily lives of individuals, the role of intermediaries is a necessary inclusion, such that evaluations of the role of national political elites led many to conclude that support for continued EU integration was largely an elite-driven process. There is a distinction between EU and national elites (Thomassen and Schmitt 1997) and various analyses show that most elites support European integration to a greater degree than mass publics, such as EU parliamentarians (Schmitt and Thomassen 2000) and governmental elites (Hug and König 2002; Aspinwall 2002). Yes, on the whole, popular attitudes regarding the EU are typically considered to be mediated or even manufactured through the attitudes of national and EU elites (Anderson 1998; Franklin, Marsh, and McLaren 1994a); a premise that is increasingly contested (see below).

There has been some evidence of electoral competitiveness based on a combination of the left-right dimension and anti- and pro-integration positions taken up by party elites (Hix and Lord 1997). In older member states in which national institutions work well, domestic elites can affect how mass publics evaluate the EU (Franklin, van der Eijk, and Marsh 1995; Weßels 1995); yet, others have argued that following the Maastricht Treaty,²² this may be less true (Niedermayer and Sinnott 1995) as national party elites have been argued not only to ignore EU policy implication in national political debates but even actively generate public resistance to integration (Anderson 1998; Franklin, Marsh, and McLaren 1994a). Further, sub-national elites have been shown to view their nations' EU membership as largely irrelevant to their platform (Hughes, Sasse, and Gordan 2002).

More recent examinations have reached a more nuanced understanding of the elite/mass public divide. Hooghe (2003) argues that elites view the EU and its continuation as a means to develop an

²² To many, the results of Maastricht profoundly re-orientated the trajectory of the EU. It laid the basis for a common foreign and security policy, closer cooperation on justice and home affairs and the creation of an economic and monetary union, including a single currency. It further introduced the principle of subsidiarity and the Pillar system of policy formation. Even the name – the European Economic Community – was changed to the European Community, suggesting of the changing nature of the project.

effective and integrated economic market that results in more significant and unified international political actor while mass publics are more concerned with social policies that impact them more directly. That is, while there is a gap between the levels of support between elites and mass publics on EU support, these differences are a function of underlying and differentiated concerns about what the project can provide and what policies should be under the purview of the EU. National elites seek to exert national competencies onto international issues while mass publics are concerned about the ability of the EU to deliver social goods.

A result of increasing elite-mass disparity is indicated by a decreasing congruence between the policy positions of EU citizens and their elite representatives. As Thomassen and Schmitt (1997) note, mass-elite agreement on specific EU policies is known to be poor (see also Schmitt and Thomassen 1999: ch. 9). This elite-mass discrepancy in policy positions further underscores popular perceptions of the EU as a less than fully democratic set of institutions by cultivating the impression of the EU as an elite playground, segregated from 'real' Europe. Schmitt and Thomassen (1999: 201–202) argue that this might be the case as 'Euro-crats' are perceived as being recruited only from a group interested in the EU project and inhabitants of an insular world of Brussels and Strasbourg. But rather than assign this as a failure of an elite-mass relationship, they argue that European party elites are in fact 'leading the way' on issue of integration rather than being 'out of touch' with home constituencies and that the disparity is a constituent issue (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999: 202). Or put another way, the distance between EU elites and their constituency is created by the sluggishness of popular orientation to adapt to the new realities and new issues facing the EU, or more generally, the EU project *per se* (Schmitt and Thomassen 1999: 206; see also Hooghe 2003).

3.2 Parties, partisanship, and ideology

The role of parties has received little attention in early investigations into public opinion of the EU; yet, as of late, more researchers are finding it a fertile research question. The place for parties somewhat depends on the EU project itself; that is, whether EU institutions take on the guise of inter-governmentalism, predicated on the active participation of members' states and their parliaments, or toward a more European parliamentary model under which the EP would become an effective supranational parliament. For the question at hand, can the same be said for their role in shaping individuals' orientation to EU politics? Can European politics be investigated through the lens of national party politics, and thus our understanding of citizens' response to parties' role as effective intermediaries of the EU project?

Contemporaneous with the expansion of the EU, scholars noted a decline in the role of traditional mass parties at the national-level (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Mass political parties have demonstrated a diminishing role in national politics, providing fewer cues and ideological heuristics to constituents and have been traditionally understood as means of representation, origins of coherent policy positions, and informational linkages between governments and their constituents. Evidence of citizens' attachment to parties, citizens' partisanship, were no longer effectively explained by their membership in specific social groups, a change that manifests itself as a slow popular, political demobilization. Several reasons for this process have been offered.

Some have argued that rather than a decline of parties, national parties are experiencing or actively undertaking a modernization in response to an expanding supranational political realm (Panebianco 1988; Mair 1990; Katz and Mair 1994). Rather than the traditional role of parties as consensus-forming intermediaries of national political representation, they have shifted their focus to electoral competitiveness in the realm of increasing EU significance (Panebianco 1988). As one example, for the British, EU attitudes have shifted from the left–right ideological dimension to a voter-driven process (vs. a party-driven process), a shift attributed to intra-party dynamics and changes in the saliency of the EU (among other external political events) (Evans and Butt 2007).

During this period, however, parties were argued to intervene in EU politics. Van der Eijk and Franklin (1996) present evidence that national political parties focused European Parliamentary elections on national issues rather than European ones. Thus, they argue, national parties could aid in the building of EU legitimacy by forcing European policymaking to be more transparent and accountable. Rather than pitting national politics against European politics, national parties could eliminate the ability of national politicians in the EU to mislead their national parliaments by removing these representatives' ability to portray the EU decision-making process as a zero-sum game. Further, national parties might benefit in terms of being able to 'point the finger' at policy areas over which they have no control.

Partisanship is relevant at the national-level such that when people support national parties that are pro-EU, they are pro-EU independent of their personal characteristics (Franklin, Marsh, and McLaren 1994a; Franklin, Marsh, and Wlezien 1994b; Gabel 1998a; Ray 2003a; Hooghe and Marks 2005). Yet, the decline of partisanship has accompanied a decline in the relevance of social and political groups. Taggart (1998) has argued that parties in fact play a lessened role in the emergence of 'Euroscepticism', second to domestic contextual factors, and largely so because of a lack of national conversations on the matter (see Section 3.1 on elites). The sources of the decline of partisanship might include issue politics (particularly new issues such as immigration and security), a rejection of the incentives of 'materialist' parties (Kitschelt 2000), and the process of political sophistication (via education and communication). It may as well include a shift toward individual versus community values, signaling a shift from national- to supranational-level politics. All of these developments suggest that national parties are becoming less important than they once were, lowering the degree to which they can influence public opinion about a range of attitudes, including those about the EU.

Yet, perhaps the strongest case for re-inserting party politics back into the discussion of public opinion of the EU has been made by Marks, Hooghe and their various co-authors (Marks and Wilson 2000; see also Marks, Wilson, and Ray 2002). Marks and Wilson (2000) present party competition over EU politics as historically determined constraints *à la* Lipset and Rokkan (1967)'s cleavage theory of party alignment. They argue that parties do not take cues from their respective electorates' on matters of the EU as individuals do not possess sufficiently structured orientations, clearly contradicting Gabel's (1998a; 1998b) instrumentalist notion that individuals can determine what continued integration means to them (as 'winners' and 'losers'). As national parties integrate concerns over EU integration into pre-existing and historically stable positions, this reasserts domestic politics into this question. Rather than a surrogate for EU-level politics, national politics and more specifically parties reflect less of the extant debate over integration than an extension of domestic politics into the EU arena.

Still, individuals' partisanship has been demonstrated to move with their support for integration. Moreover, Ray (2003b) has demonstrated that if individuals are strong partisans they are more likely influenced by party stances about the EU, especially if there is little controversy over a party's policy stance about integration (see also Hooghe and Marks 2005). Given these additional facets of this relationship, it is important to note the steady decrease in intra-party consensus on European integration (as per party manifestos, see Hooghe and Marks 2006). Ray's argument mirrors the proxy argument by arguing that national parties provide cues about the EU and in terms of future integration, individuals' evaluate that contingency through the lens of potential domestic political outcomes. It also asserts the primacy of national political contests (or first order elections) over the perceived lower saliency of European elections.

Further complicating the party-constituency dynamic, the recursive nature of party positions and voter opinions is further exacerbated by the strategic responses of political parties to the opinions of likely supporters (Carrubba 2001). Evidence suggests a weak causal arrow for the effect of national parties' positions on citizens' support for the EU. Evans (2002), for example, shows that citizens' opinions of EU integration are resilient in the face of positional shifts by

their own party in Britain. Crum (2007) demonstrates that for referenda, many Europeans have displayed little support for the EU project despite their partisan affiliation with pro-EU parties. Although possibly related to the temporal nature of referenda (and narrower issues), there remains evidence of this attitudinal division among elites and mass publics in other time periods (Schmitt and Thomassen 2000). However, in another example for newer member states, Markowski and Tucker (2010) compare the levels of euroscepticism in Poland across three elections periods (1997, 2001, 2005, including the EU referendum of 2003) to find that citizens' euroscepticism supported Poland's Eurosceptic parties rather than having been driven by them (see also Raunio 2007: for similar findings in the Nordic EU). Although, Gabel and Scheve (2007) provide a sophisticated statistical analysis of elite cues to suggest that mass publics do respond in accordance to elite positions (and messages) are more influential than early work has demonstrated even for the politically savvy citizen.

In conjunction with long-standing domestic constraints, discernable pro- and anti-EU parties have largely been understood along two dimensions. The first taps the normative underpinnings of the project placing social democracy at one end and market liberalism at the other. The second dimension, as we have seen some evidence of above, is the contest between the sovereignty of the nation-state in the face of the continuing integration or supranationalism (Hooghe and Marks 1999). While some have linked EU support with satisfaction with incumbent government (Franklin, van der Eijk, and Marsh 1995), more recent contributions have demonstrated further that support for incumbent parties is linked to pro-EU stances while support for opposition parties is anti-EU. Yet, while Ray (2003a) concedes this point, he argues that this takes place under the contingency of the timing of national and EU elections (and EU policy referenda) such that, "...the effect of support for an incumbent party may be contingent on that particular political contest, and disappear at other times" (Ray 2003a: 260).

At the broadest level, right leaning parties are often more supportive of EU as the left views further integration as a manifestation of capitalist forces. And while it would seem naturally to conclude that citizens who support a national party that is pro-EU are often pro-EU, individuals' partisanship demonstrates little correlation between support for integration and left/right party affiliations although parties line up coherently along this continuum (Aspinwall 2002). Again, Taggart (1998) as well cited domestic contextual factors for the lack of Euroscepticism in national parties such that Euroscepticism is almost completely absent from party platforms in Western Europe and that anti-integration positions are merely the product of minor parties' efforts to appear as radical outsiders.²³

This discussion of parties is relevant to our understanding of public perception of the EU as the lack of parties' electoral competition across an explicitly defined EU dimension does little to encourage their constituents to engage in the same debate, fostering a continued national debate rather than a pan-European one. A direct result of the fragmented European public is weak influence of individuals' ideology as an explanatory variable, especially if citizens cannot correctly discern their parties' EU positions. In doing so, this further limits the applicability of citizens' left/right ideology as a useful heuristic in understanding the EU policy positions, more broadly. Taken together, these examinations of national parties suggest that the lack of a discourse by parties over the issue of the EU fails to provide meaningful positions on the EU debate and thereby limits their role as effective intermediaries.

As a consequence, van der Brug and van der Eijk (1999) address the disparity in mass publics' and elites' perception of the EU political world in order to assess the effectiveness of elections as an effective means of communication of mass publics' political preferences. They find that voters "...have adequate perceptions of the choices offered to them..." (1999: 129) and they, "...perceive parties quite accurately in terms of left-right ideology..." (1999: 154); however, they

²³ Although, Jolly (1991) provides evidence that regionalist European political parties are pro-EU.

conclude that European voters are not able to clearly discern national parties' EU policy positions (van der Brug and van der Eijk 1999: 153). This undermines individuals' use of ideology as a meaningful heuristic to guide individuals' assessment of the spectrum of EU policy positions and more importantly, parties' alignment with those positions (Fuchs and Klingemann 1990) ultimately contributing to a feeling of disassociative representation.

3.3 Mass media

There is evidence that mass media influence citizens' comprehension of and eventual orientation to the EU, as well as their broad support for – and political engagement in – EU affairs. One measure of mass media's ability to exert influence is predicated on the amount of EU policies, actors, and topics that they choose to include, thereby regulating the amount of exposure citizens are able to have. De Vreese *et al.* (2006) have demonstrated that the EP elections are more visible in the ten newer member states than in the pre-2004 expansion 15 members. For the former, broadcast and print news coverage presented mixed messages while for the later, the messages were generally negative toward the EU. They correctly assert that mass media are effective intermediaries of European politics due to the second-order nature of the electoral process and the distance from these citizens' immediate experiences. Banducci and Semetko (2004) demonstrate that individuals are more likely to participate in EP elections in an environment of increased campaign visibility. However, their results may be a function of the increased profile of pro-EU actors and issues cultivating broad EU support (de Vreese 2002) or a temporal effect of a general heightened electoral season. Nonetheless, de Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) demonstrate a broader effect such that in periods of increased EU coverage, individuals made gains in knowledge about the EU.

For Britain, several studies have examined the effects of media as a mediator of popular EU support. Most studies do not accord much explanatory power to media as their effects on popular attitudes are often significant but small (Norris *et al.* 1999; Newton and Brynin 2001). For example, Curtice (1999) finds little power behind newspaper consumption and individuals' EU monetary policy attitudes. Relying on cross-national aggregate data, Norris (2000) has argued that when an attentive public receives extensive media coverage of an issue that has consistent directional bias, media have a discernable negative effect at the aggregate level; yet, this linkage is inconsistent and substantively somewhat weak. Like Dalton and Duval (1986) who earlier linked the tone of British press and support for integration at the aggregate level, Norris cites contemporaneous negative press coverage and attitudes regarding the Euro and the EU in general, although in using aggregate data, she is unable to clearly assign causality. Newer work finds congruence with this demonstrating, for example, the identity dimension of EU support can be influenced by positive or negative media environments. Azrout *et al.* (2012) show that viewers with strong anti-immigrant attitudes are more clearly affected by a negative information environment (although not from individual exposure).

Other authors have similarly pursued more specific policy implications of EU integration, particularly the Euro. Semetko, de Vreese, and Peter (2000) qualitatively compare the cases of Britain and Germany in the pre-Euro period of 1998–99 and demonstrate distinctly national news 'spins'. This conflict frame or "economic consequences frame" (Semetko, de Vreese, and Peter 2000: 135) is congruent with other studies (for examples in the Dutch case, see Semetko and Valkenburg 2000) yet is limited to the economic dimension of EU integration. However, another study supports the broad contribution of mass media as Carey and Burton (2004) demonstrate independent – albeit weak – effects of parties and media, but a more powerful effect in conjunction – and on message – with one another.²⁴

²⁴ Flickinger (1994) in contrast shows strong mobilizing effects of parties while controlling for media effects in Britain.

Taken on the whole, while systematic attempts to employ individual-level media effects theories (agenda-setting, priming, and framing) has begun to make headway in small N studies, the examination of mass media and the support for the EU has progressed in a piecemeal fashion, relying on case studies and a fluid set of dependent variables. More importantly, this research and others (Meyer 1999; Anderson and McLeod 2004) has underscored the role of mass media as a contributor to flagging EU legitimacy via a communication deficit. This communication deficit is a function of failed attempts at connecting EU constituents to the integration project and conveying its relevance. This, coupled with what they demonstrate are often negative or ambiguous messages (see also Norris 2000), contributes to the inability to overcome the specific problem of EU legitimacy and even the larger issue of a shared public domain (Schlesinger 1999). Further, national and European media apparatuses, including both political and media actors alike, are creating a media environment in which regional, national, and trans-national media are competing and cooperating unevenly. This arrangement may alter our understanding of the traditional national-level media organization as EU broadcasting policy increasingly seeks to remove national barriers to transmission and ownership and establish norms for content. Finally, in the absence of a trans-national or EU 'press corps' (including the lack of a definitive EU spokesperson or unified voice), these changes are likely to continue to undermine the ability of national media to exert a clear and consistent role.

Although not limited to the study of mass communication in the EU, political communication scholars have cited the theoretical and conceptual difficulties in large N cross-national research. Deficiencies in conceptual comparability across audience members, technologies, presentation, and context in addition to the methodological difficulty in determining a 'true' media effect have discouraged large scale media studies concerning the EU (see Hallin and Mancini 2004). However, it would behoove scholars to begin to generate *prima facie* evidence as to the existence of a media-EU-constituent linkage (de Vreese *et al.* 2006).

4 Central and Eastern Europe

For the member states in the pre-2004 EU, the EU question was first centered on whether and why they should join the European Union after the demise of communist regimes. For ascension and applicant states, the EU question was instead popular support for potential membership. In pre-ascension Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), researchers approached support for EU membership through the lens that these citizens would view the EU as a guarantor of reforms (Cichowski 2000; Kucia 1999; Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky 2002).²⁵

Additionally, Jones and van der Bijl (2004) have demonstrated a positive correlation between aggregate popular support and candidate countries' share of total exports of the member states.²⁶ Elgün and Tillman (2007) find, in addition to the traditional explanatory variables, that individuals' exposure to the consequence of European integration, particularly the distributive results of integration itself, influence their attitudes toward membership. Other macro-dimensions, such as economic and political performance, also seem to have had an impact (Christin 2005).

However, at the individual-level and in contrast to the utilitarian and value models of the West, in accession states (pre-2004), attitudes toward democracy, capitalism and individuals' political partisanship are the strongest in predicting support for EU membership (Cichowski 2000). While some analyses of EU support in CEE have focused on economic winners and losers (Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky 2002), these instrumentalist views have found little support in this region in other studies before they became members of the EU (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2006a). To some, support for integration was more a question about satisfaction with political and economic transition that has occurred (Tverdova and Anderson 2004). In this line of reasoning, Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2004) argue that CEE's more likely to make decisions based on underlying economic or political values than outright material payoff (see also Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2006b). It is, they argue, individuals' attitudes toward domestic economic and political reforms that are better predictors of citizens' attitudes about the EU.

The application of the instrumentalist approach in CEE is also weakened by the unstable and often insubstantial demographic effects on support (Tucker, Pacek, and Berinsky 2002; Cichowski 2000; Ehin 2001; Tverdova and Anderson 2004), inconsistencies which undermine the utilitarian approach of resource-defined groups (whether human or economic) 'calculating' their potential gains and losses from integration. Nearly all published academic have focused on the time when these new democracies had not yet joined the EU; a fact which clearly influences the basis of popular attitudes about the EU. For example, after the accession to the EU, publics in CEE may no longer be deeply concerned about maintaining democratic and economic reforms – the EU will guarantee those. Instead, publics in new democracies may now focus on the more mundane bread-and-butter issues, such as generating economic affluence. As a consequence, citizens may increasingly rely on economic perceptions when judging the EU.

However, for new members such as Bulgaria and Romania, Gherghina (2000) finds stronger support for economic (prospective economic evaluations) explanations than attitudinal congruency with the EU. This finding has some parallel to 'older' new member states such as Poland, in which both sociotropic and egocentric economic evaluations (particularly assessments of individual benefits from integration) play the central explanatory role (Jackson *et al.* (1994); see also Guerra 2013). However, in a larger study, Loveless (2010) investigates these pre-accession understandings of support for EU membership in CEE as a model for support of EU membership in post-accession CEE. While he finds a waning effect of utilitarianism but a steady influence of economic and political values, he identifies an increasingly specificity in the economic bases of EU

²⁵ There are several country and sub-regional studies. Examples include: Poland: Bielasiak 2002; the Baltics: Ehin 2001; Slovenia: Adam, Hafner-Fink, and Uhan 2002.

²⁶ Their use of 13 candidate countries (including Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey) also demonstrated negative correlation between the relative importance of agriculture in domestic employment and aggregate support.

support, namely a strong negative effect of the increasing perception of social inequalities. This signals some transitional discomfort as while ideological support for the EU continues, there are increasing signs that citizens may desire it to work differently within the free market.

Less work has been done on group-level process in this region including media, parties and elites. Taggart and Szczerbiak (2004) have found a rather equitable distribution of 'Euroscepticism' in CEE regardless of party family or left/right ideology, although some parties – primarily on the right – employed this rhetoric to strengthen their 'outsider' or 'non-incumbent' status. In turn, Marks *et al.* (2006) and Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2007) show that the domestic cleavages of post-communist societies affect the position taken by political parties on European integration. However, on the horizon, such as South-East European candidacy, Lecheler and de Vreese (1999) examine the support for EU candidacy by manipulating news frames about Serbian EU candidacy and support for EU policy. Like the rest of Europe, news can influence support although this overall effect is mitigated by individual knowledge.

5 Conclusion

This Living Review has attempted to provide a thorough overview of the state of the research on public perceptions of the EU as a system of governance. The intent is to provide a resource to researchers unfamiliar or new to the field by presenting the theoretical development over the past decades, the ‘knowns’, and suggesting a few avenues for future research.

Our understanding of the mass publics’ perception of the EU has been driven by the considerations by which the EU itself has progressed. From the origin to the relative economic stability of the early 1990s (even as late as the EFTA Enlargement), popular orientations to European integration were largely understood as a function of the stratified cleavages that had served the origin of mass parties and the modern political state in Western Europe, namely instrumental self-interest (explicitly economic self-interest) and a constellation of individuals’ social location attributes. On the heels of policy expansions, collective security and identity issues, and debate over the future of national sovereignty that emerged from the Maastricht summit,²⁷ mass publics’ orientations to the project became a more significant and salient element in discussion of the EU’s potentialities. Scholars’ understanding of the sources of these orientations shifted as well and increasingly approached this question in terms of the necessity of popular support. The resulting research has suggested that perhaps this has been a function of citizens becoming more sophisticated in their demands of the EU as it had come to increasingly impinge upon their daily lives. Therefore, scholars moved from economic determination to the heuristics of identity and institutions (both evaluative and proximate), and the interlocutors of parties, media, and elites, all with an appeal to normative congruence.

An alternative to the continued approach of national-level models of normative and institutional support is to consider the EU as *sui generis* among supranational organizations. Schmitt and Thomassen (1999) cite the potentiality for expanding research on the EU as a new field in comparative politics, namely, supranational politics. They argue that despite the EP’s nominal role, political ability and effective political representation need to take place at the EU level in order to satisfy the demands of the collective European project (ibid.: 256). This avenue of research would be an outgrowth of comparative politics, rather than international relations, and the theories that inform them including political behavior and public opinion (see Marks and Wilson 2000). In these we find a potential for citizens of the EU to begin thinking in terms of a shared sense of ownership in the overall result and therefore the seeds of *European* thinking. Not only does this demand a realignment of political identity for Europeans, but also that political representation – and therefore legitimacy – is hamstrung by the inability of both EU level elites and parties to make a meaningful linkage to their constituents, however poorly formed and self-aware.

Additionally, Mair and Thomassen (2010) take on the core underpinnings of the democratic deficit, namely the lack of party government at the EU level and the inability of these parties to effectively represent European citizens. They argue that EU-level party representation, while indirect, is accomplished sufficiently through European-wide elections and national political parties. However, more broadly, they turn the thrust of the party government argument on itself to claim that it is precisely the inappropriateness of conventional party government models to EU party performance that obscures its achievements. In other words, they argue that the democratic deficit argument may be reliant on sustaining this, arguably unnecessary, comparison between national and EU party governance.

Although a historically guided assessment of cross-national support for the EU is a tremendous task, the spiraling evolution of the EU warrants deeper examination. For simplification’s sake, cross-national, individual-level analyses make several assumptions about the populations of member states. Among a multitude of nation-specific variations is the agricultural subsidies program (CAP) for French farmers (in contrast to Italians or Germans), which tends to skew national level discussions and ultimately party positions. A more generalized cross-national difference – but still

²⁷ This period, like the present one, was also filled with concerns of the question of expansion.

sub-regional in terms of the EU – is the southern European on-going struggles with corruption, poor performance of the state, low responsiveness of political parties, and high structural unemployment. Other members, with low corruption, an efficient democracy, and highly developed welfare states, are likely to provide citizens with a distinctly different political, social, and economic environment from which to base their orientation to matters of further integration and support for the EU. Finally, history casts its long shadow on sub-national variations in support as well. Southern Italy has been the recipient of begrudging support via the economic performance of northern Italy and is likely to produce differences in support that find comparable sub-national contests among other member states. In other words, non-national – including sub-EU regional and sub-national – disparities exist and can be evaluated. One example, Mahler, Taylor, and Wozniak (2000) present initial evidence at the regional level of the competing origins of support between the utilitarian and broader affective orientations to EU support. Other meso-level processes are gaining tentative relevance in understanding the loss of support over time (Fitzgibbon 2013). Specifically, in case studies of Ireland, the United Kingdom and Denmark, EU-related referendums seem to mobilize grass-roots civic engagement leading to “civil-society-based Euroscepticism” (ibid.). In addition, as we have seen above, there is growing evidence that national-level variation in the quality of democratic institutions plays a significant role in determining support for the EU. It is possible that forces that motivate popular EU support may be reconfigured around alternative institutions of sub- or supranational character. Aside from obvious instruments of integration and national political institutions, what of cross-national, non-governmental organizations (e.g., professional organizations and trade unions) transcending national concerns to confront European issues? Included in this potential avenue of analysis is the research question of issue politics. Following the fourth expansion, expansion has come to represent less economic security and more physical and/or cultural security. With the inclusion of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, the EU has reached what might most easily be described as its ‘geographical limit’. What is the most useful conceptualization of Europe? A geographical one? An institutional one? A social, economic, or political model?

This is where we find ourselves today. The critical center of this research lies in what might be best described as a process of socialization of Europeans toward a new political norm of supranational governance. Again, the project of the European Union represents a pioneering model of supranational institutional possibilities and as discussed above, its future will be influenced by popular sanction. One can think of the preceding decades as a period of the conceptualization of an integrated Europe and the current period as the realization of the European project.

Incumbent upon this recent realization are two mandatory debates. First, the study of public perception of the EU as a system of governance will increasingly confront the possibility of a genuine European identity. In order to achieve increased levels of legitimacy and to secure a popular mandate through which it can continue, the future of integration will demand a public discussion of the nature of membership and identity. Europe has reached what might be identified as its historically familiar shape; yet, from this point, the bases for exclusion and inclusion have yet to be determined. This looming identity crisis is the cradle of the debates over issues of security, the notion of a European public sphere, and ultimately the emergence of a European *demos*.

The second issue is the related but more tangible debate over the future of the nation-state. Europeans must consider not only the possibilities of expansion but the usurpation of the nation-state by pan-European institutional governance. The attenuation of the relative strength of each member states’ governing structure and the institutional supplication to an expanding EU will force citizens to address the role of the nation-state in the emerging supranational organization.

Clearly, these two debates are inherently linked. As identity is manifest in-group association, the citizens of Europe will be deciding at what level that group will be, whether it is association by cultural, institutional, philosophical, political, or economic congruence. In reaching a definition, the answer will impact the future of the nation-state and ultimately the trajectory of the EU.

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