

Paper Forthcoming in the *Journal of Political Marketing*.

**VARIABLE OPINIONS:  
THE PREDICTABILITY OF SUPPORT FOR UNIFICATION IN EUROPEAN MASS  
PUBLICS**

**Marco R. Steenbergen**

Department of Political Science

University of Zurich  
[steenbergen@ipz.uzh.ch](mailto:steenbergen@ipz.uzh.ch)

**Catherine E. de Vries<sup>1</sup>**

Department of Political Science &  
International Relations  
University of Geneva  
[catherine.devries@unige.ch](mailto:catherine.devries@unige.ch)

**Abstract**

This paper explores the extent to which European citizens are now Euro-ambivalent. Over the past decade, authors have argued that public opinion toward European integration has moved from a permissive consensus to a constraining dissensus. This suggests a clear-cut swing from mostly favorable to mostly unfavorable attitudes toward European integration. We argue in this paper that public opinion toward European integration is not so clear-cut pro or anti. Rather, it is ambivalent. We explore this ambivalence, its antecedents, and its implications for voting behavior in European Parliament elections using the 2009 European Election Survey.

**Key Words:** Ambivalence, European Integration, EU Support; Response Variability.

---

<sup>1</sup> Catherine E. de Vries would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Veni grant scheme of the Netherlands Organization of Scientific Research (NWO Veni 451-08-001) and is grateful to the Mannheim Centre for Social Science Research (MZES) for granting her a research stay during the Fall semester of 2010.

## **Introduction**

Over the past decades the European Union (EU) moved away from a largely elite-led diplomatic project to a system of multi-level governance in which member states share policy making with supranational institutions, such as the European Commission and European Parliament (EP). This shift in the power balance between national governments and supranational institutions has not gone unnoticed in the domestic political arenas of member states. At present, we are witnessing increased public contention over European matters in referenda, party competition and media reporting (de Vreese, 2003; de Vries, 2007, de Vries and Edwards, 2009; Hobolt, 2009; Hooghe, et al., 2002; Kriesi, et al., 2006, 2008; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Tillman, 2004; van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004). EU scholars consequently argue that the time of permissive consensus in which the general public by and large accepted the actions of national elites at the European level is over. Today, European and national political elites are increasingly constrained by popular dissent, where citizens actively monitor the course of integration and voice their fears and objections when deemed necessary (Hooghe and Marks, 2009).

An open question, however, is how predictable public opinion toward European unification is. Past studies of public support for European integration have focused exclusively on central tendency.<sup>2</sup> The variability of expressed support has not been examined. Yet, variation in opinion contains important information about how certain the public is in its stance on European unification. This in turn can help in understanding the link between support for European unification and political behavior, e.g., voting in EP elections. Specifically, the more certain people are in their unification stance, the more likely it is that this stance influences voting behavior.

In this paper, we focus on the predictability of public support for European unification. Following an approach similar to that used by Alvarez and Brehm (1995, 1998, 2002) for American public opinion, we ask (1) to what extent European mass publics possess predictable views on European unification and (2)

---

<sup>2</sup> On public Euroskepticism, see for example Eichenberg and Dalton (2007).

whether the degree of predictability can be explained by attributes of the individual and the national political environment. Specifically, we ask to what extent information, in the broadest sense of the term, influences variation in opinion. Based on this analysis, we examine cross-national differences in the expected predictability of public support for European unification.

The remainder of the study is structured as follows. In the next section, we briefly introduce the concept of response variability employed in this study. Subsequently, we present our theoretical expectations regarding the factors both at the individual level and contextual level that influence the degree of response variability on opinions towards European unification. After outlining the data, method and operationalizations used in this study, we present the empirical results. We conclude by drawing several general lessons from our analysis and elaborate the possible implications of response variability for voting behavior in the 2009 EP Election.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### The Concept of Response Variability

The section reviews defines the concept of response variability used in this study and provides an overview of ongoing work on this topic. For almost a century now, sample surveys have been the empirical backbone of public opinion research. Posing questions to a randomly selected subset of citizens is the essential tool that allows researchers a glimpse of the collective preferences of the mass public. But what exactly drives the survey response? For years, the answer to this question has been that survey responses are driven by a fixed, albeit unobservable, attitude plus random measurement error that is due to the imprecision of survey items (e.g., Achen, 1975). The key assumption here is that the attitude is a fixed point on a continuum. Thus, any and all response variation is a case of measurement error.

Recently, however, many public opinion scholars have moved away from the notion that attitudes are fixed points. At least three strands of theory lead one to conceptualize attitudes as inherently variable qualities. First, the evaluative space model of Cacioppo et al. (1997) calls attention to the possibility that

individuals are ambivalent, i.e., simultaneously like and dislike an attitude object. In this theory, the complete attitude is not defined as a single point but as a pair of points that characterize the intensity of liking and disliking, respectively. This introduces an element of variability into the attitude.

Second, Feldman and Zaller have conceptualized attitudes as distributions of considerations (Feldman, 1995; Zaller and Feldman, 1992). To the extent that considerations vary in their evaluative implications, this automatically introduces variability into the attitude concept. In the extreme case, the attitude may be characterized by considerations with opposing evaluative implications, in which case the attitude is again characterized by ambivalence. Feldman and Zaller explicitly link their characterization of attitudes to the survey response by introducing the idea of sampling. When an individual answers a survey question, they argue, that person will engage in “top-of-the-head” responding. This means that he or she samples at best a few considerations. Since the individual may draw different samples at different times, the expressed opinion will not always come out identical. Thus, response variation is a direct consequence of the nature of attitudes.

Third, in a similar vein, Alvarez and Brehm (2002) argue that citizens possess multiple predispositions, which may either be conflicting (ambivalence) or reconciled (equivocation). In the case of ambivalence, response variability should be greater, whereas it should be smaller in the case of equivocation. In addition, Alvarez and Brehm see a key role for information. A lack of attitudinally relevant information induces uncertainty, which in turn increases response variation (see also Alvarez and Brehm, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2002).

The three theoretical approaches outlined here share as a common element that response variation does not merely reflect measurement error but, importantly, also reflects qualities of the underlying attitudes themselves. We adopt this perspective here as well. Indeed, it is precisely because of its attitudinal sources that response variability is of theoretical interest instead of a phenomenon that is merely of methodological interest.

In the present context, response variability is of interest for understanding support for European unification. While past studies have often implicitly assumed

that public opinion reflects fixed attitudes, we believe it to be useful to think of these attitudes as inherently variable, reflecting differential degrees of certainty and ambivalence. European integration remains one of the most complex political issues that European mass publics face. Much of the day-to-day debate involves highly technical questions that citizens may find difficult to grasp. This should generate considerable uncertainty among citizens. Moreover, European unification is multi-faceted and presents numerous policy angles. It is no surprise, then, that citizens may also be deeply conflicted about the prospect of unification. For example, they may like the idea in the abstract but not much appreciate the actual policies that the EU pursues. Or they may like certain policies, while objecting to others. Or they may like the policies but object to the political process that yields them. In short, here are numerous reasons why European citizens would be ambivalent.

Should support for European unification prove to be highly variable, as we argue here, then it does not suffice to establish merely its central tendency. One should also establish its variance, across individuals and EU member states. A failure to do so would lull one into the false believe that Europeans hold clear-cut opinions, which either favor or oppose unification. It would also make one overconfident in one's predictions, for instance, about the connection between support for unification and political behavior, such as party choice. After all, if a person does not possess a clear-cut position on unification, it will be more difficult to predict his or her behavior.

Note that none of this implies that public opinion toward European unification reflects mostly "non-attitudes" (cf. Converse, 1964). We are not saying that European citizens do not have real opinions about European unification. Rather, we are saying that their attitudes may be more complex than has hitherto been assumed in much of the literature. And we are saying that public opinion scholars could benefit from studying this complexity.

#### Sources of Variability: Cue Availability and Cue Competition

To understand the sources of response variability, we conceptualize public opinion toward European integration as a cueing process. European unification is a

sufficiently complex topic that citizens have a need to find shortcuts in the form of attitudinal cues. Some of these cues take the form of personal predispositions, while others are offered by the political environment. The clearer the cues are, the better able will the person be to form a coherent attitude and the less variable his or her expressed opinions will be. Thus, the availability of cues as well as the consistency between cues play a central role in predicting response variation.

We should elaborate on this last point, as it is the crux of our theory of response variation. We believe opinions to be most variable when (1) there is not enough information to form a coherent attitude or (2) there is too much contradictory information. Thus, a lack of cues will make survey responses less predictable. The answer, however, is not necessarily an increase in cues. After all, if the increase in the volume of cues is associated with an increase in cue competition, then it may become difficult again for citizens to form a clear-cut attitude toward European unification.

Keeping this distinction between *cue availability* and *cue competition* in mind, what factors should play a role in shaping response variation? We concentrate here on six factors, to wit political knowledge, media emphasis, lack of clarity in party cues, perceived party differences, duration of EU membership, and political identity. Of these factors, media emphasis, lack of clarity in party cues, and duration of EU membership are situated at the national level; the remaining factors reflect individual differences.

The first factor to consider is political knowledge, which is taken here to mean domain-specific knowledge (McGraw and Pinney, 1990). The more a person knows about the EU, the more cues he or she possesses to form a well-defined (crystallized) attitude. It is not only cue availability that matters but also cue integration. It is likely that knowledgeable citizens are in a better position to integrate various cues, even competing ones, which should then reduce response variability.<sup>3</sup> Thus, our first hypothesis is:

---

<sup>3</sup> On the link between sophistication and integration see, for example, Rosenberg (1988).

H1: Political knowledge correlates negatively with response variation in expressed opinions toward European unification.

A second factor is media coverage. This factor should explain cross-national differences in response variation. In principle, the more emphasis the media place on European unification, the greater cue availability should be. The sheer availability of information should allow citizens to form more clear-cut attitudes. This being said, greater media emphasis also implies greater cue competition. In the latter case, response variation may actually increase.<sup>4</sup> Due to the fact that we are witnessing a steady increase in media reporting on EU issues and that the societal and political debate over the scope and depth European integration has intensified recently (see for example Hobolt, 2009; De Vries and Edwards, 2009; Schuck, et al. 2011), we expect media coverage to increase response variation:

H2: Media coverage correlates positively with response variation in expressed opinions toward European unification.

The third factor we consider is the obscurity of party positions. There is a voluminous literature on the role of cue-taking in public opinion toward European integration, much of which focuses on party cues (Feld and Wilgden, 1976; Franklin et al., 1994; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen et al., 2007). This literature argues that European mass publics look to parties for cues that can inform their own positions on European unification. The ability to do so, however, depends on the clarity of party positions. If political parties do not take a clear-cut stance, or the mass public perceives them as such, then party cues are highly unreliable (cf. Ray, 2003; Steenbergen et al., 2007). In the extreme case, citizens may not know if a party favors or opposes European unification. This lack of reliability should then result in increase response variability. Hence,

---

<sup>4</sup> Of importance may also be the nature of the coverage, especially during an election. If the coverage does not focus on the issues but rather on the horse-race, then the availability of attitudinally relevant cues may actually be reduced, thus hampering individuals to form coherent attitudes (cf. Cappella and Jamieson, 1997). Unfortunately, we lack the data to explore this possibility.

H3: Obscurity of party positions correlates positively with response variation in expressed opinions toward European unification.

Even when every party is perceived to take a clear-cut stance, cue-taking from parties may not aid in the construction of coherent attitudes toward European unification. The perceived difference between parties also is a factor (cf. de Vries, 2007, 2009; Ray, 2003). The relationship between perceived party differences and response variation, however, is expected to be curvilinear. A lack of perceived party differences reduces the information that is available to citizens. If all parties are perceived to agree on European unification, then the citizen has access to only one set of arguments, either those that favor unification or those that oppose it. This limited informational basis may render it difficult to form a coherent attitude.<sup>5</sup> But extreme perceived differences between parties may also not help for, in this case, cue competition becomes a problem. Thus, our expectation concerning perceived party differences is as follows:

H4: Perceived party differences correlate in a curvilinear fashion with response variation in expressed opinions toward European unification. Specifically, response variation should be greatest when the perceived party differences are small or when they are large.

The fifth factor we consider is the lapsed time since a country joined the EU. Again, our expectation is that this factor influences response variability in a curvilinear manner. The mass publics of member states that joined only recently have had little time to accumulate experiences with the practical workings of the EU (i.e. low cue availability). This is not the case for mass publics in countries that have been members longer. However, if a country has been a member for a long time, then the accumulated experience with European unification may result in both positive and negative considerations (i.e. high cue competition). Mass publics

---

<sup>5</sup> In addition, lack of perceived party differences means that the issue cannot form a basis for deciding between parties in an election. This may be a disincentive for citizens when it comes to collecting more information about the issue.

in these countries will have had plenty of time to contemplate what they like about unification but also what they dislike. Thus, our prediction is as follows:

H5: The duration of EU membership correlates in a curvilinear fashion with response variation in expressed opinions toward European unification. Specifically, mass publics in countries that have recently joined the EU should display larger response variation. The same should be true for mass publics in countries that have been EU members for a long time.

The final factor that we consider concerns predispositions. Specifically, we look at the role of social identities. European citizens can identify with multiple political/geographic units. They can identify with their own country, but they can also identify with Europe (e.g., Cinnirella, 1997). The question is what happens when they identify with both.

On one hand, this can be construed as a classical example of ambivalence. Dual identities provide conflicting cues, in as far as European unification is viewed as a threat to one's nation (Cinnirella, 1997). In this case, one's national identity should cause one to oppose European unification, whereas one's European identity should cause one to favor it. The net result should be increased response variation.

It is not a given, however, that the sheer possession of dual identities implies conflict. European unification is not always perceived as a threat to one's nation (Cinnirella, 1997). Moreover, recent work suggests that individuals have several strategies that allow them to negotiate multiple identities (see for example Brewer, 2001). Some of these even result in a synthesis of identities so that all conflict is avoided. Against this backdrop, we expect that holding dual identities likely reduces response variation.

H6: Simultaneous identification with one's nation and with Europe decreases response variation in expressed opinions toward European unification.

## Data, Methods and Operationalizations

### Data

The data for this study are derived from the European Parliament Election Survey (EES) 2009, Advance Release (EES 2009a; van Egmond et al., 2010). The survey was conducted among representative samples of the electorates in all 27 EU member states, and focussed on electoral behaviour and political attitudes. In each country, a representative sample of around 1,000 individuals was drawn. The contextual data on media attention regarding EU issues in the 2009 EP campaign is derived from the EES 2009 Media Study, Advance Release, (EES 2009b; Schuck et al., 2010). The data cover all 27 EU member states, to wit: Austria (AT), Belgium (BE), Bulgaria (BG), Cyprus (CY), the Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Greece (GR), Hungary (HU), Ireland (IE), Italy (IT), Latvia (LV), Lithuania (LT), Luxembourg (LU), Malta (MT), the Netherlands (NL), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Slovakia (SK), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), and the United Kingdom (UK).

### Model

We estimate Harvey's (1976) heteroskedastic regression model. This model informed the model of response variation discussed by Alvarez and Brehm (1995, 1998, 2002). Let  $y_i$  denote individual  $i$ 's response on a question concerning support for European unification. Further, let  $\mathbf{x}$  be vector of covariates that drive the individual's average response tendency on the question. Furthermore, let  $\epsilon_i$  denote deviations from the average response. Finally, let  $\mathbf{z}_i$  denote a vector of covariates that drive the size of the deviations. Then, the heteroskedastic regression model may be formulated in the following manner:

$$\begin{aligned}y_i &= \mathbf{x}_i' \boldsymbol{\beta} + \epsilon_i \\ \epsilon_i &\sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_i^2) \\ \sigma_i^2 &= \exp(\mathbf{z}_i' \boldsymbol{\gamma})\end{aligned}$$

Here  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$  are vectors of regression coefficients. Note that  $\gamma$  includes a constant. If all other elements of this vector are simultaneously zero, then the variance model reduces to  $\exp(\gamma_{0i})$  and we obtain the classical linear regression model with homoskedastic errors.

In our analysis, we include the following elements in  $\mathbf{x}_i$ : occupation, education, gender, national identity, and European identity. We also include country effects to allow for cross-national differences in support for European unification. The vector  $\mathbf{z}_i$  includes political knowledge, media coverage (television and newspapers), obscurity of party positions, perceived difference of party positions (linear and squared), duration of EU membership (linear and squared), and dual identity.

### Operationalizations

The dependent variable is support for European unification and is measured on an 11-point scale that runs from 0 (“unification has already gone too far”) to 10 (“unification should be pushed further”).<sup>6</sup> Thus, higher values imply greater support.

In line with the utilitarian model of EU support, we include variables tapping into citizens’ occupational and education status into the mean model (see Gabel, 1998). The reasoning here is that those who can most easily benefit from the European unification process, are most likely to favor it. In addition, we introduce variables tapping into citizens’ feelings of national versus European identity which are also seen as key determinants of public support for European integration (Carey, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; McLaren, 2002). In the mean model, we thus included a series of occupational dummy variables: professionals, higher administrative staff, clerical staff, sales staff, service personnel, skilled worker, semi-skilled worker, unskilled worker, farm personnel, farm owner, and

---

<sup>6</sup> We treat this scale here as interval. We also estimated a heteroskedastic ordered logit model, which treats the scale as ordinal. Since the results produced substantively similar conclusions, we decided to present the linear regression results, which are easier to interpret.

student; not having worked was treated as the baseline category. For education, we included the ISCED education level, which is cross-nationally comparable. Higher values imply more education. Gender is coded as a dummy that takes on the value 1 for women. Identity was captured through two dummy variables. National identity takes on the value 1 if a person identifies with his/her country. European identity takes on the value 1 if a person identifies with Europe. Note that the two dummies are not mutually exclusive: a person can score 1 on both dummies if he/she possesses a dual identity. The mean model also includes 26 country dummies, with Belgium operating as the baseline category.

The variance model includes a composite scale consisting of seven knowledge questions. In the 2009 EES, survey respondents were asked to answer seven true-false questions about the EU. A correct response was coded 1, whereas a false response or don't know was coded 0. The seven items load on a single factor. Consequently, we added them into a single (unweighted) index.<sup>7</sup>

Media attention is operationalized by the emphasis given in the print and TV media to EU related topics in the EP election campaign. In terms of print media all news stories containing information about the EU were coded in the Political/News, Editorial and Business sections. In order to arrive at the degree of attention to EU versus other news, all other news stories on the front page and a randomly selected second page were coded. A measure of newspaper attention to EU related issues is obtained by dividing the number of EU news stories by all news stories in the 2009 EP campaign in the 27 member states. The attention to EU issues in TV news was constructed by the coding of the content of news items in the most popular news broadcasts on both the public and private TV channels within each country (for more details see Schuck, et al., 2010; 2011).<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> The seven questions are as follows: (1) Switzerland is a member of the EU; (2) the EU has 25 member states; (3) every EU member elects the same number of representatives; (4) every 6 months a different member state takes over the presidency; (5) one must be 25 or older to stand in one's country general election; (6) correct identification of the minister of education; and (7) correct identification of the number of legislators in the national assembly.

<sup>8</sup> We constructed a combined EU media attention variable by adding the newspaper and TV attention variables, which seemed justified in view of the strong correlation between them ( $r=.7$ ;  $p <.001$  two-tailed).

The obscurity of party positions is based on respondent placements of parties on the same response scale that serves as the dependent variable. For each party we computed the standard deviation in placements. For each country, we then averaged the standard deviations over all parties. The greater the standard deviation is, the less consensus there is about party positions, and the less clear party cues are.<sup>9</sup>

Perceived party differences are also based on the respondent placements of parties. For each respondent, we computed the difference in the positions between the least and most supportive parties. This difference runs from 0 (all parties are perceived to be equally supportive) to 10 (the parties cover the entire spectrum of support for unification). We also squared this measure to capture the hypothesized curvilinear effect.

The duration of EU membership was measured in the decades passed between formal accession and 2009, the survey year. A squared term is included to capture the hypothesized curvilinear effect. Finally, dual identities are captured through the interaction between the national and European identity dummies.

## **Empirical Results**

### Mean Model

Our emphasis in this paper is on the variability of opinions toward European unification. Before exploring this topic, however, we should spend a brief moment discussing the results from the mean model. Here, several individual and cross-national differences manifest themselves, as can be seen in Table 1.

At the individual level, socioeconomic factors as well as identity play a central role. More highly educated people are more supportive of European unification than their less well-educated peers. Compared to people who have never worked (the baseline), farmers, clerical and sales staff, service personnel,

---

<sup>9</sup> Note that we performed the same analysis weighting these standard deviations by vote share. The argument here would be that obscurity of party cues for major parties in the system should matter more. The empirical results are almost identical for the weighted versus unweighted measure.

and blue-collar workers (skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled) are significantly less supportive of unification.<sup>10</sup> Individuals who identify with the nation are significantly less supportive of unification than those who do not. Identification with Europe significantly increases support. It should be noted that the effect of European identification is much stronger than that of national identification. Hence, simultaneous identification with Europe and one's country still produces a significant net positive effect on unification ( $b = .673, p < .01$ ).

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Another individual factor that influences support for European unification is left-right self-placement. The effect here varies cross-nationally, as is shown in Figure 1. A significant negative effect of left-right is observed in Austria, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom. In these countries left-leaning citizens tend to be more supportive of European unification than right-leaning citizens. A significant positive effect of left-right is observed in Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Portugal, Slovakia, and Sweden. In these countries, right-leaning citizens tend to be more supportive of unification than their left-leaning peers. No statistically significant effect of left-right self-placement is observed in the remaining countries.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Cross-national differences also manifest themselves in the baseline level of support for European unification, i.e., the intercept. Here, we can note that the lowest estimate is obtained for Latvia. The highest estimate is obtained for Romania (see Figure 2).

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

---

<sup>10</sup> Given the large sample size, we set the cutoff for statistical significance at a p-value of .05 or less.

### Variance Model

Most important for our purposes is the variance model. Here, we observe one null effect, namely for political knowledge (see Table 1). We had hypothesized that individuals with a large store of knowledge about the EU would have better crystallized attitudes toward European unification and, consequently, would display less response variation (see hypothesis H1). The effect of political knowledge, however, is neither statistically significant nor sizable. Apparently, political knowledge does not matter for response variation.

The remaining predictors are statistically significant and reveal interesting patterns. First, consider the obscurity of party positions. From a cue-taking perspective, we had argued that such obscurity should contribute to increased response variation (see hypothesis H3). The results support this hypothesis. Obscurity has a strong positive effect, which means that response variance tends to increase when there is little consensus among citizens where parties stand on European unification.

Next, consider the time lapsed since a country joined the EU. Here we expected to find a curvilinear effect, with publics in the most recent and the oldest member states showing the greatest response variability. The data again support hypothesis H5, as is shown in Figure 3. This figure shows the logged variance as a function of time (in decades). We clearly see the variance drop and then rise again.

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Consistent with our expectations formalized in hypothesis H4, we also observe a significant curvilinear effect for perceived party differences, as is illustrated in Figure 4. A perceived lack of party differences is associated with a higher response variance. However, if perceived party differences become very large, then response variation also tends to be large. The optimal perceived party difference—i.e., the difference that minimizes response variation—is around 4.5 points. To either side of this value, response variation increases.

[FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

We now turn to two predictors where our expectations were less clear-cut. Consider first media emphasis (see hypotheses H2). We argued that increased media emphasis may likely increase response variation. This would happen if the quality of media reporting provides citizens with numerous conflicting cues or if the overall quality of reporting is low. From a slightly different perspective, though, one could expect that greater emphasis of the media on the European elections may have provided citizens with the necessary information to develop real attitudes toward European unification. This should help to reduce response variation. The evidence is in keeping with our first prediction. We observe a positive, albeit modest, effect of media emphasis on response variation. Thus, the more emphasis the media placed on the European elections, the more variable expressed opinions about European unification were.

Next consider the presence of dual identities, i.e. hypotheses H6. To the extent that such identities produce conflicting cues, one would expect response variation to increase. As we argued earlier, however, recent research suggests that dual identities need not be conflicting identities (see Brewer, 2001). Individuals can reconcile multiple identities in numerous ways and when they do, the result may well be a coherent sense of the self. This should reduce response variation. The evidence favors the second prediction. While the effect is not enormous, the possession of a dual identity correlates with a reduction in response variation rather than an increase.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Recently, scholars of public opinion regarding European integration have argued that we have witnessed a clear swing from mostly favorable to mostly unfavorable opinions toward European integration among the general public. In this study, we argue and empirically substantiate that public opinion toward European integration is not so clear-cut pro or anti. Rather, it is ambivalent. While past studies of public support for European integration have focused exclusively on

central tendency, we expand the current state-of-the-art and explore variation in opinion which contains important information about how certain the public is in its stance on European unification. In doing so, we also expand on the large body of work from the United States context which highlights the importance of response variability when studying citizens' political attitudes (see for example Cacioppo et al., 1997, Zaller and Feldman, 1992 or most notably Alvarez and Brehm, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2002).

By employing survey and media data from the 2009 European Election Study, this study demonstrates that (1) European mass publics hold ambivalent views on European unification, and (2) that this response variability can be explained by attributes of the individual and the national political environment. Specifically, we show that the information contexts which citizens are exposed are key determinants of response variability. For example, the obscurity of party positions or a perceived lack of party differences lead to higher response variance. In a similar vein, the evidence suggests that increased media emphasis boosts response variation. This could largely be an indication of the poor quality of the information provided in the media or the fact that increased emphasis provides citizens with numerous conflicting cues.

Examining response variability and its determinants is not only insightful in and of itself, but also provides us with important information about the way in which support for European unification may interact with political behavior, such as party choice in EP elections for example. Recently, scholars have begun to explore the link between attitude uncertainty and party choice by exploring the mediating effects of political knowledge and contextual information on vote choice in the 2009 EP elections (see de Vries, 2007; de Vries et al., 2011; Hobolt, 2009; Hobolt, et al., 2009; Hobolt and Wittrock, 2011). This work demonstrates that increased politicization in EU member states about European issues strengthens the impact of attitudes towards Europe on vote choice in EP and national elections as well as in EU referenda, but also shows that these effects are contingent upon voters' levels of political knowledge and information. This study builds on this work and draws our attention to an additional condition for EU attitudes to influence political behavior in elections and referenda, namely ambivalence.

This study provides important new avenues to explore in this respect. It demonstrates that public opinion towards the EU is characterized by ambivalence albeit the extent varies across contexts and individuals. These findings have important implications for the study of political behavior generally and voting behavior in EP elections specifically. Concretely, we expect that the more certain people are in their unification stance, the more likely it is that this stance influences voting behavior in EP elections. In addition, the characteristics of the information context in which voters reside in likely constitute important intermediary effects in this respect. These expectations are worth exploring in future work.

## References

- Achen, C.H. (1975). Mass Political Attitudes and the Survey Response. *American Political Science Review* 69(4): 1218-1231.
- Alvarez, R.M., and J. Brehm. (1995). American Ambivalence towards Abortion Policy: Development of a Heteroskedastic Probit Model of Competing Values. *American Journal of Political Science* 39(4): 1055-1082.
- Alvarez, R.M., and J. Brehm. (1997). Are Americans Ambivalent towards Racial Policies? *American Journal of Political Science* 41(2): 345-374.
- Alvarez, R.M., and J. Brehm. (1998). Speaking in Two Voices: American Equivocation about the Internal Revenue Service. *American Journal of Political Science* 42(2): 418-452.
- Alvarez, R.M., and J. Brehm. (2002). *Hard Choices, Easy Answers: Values, Information, and American Public Opinion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brewer, M.B. (2001). The Many Faces of Social Identity: Implications for Political Psychology. *Political Psychology* 22(1): 115-125.
- Cacioppo, J.T., W.L. Gardner, and G.G. Berntson. (1997). Beyond Bipolar Conceptualizations and Measures: The Case of Attitudes and Evaluative Space. *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 1(1): 3-25.
- Cappella, J.N., and K.H. Jamieson. (1997). *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Carey, S. (2002). Undivided Loyalties: Is National Identity an Obstacle to European Integration? *European Union Politics* 3: 387-413.
- Cinnirella, M. (1997). Towards a European Identity? Interactions between the National and European Social Identities Manifested by University Students in Britain and Italy. *British Journal of Social Psychology* 36(1): 19-31.
- de Vreese, C. (2003). *Framing Europe: Television News and European Integration*. Amsterdam: Aksant Academic Publishers.
- de Vries, C. E. (2007). Sleeping Giant: Fact or Fairytale? How European Integration Affects Vote Choice in National Elections. *European Union Politics* 8(3): 363-85.
- de Vries, C. E. (2009). The Impact of EU Referenda on National Electoral Politics: The Dutch Case. *West European Politics* 32(1): 142-71.
- de Vries, C. E. and E. E. Edwards (2009) Taking Europe to Its Extremes: Extremist Parties and Public Euroskepticism. *Party Politics*, 15(1): 5-28.

de Vries, C. E., W. van der Brug, M. H. van Egmond and C. van der Eijk (2011). Individual and Contextual Variation in EU Issue Voting: The Role of Political Information. Paper forthcoming in *Electoral Studies*.

EES (2009a). *European Parliament Election Study 2009, Voter Study, Advance Release*, 7/4/2010 ([www.piredeu.eu](http://www.piredeu.eu)).

EES (2009b). *European Parliament Election Study 2009, Media Study Data, Advance Release*, 31/03/2010, ([www.piredeu.eu](http://www.piredeu.eu)).

Eichenberg, R. C. and R. J. Dalton (2007). Post-Maastricht Blues: The Welfare State and the Transformation of Citizen Support for European Integration, 1973-2002. *Acta Politica* 42: 128-52.

Feld, W. and J. Wildgen (1976). *Domestic Political Realities and European Unification: A Study of Mass Publics and Elites in the European Community Countries*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Feldman, S. (1995). Answering Survey Questions: The Measurement and Meaning of Public Opinion. In *Political Judgment: Structure and Process*, ed. Milton Lodge and Kathleen M. McGraw. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Franklin, M., M. Marsh and L. McLaren (1994) The European Question: Opposition to Unification in the Wake of Maastricht. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 35: 455-472.

Gabel, M. J. (1998). *Interests and Integration: Market Liberalization, Public Opinion, and European Union*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Harvey, A.C. (1976). Estimating Regression Models with Multiplicative Heteroskedasticity. *Econometrica* 44(3): 461-465.

Hobolt, S. B. (2009). *Europe in Question: Referendums on European Integration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hobolt, S. B., J.-J. Spoon & J. Tilley (2009). A Vote Against Europe? Explaining Defection at the 1999 and 2004 European Parliament Elections. *British Journal of Political Science* 39(1): 93-115.

Hobolt, S. B. and J. Wittrock (2011). The Second Order Election Model Revisited: An Experimental Test of Vote Choices in Multi-Level Elections. Forthcoming in *Electoral Studies*.

Hooghe, L. and G. Marks (2005). Calculation, Community, and Cues: Public Opinion on European Integration. *European Union Politics* 6: 419-43.

- Hooghe, L. and G. Marks (2009). A Postfunctionalist Theory of European Integration: From Permissive Consensus to Constraining Dissensus. *British Journal of Political Science* 39(1):1-23.
- Hooghe, L., G. Marks and C. J. Wilson (2002). Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration. *Comparative Political Studies* 35(8): 965-89.
- Kriesi, H., E. Grande, R. Lachat, M. Dolezal, S. Bornschieer & T. Frey (2006). Globalization and the Transformation of the National Political Space: Six European Countries Compared. *European Journal of Political Research* 45(6): 921-956.
- Kriesi, H., E. Grande, R. Lachat, M. Dolezal, S. Bornschieer & T. Frey (2008). *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McGraw, K.M., and N. Pinney. 1990. The Effects of General and Domain-Specific Expertise on Political Memory and Judgment. *Social Cognition* 8(1): 9-30.
- McLaren, L. (2002). Public Support for European Integration: Cost/Benefit Analysis or Perceived Cultural Threat. *Journal of Politics* 64: 551-66.
- Ray, L. (2003). When Parties Matter: The Conditional Influence of Party Positions on Voter Opinion about European Integration. *Journal of Politics* 65(4): 978-94.
- Rosenberg, S.W. (1988). *Reason, Ideology, and Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Schuck, A., G., Xezonakis, S. Banducci and C. H. de Vreese (2010). *EES (2009) Media Study Data Advance Release Documentation*, 31/03/2010. ([www.piredeu.eu](http://www.piredeu.eu)).
- Schuck, A. G. Xezonakis, M. Ellenbaas, S. Banducci and C. H. de Vreese (2011). Party Contestation and Europe on the News Agenda: The 2009 European Parliamentary Election. Forthcoming in *Electoral Studies*.
- Steenbergen, M. R., E. E. Edwards and C. E. de Vries (2007). Who's Cueing Whom? Mass-Elite Linkages and the Future of European Integration. *European Union Politics* 8(1): 13-35.
- Tillman, E. R. (2004) The European Union at the Ballot Box? European Integration and Voting Behavior in the New Member States. *Comparative Political Studies* 37(5): 590-610.
- van Egmond, M. H., E. V. Sapir, W. van der Brug, S. B. Hobolt, M. N. Franklin (2010). *EES 2009 Voter Study Advance Release Notes*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.

van der Eijk, C. and M. N. Franklin (2004) Potential for Contestation on European Matters at National Elections in Europe. In G. Marks and M. R. Steenbergen (eds): *European Integration and Political Conflict*, pp. 33-50. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zaller, J. and S. Feldman. (1992). A Simple Theory of the Survey Response; Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences. *American Journal of Political Science* 36(3): 579-616.

## Tables and Figures

**Table 1: Heteroskedastic Regression Model of Support for European Unification**

|                                     | <b>B</b> | <b>SE</b> | <b>Prob</b> |
|-------------------------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| <u>Mean Model:</u>                  |          |           |             |
| Left-Right (at Baseline)            | -0.002   | 0.051     | 0.970       |
| National Identity                   | -0.440   | 0.131     | 0.001       |
| European Identity                   | 1.122    | 0.048     | 0.000       |
| Education                           | 0.075    | 0.019     | 0.000       |
| Professionals                       | -0.273   | 0.139     | 0.050       |
| Higher Administrative Personnel     | -0.285   | 0.153     | 0.063       |
| Clerical Staff                      | -0.439   | 0.138     | 0.002       |
| Sales Staff                         | -0.534   | 0.150     | 0.000       |
| Service Personnel                   | -0.377   | 0.142     | 0.008       |
| Skilled Worker                      | -0.520   | 0.142     | 0.000       |
| Semi-Skilled Worker                 | -0.610   | 0.152     | 0.000       |
| Unskilled Worker                    | -0.368   | 0.159     | 0.021       |
| Farmhand                            | -0.397   | 0.194     | 0.041       |
| Farmer                              | -0.411   | 0.211     | 0.051       |
| Student                             | -0.009   | 0.158     | 0.952       |
| Female                              | -0.068   | 0.045     | 0.129       |
| Constant (at Baseline)              | 5.186    | 0.333     | 0.000       |
| <u>Variance Model:</u>              |          |           |             |
| Media Emphasis                      | 0.007    | 0.001     | 0.000       |
| Conflict Framing                    | -0.124   | 0.052     | 0.017       |
| Conflict Framing Squared            | 0.055    | 0.021     | 0.009       |
| Obscurity of Party Positions        | 0.317    | 0.035     | 0.000       |
| Time Since Accession (decades)      | -0.083   | 0.027     | 0.002       |
| Time Since Accession Squared        | 0.018    | 0.004     | 0.000       |
| Perceived Party Differences         | -0.188   | 0.012     | 0.000       |
| Perceived Party Differences Squared | 0.021    | 0.001     | 0.000       |
| Knowledge                           | 0.009    | 0.007     | 0.186       |
| Dual Identity                       | -0.141   | 0.023     | 0.000       |
| Constant                            | 1.254    | 0.120     | 0.000       |

**Notes:** Table entries are maximum likelihood heteroskedastic regression estimates and their cluster-corrected standard errors (clustering on country). The analysis included country dummies as well as interactions between ideology and country dummies, treating Belgium as the baseline. N = 16598. Log-likelihood = -40740.022.

**Figure 1: Effect of Left-Right Self-Placement on Support for European Unification**

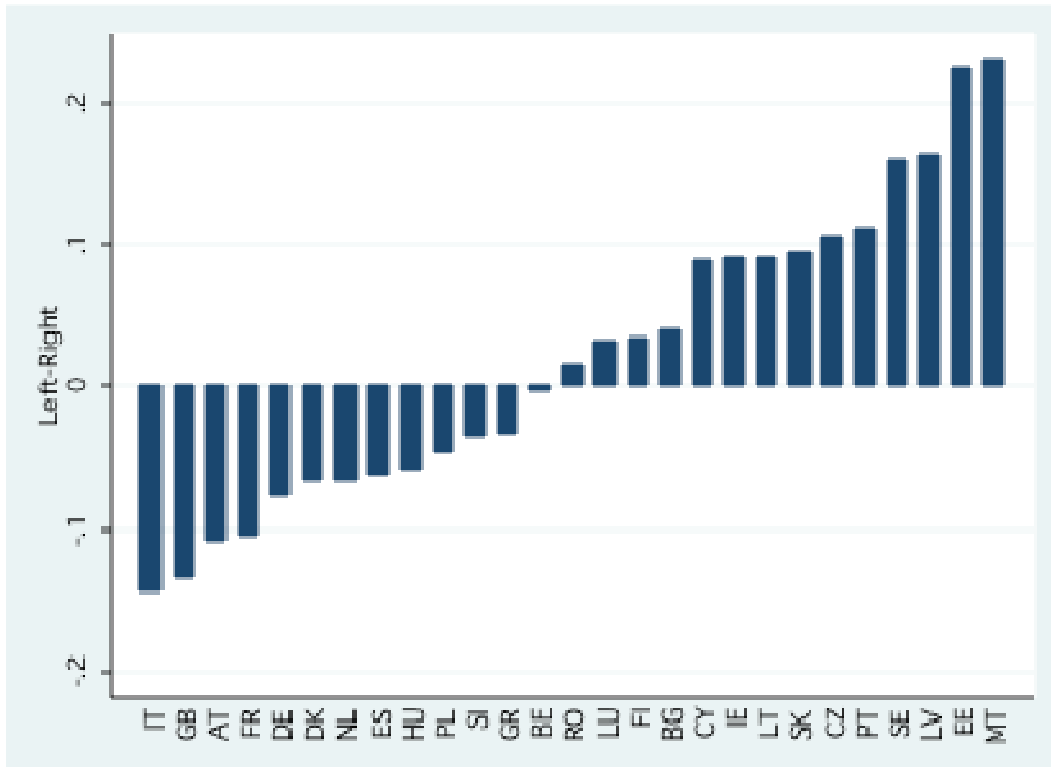
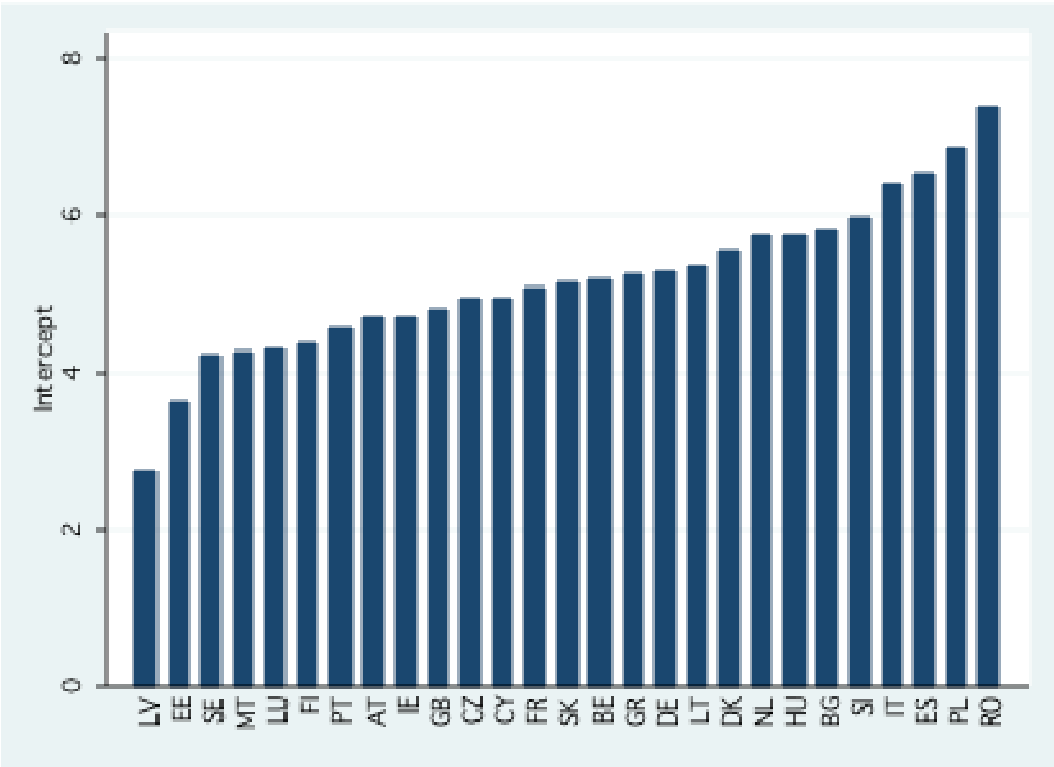
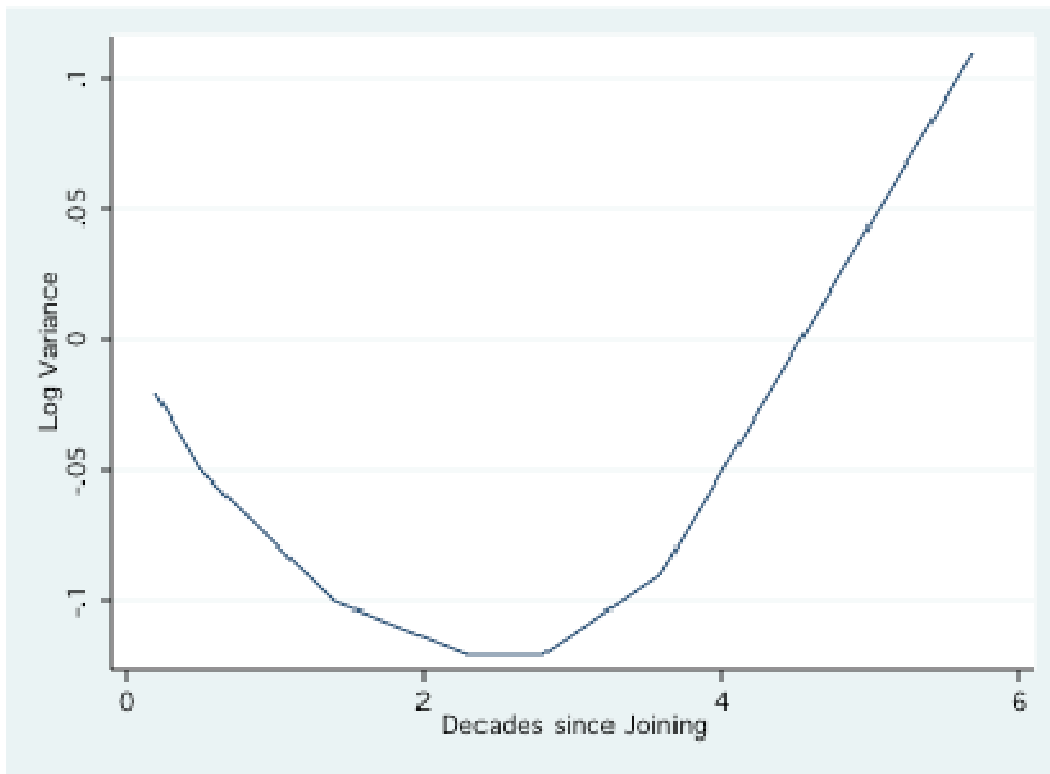


Figure 2: Baseline Support for European Unification



**Figure 3: Effect of Length of Membership on Variation in Opinions**



**Figure 4: Effect of Perceived Party differences on Variation in Opinions**

