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Abstract

Democracy requires an active and informed citizenry. Citizen engagement is all the more critical in complex environments such as the European Union (EU). This article examines how having an informed public matters for support for European-level policy competencies. Is public skepticism of EU authority shaped by a lack of knowledge, or are attitudes about policy jurisdiction in Europe's multilevel system unbiased by information? Our analysis of collective opinion in 27 issue areas reveals that, in nearly every case, a paucity of knowledge about the EU reduces popular support for European policy control. Further analyses show that possessing knowledge of Europe's institutions affects support for EU authority in areas involving cross-border political issues. In contrast, we find no consistent biasing effect on opinions about control over economic issues.

Keywords

democracy deficit, EU policy authority, EU support, information effects, policy preferences

Introduction

The European Community has long suffered from a 'democratic deficit' (Follesdal and Hix, 2006; Williams, 1991), posing a clear crisis of legitimacy for the European project (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 2004). One of the potential sources of this deficit, cited by both the Commission and critics of democracy in the European

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Union (EU) alike, is the absence of a supranational ‘public sphere’ through which citizens might learn about how Europe works and about the costs and benefits of integration (Scharpf, 1999; Schmitter, 2000; Siedentop, 2000). This claim presumes that a better-informed European citizenry would, with time, build up a much-needed reservoir of support for integration and, in particular, for European-level policy competencies. Yet, despite much discussion about the democratic deficit and the promised benefits of a more informed public, no research has determined how much Europeans actually know about the EU or how the potential lack of information affects mass support for the European project.

There is ample reason, however, to believe that member state publics would hold different policy preferences at the EU level were they more informed. The well-known dearth of political knowledge about politics among mass publics has implications for political attitudes (Althaus, 2003) and for election outcomes (Bartels, 1996; Blais et al., 2009). Indeed, a number of studies demonstrate that low levels of information affect voting behavior at the EU level. Regarding the EU, recent research finds that more knowledgeable individuals are more likely to vote in European Parliament elections (Clark, 2010). The more informed are also more likely to vote based on preferences over EU-level issues, rather than to act on concerns about national political issues (De Vries et al., 2011b; Hobolt and Wittrock, 2010). In turn, greater levels of information improve voters’ competence in using electoral mechanisms to address tasks at hand, such as voting in EU referenda according to positions on European integration rather than the popularity of national governments (Hobolt, 2007). None of this research, however, examines the effect of information on attitudes toward European integration.

The objective of this article is to do so. In particular, we identify, characterize, and explain the information biases in collective preferences for European policy authority. We build on a body of work on the effect of political information on the public’s policy preferences. These studies have shown that the ill-informed may advocate positions that are not in line with their values and interests (Althaus, 1998, 2003; Gilens, 2001). To the extent that such ill-informed positions are reflected in public opinion polls, the resulting aggregation of individual opinions may not accurately account for the interests of all segments of society. And this matters for how interests are represented: Even if policy makers respond faithfully to public signals, the signals they receive and, thus, the policies they deliver are likely to deviate from the public’s fully informed preferences.

Biases in aggregate preferences may be exacerbated in contexts where publics lack easily available information, such as in the case of the EU. As a supranational entity, the EU lacks the quantity and quality of media coverage and political discourse found at the national level (De Vreese et al., 2006; Meyer, 1999), denying citizens the heuristics many rely upon for developing positions on EU issues that accurately reflect their interests. Furthermore, the European polity’s multilevel character, coupled with asymmetries in the extent of the EU’s influence across different policy domains, renders EU decision-making considerably more complex

than most national political systems (Chabert, 2002; Christiansen, 2001; Schmitter, 2000).

In what follows, we make three arguments pertaining to information effects and mass support for European policy control. First, we argue for the *existence* of large and consistent information biases. Second, we suggest that these biases have the effect of *reducing*, rather than enhancing, popular support below that anticipated by an informed European citizenry. And, third, we maintain that such biases are stronger in certain areas than in others. In particular, we expect that aggregated information biases or 'information effects' will be larger in areas where EU activities have received less attention. Although even the ill-informed may recognize that the EU began and continues chiefly as an economic project, we suspect that individuals who do not pay close attention to European affairs are less likely to know about the EU's efforts to control pollution or to assist the member states in fighting organized crime. It is in these areas where public knowledge about Europe is most critical for producing accurate collective preferences. Analyses of survey data of member state publics provide solid support for each of these arguments.

The results of this study carry several implications of interest to students of public opinion and the EU. First, this study advances what we know about public opinion at the EU level. Rather than focusing on general support for more or less integration, we investigate support for integration in specific policy areas. In so doing, we move the discussion beyond the current debate over the utilitarian (Gabel, 1998; Mahler et al., 2000), cultural (Diez Medrano, 2003; McLaren, 2002), and political (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000) bases of EU support to consider whether individuals may have more nuanced views toward European integration.¹ Second, we show that political information plays a vital role in developing democratic institutions at the regional and global levels of governance. Partially in response to charges of a democracy deficit, the EU has in recent years empowered the European Parliament and improved the accessibility of its institutions. However, our findings suggest that such reforms are not likely to improve legitimacy in the EU or any other regional or international body – unless the public understands how Europe's multilevel governance system works. Finally, our results provide a means for examining the information biases in preferences over policy *jurisdiction* rather than policy *direction*, as previous work has done. Prior research on collective preferences for 'more' or 'less' policy suggests that a better-informed US public would support a smaller role for government or more liberal social policies (Althaus, 2003). It is unclear, however, if we would find similar information-based effects among European publics or, for that matter, for questions relating to the division of policy jurisdictions between different levels of government.

Information effects in mass political attitudes

There is a longstanding consensus that voters know very little about their political system (Converse, 1964; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). However, scholars are divided over the consequences of this political ignorance. One side maintains that a

largely ill-informed public does not have an adverse effect on the accuracy of collective preferences or the representational quality of a democratic system. Some argue that statistical aggregation nullifies the distorting effects of ill-informed responses on collective opinion (Page and Shapiro, 1992), meaning policy makers receive – and act upon – an unbiased signal. Others contend that ill-informed individuals can use heuristics to behave as if they had full information (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998). The ill-informed may look to an informed source with similar predispositions (political and media elites) or rely on a specific affective orientation (party identification) to identify the positions that most accurately reflect their values and interests.

Others are skeptical whether aggregation and heuristics compensate for the public's lack of information. Many scholars argue that aggregation fails to correct for any systematic bias related to low levels of political knowledge and that elites may use strategic issue frames to lead ill-informed voters away from their true preferences. Indeed, biases, information-induced or otherwise, do not disappear in the aggregate (Althaus, 1998; Bartels, 1996; Duch et al., 2000). Moreover, low knowledge levels have been shown to affect policy preferences (Althaus, 1998; Gilens, 2001), voter choice (Bartels, 1996; Blais et al., 2009; Zaller, 1992), and response stability in opinion surveys (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). These findings are problematic for political representation, given that decision makers regularly consult, and are often influenced by, opinion polls (Althaus, 2003; Jacobs and Shapiro, 2000).

Much of what we know about the effects of political knowledge, however, is based on a single case. As such, we know little about the influence of voter sophistication across different political contexts (but see Elff, 2009). For clues as to the role of political knowledge in a multilevel context we might look to research on retrospective voting. This research finds that it is more difficult for voters to attribute responsibility for policy outcomes when power is dispersed across different political parties and/or decision-making bodies (Powell and Whitten, 1993). Consistent with these findings are studies indicating that vertical dispersion of power, such as federal arrangements, also complicates the public's ability to attribute responsibility to different political actors (Arceneaux, 2006). Finally, De Vries et al. (2011a) find that voting on the basis of EU issues is accentuated by the clarity of national institutions. Although not chiefly concerned with information effects, this research agenda indicates that the greater complexity of politics at the EU level should make it more difficult for member state publics to understand how the supranational political system works.

These obstacles appear especially formidable when it comes to identifying preferences for who holds policy jurisdiction in a multilevel setting. It is not always clear who is responsible for decisions at the EU level. EU institutions share jurisdiction with the member state governments in most policy domains, and EU politics involve a large number of actors from the local, regional, national, and European levels of governance. Further, the multiplicity of decision-making rules creates ever-shifting configurations of shared power between the EU institutions, the member state governments, local and regional bodies, and private actors over

different policy areas. The EU's decision-making rules, observes Schmitter (2000: 81), are 'virtually unintelligible even to experts, much less citizens.' This situation inhibits the public from understanding or participating in EU affairs. Finally, it is doubtful whether the public receives consistent signals from the media about EU matters. With no EU-specific media source, individuals must look to local and nationwide media outlets for information on European developments. Those sources devote nearly all of their coverage to local and national issues (Anderson and McLeod, 2004; De Vreese et al., 2006; Meyer, 1999). And in those instances when the national media do take an interest in the EU, they present one-sided – often negative – accounts of EU politics (Anderson, 2004; Anderson and Weymouth, 1999; De Vreese, 2002; Maier and Rittberger, 2008; Norris, 2000). In short, if not engaged or informed, citizens face many hurdles to understanding the policies and procedures of an increasingly competent European political actor.

There are a few reasons to expect better-informed citizens are more supportive of European integration. The EU offers a number of potential benefits to the member states, including substantial financial assistance to agricultural markets, region-based subsidies to improve infrastructure, access to new markets, opportunities to cooperate in foreign and diplomatic matters, and mechanisms to better address global crime, environmental pollution, and other cross-border issues. The better-informed are more likely to be aware of the EU's efforts in these areas and to support European integration when and where there are clear benefits to their own pocketbook or to the national well-being.

High sophisticates should also be less susceptible to the cues of Euroskeptic elites who frame the EU as a threat to the national way of life. Through such discourse, political and media elites have been effective in stoking fears of the EU and creating opposition to European integration (Anderson, 2004; Gabel and Scheve, 2006; Hooghe and Marks, 2004; Maier and Rittberger 2008; Norris, 2000). Negative frames typically rest on an assumption that European policy makers have seized control of areas traditionally under the aegis of national authorities. However, in those non-economic areas where the EU does have some authority, Europe's supranational institutions in fact are unable to undertake any action without the support of the member states. Those individuals with greater knowledge are more likely to recognize the political and legal limits on the EU's authority. Elite cues should have a minimal effect on the attitudes of better-informed individuals who, at the EU level, recognize the limits on Europe's power and are thus less likely to be persuaded by the rhetoric of Euroskeptic elites.²

In sum, given the greater potential for ill-informed positions at the EU level, there is reason to suspect that public opinion polls do not reflect preferences toward European integration in a manner consistent with the public's 'fully informed' interests. In what follows, we assess two claims. The first concerns whether information effects distort the preferences for EU policy control that are depicted in the survey data. The second claim pertains to the direction of these expected effects. Specifically, we expect the bias to be downward: Low levels of information about

the European Union produce a downward bias in collective preferences for EU policy control in the sense that larger member state publics would support European competencies were they fully informed.

Research design

We are interested in the effect of political information on popular policy preferences. By *information effects* we mean the bias in collective opinion owing to less than optimal levels of political knowledge. Unlike previous work, we are not interested in preferences *for* or *against* a specific proposal. Our aim is instead to understand public preferences for the locus of policy decision-making, or *policy control*, in multilevel systems. Do Europe's citizens prefer that decision-making remains under the sole jurisdiction of national authorities? Or, recognizing the effects of globalization and Europeanization, do most member state publics perceive the benefits of sharing policy control with EU officials?

We employ public opinion data from Eurobarometer 62.0 (Papacostas, 2005).³ Conducted in the fall of 2004, the data set contains respondents from (then) all 25 member states.⁴ To measure citizen preferences for EU-level policy-making, we make use of an extensive battery of 27 items asking respondents whether particular policy issues should be decided at the national level or jointly with the European Union. The item is worded as follows:

'Some people believe that certain areas of policy should be decided by the [national] government, while other areas of policy should be decided jointly within the European Union. Which of the following areas of policy do you think should be decided by the [national] government and which should be decided jointly within the European Union?'

Respondents were then asked for their opinions on a host of policy areas, including currency, jobs, research and development, environment, regional policy, agriculture, poverty, education, culture, defense, and immigration.

Table 1 reports the response marginals pooled across respondents from all 25 countries surveyed. The first column reports the percentage claiming the policy should be decided solely by the national government; the second the percentage favoring joint jurisdiction with Europe. On some issues, we see little disagreement as to the need for policy coordination at the European level. For example, nearly 9 of 10 Europeans believe that fighting terrorism requires EU-level oversight. Large majorities also support EU control to fight human trafficking, to combat organized crime, and to fight drugs. But on other issues most respondents prefer that national authorities should have full jurisdiction. Only around 30 percent support joint EU–national decision-making on policies pertaining to police, urban crime, health care, press oversight, and education. Across all issue areas, more individuals support joint policy competency than sole control by national authorities,

Table 1. Mass preferences for national/joint EU decision-making control, 27 issue areas (percent)

Policy area	Policy should be decided:		
	By the national government	Jointly within the EU	Don't know/refuse
Fight against international terrorism	10	87	3
Fight against human trafficking	15	81	4
Fight against organized crime	19	77	3
Fight against drugs	24	73	3
Information about the European Union	22	71	6
Scientific and technological research	25	69	6
Humanitarian aid	27	68	5
Foreign policy	25	67	7
Protection of the environment	33	63	4
Support for regions	31	63	5
Currency	32	63	5
Fight against poverty	38	58	4
Defense	40	55	5
Immigration policy	41	54	5
Rules for political asylum	40	54	6
Accepting refugees	46	50	5
Fight against unemployment	47	50	3
Agriculture and fishing policy	45	49	6
Tackling challenges of ageing population	47	46	7
Juvenile crime prevention	56	40	4
Education	60	36	4
Justice	61	34	4
Health and social welfare	61	34	4
Urban crime prevention	62	34	4
Rules for broadcasting and the press	62	31	7
Cultural policy	64	30	6
Police	68	28	4

Note: Cells report percentage responses to the survey item 'Some people believe that certain areas of policy should be decided by the [national] government, while other areas of policy should be decided jointly within the European Union. Which of the following areas of policy do you think should be decided by the [national] government and which should be decided jointly within the European Union?' The number of respondents is 24,791.

Source: Eurobarometer 62.0 (Papacostas, 2005).

though not by a large margin (54 percent to 40 percent, respectively, with 6 percent on average claiming 'don't know').

Although these data are interesting, they may be only partially useful to policy makers interested in learning about the member state publics' actual preferences for EU-level competency. In particular, survey marginals tell us nothing about the impact of a more informed European citizenry. To address this, we must incorporate a measure of political information. The behavior literature uses a number of terms to refer to how much people know about their political system. Following Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), we conceive of political information as facts about a political system that are stored in an individual's long-term memory and can be recalled to identify, interpret, and understand political events. At the EU level, a knowledgeable individual can recall facts about the history of integration, EU institutions, and the nature of shared powers between the EU and the member states. Eurobarometer 62.0 includes a set of true/false questions about the history and political institutions of the European Union, listed in full in web appendix A. We construct an index that tallies each respondent's number of correct responses to these questions. For the most part, respondents are spread evenly across the four categories in this information index, with a plurality of respondents (24.7 percent) answering three of the four questions correctly.

The existence and magnitude of information biases in popular support for EU policy control

We now turn to estimating the presence and magnitude of information effects. Following Althaus (1998, 2003), we estimate a logit model of the form:

$$\text{logit}(\text{prob}(Y_{ij} = 1)) = \alpha + \beta_1 I_i + \sum \beta_k D_{ik} + \sum \delta_k (I_i * D_{ik}) + \sum \beta_m C_{im} + e_i \quad (1)$$

In equation (1), Y_{ij} is respondent i 's preference for control over policy area j . The outcome is scored 1 if she says policy decisions should be made jointly within the European Union and 0 otherwise.⁵ The variable I_i is i 's score on a scale of political information described above, D_{ik} is i 's score on the k th demographic attribute. Demographic attributes include measures for education, age, gender, location (urban vs. rural), ideology, and occupation. The term $I_i * D_{ik}$ represents the product of respondent i 's information score multiplied by her score on the k th demographic characteristic. We allow for the mean level of policy preferences to differ across the 25 member states by including a set of m (1, 2, ..., 25) country dummy variables, C_{im} . Finally, e_i represents the error term for the i th observation. By estimating equation (1) using the Eurobarometer survey data and then manipulating respondent values on I_i , we are able to simulate what an individual's policy preferences would be over policy control if she were 'fully informed'.

Before assessing the effects of biases arising from a lack of knowledge of EU politics, we investigate whether they exist in the first place. It is by no means

preordained that mass behavior is subject to information bias. In their examination of six Canadian federal elections from 1988 to 2006, Blais et al. (2009) find evidence for an information bias in vote choice for only three of the six. Likewise, Bartels (1996) finds no statistically significant impact for information in three of the six US elections he examines. Even Althaus (2003), in his analysis of policy effects, reports evidence of information effects in only some areas. To test for the existence of information effects in collective preferences for EU policy jurisdictions, we first estimate the model in equation (1) and then a version of that model that excludes information effects. Comparing model log-likelihoods, we test the null hypothesis of no information bias using a likelihood ratio statistic, distributed as a chi-square with degrees of freedom equal to the number of parameters in the unrestricted equation.

Results of performing this exercise for each of the 27 policy areas are reported in the first data column of Table 2. We see that, for *every* policy area, political information has a statistically significant impact on preferences for EU-level policy control. Although this result may be unsurprising to some, it nonetheless ranks as an important contribution by underlining the widespread prevalence of information biases in mass opinion on Europe. Needless to say, these biases have become more and more relevant as EU competencies have expanded with each successive treaty since Maastricht. Note that, despite our interest in examining the information effects of Europe's citizens across member states, we also estimated equation (1) separately for each country. The last column in Table 2 provides summary information about the presence of information effects across member states. It reports the percentage of cases (out of 25 member states) in which we find statistically significant evidence (at $p < .05$) for information effects.⁶

We next estimate the *magnitude* and *direction* of information biases – that is, the extent of positive or negative change in preferences for EU policy authority attributable to political information – by comparing actual survey marginals to simulated full information preferences for joint European vs. solely national policy jurisdiction. To simulate fully informed collective opinion, we use equation (1) to calculate the probability that an individual i , who possesses full information on EU processes and institutions, supports joint EU–national control over policy in area j .⁷ This is done by taking the respondent's scores on each of the D_{ik} demographic characteristics and multiplying them by coefficients obtained from estimating equation (1). To each respondent we assign 'full information' by substituting the maximum values on the political information scale. This approach captures both the direct and the indirect effects of information on policy opinions, the latter by modeling how information interacts with respondents' individual attributes.

Figure 1 reports the results. For each of the 27 policy domains we first display the actual level of popular support for joint policy control; we then report the simulated fully informed collective preferences. Uncertainty about the estimates is displayed in terms of 95 percent confidence intervals. Results show that information effects matter for collective preferences. The effect applies across policy domains. The differences in actual support levels and simulated full information

Table 2. Tests for presence of information effects in models of support for EU policy jurisdiction

Policy area (dependent variable)	Pooled model test statistic ^a	Country-level models, % with information effects ^b
Fight against international terrorism	507.31	84
Fight against human trafficking	511.77	84
Fight against organized crime	426.73	84
Fight against drugs	355.29	72
Information about the European Union	348.16	68
Science and technological research	273.72	76
Humanitarian aid	319.61	68
Foreign policy towards countries outside EU	276.26	72
Protection of the environment	620.92	84
Support for regions	503.61	88
Currency	468.71	60
Fight against poverty	289.10	68
Defense	236.79	48
Immigration policy	187.67	72
Rules for political asylum	201.22	64
Fight against unemployment	220.55	56
Accepting refugees	151.86	52
Agriculture and fishing policy	484.08	76
Tackling challenges of ageing population	254.66	48
Juvenile crime prevention	72.98	32
Education	75.82	28
Health and social welfare	220.02	44
Justice	100.02	36
Urban crime prevention	40.01	36
Rules for broadcasting and the press	117.28	40
Cultural policy	64.71	40
Police	83.72	24

Notes: Cells report results of a likelihood ratio test of the null hypothesis that the joint effect of *Political Information* on support for EU-level policy jurisdiction is zero. Test statistics are distributed as chi-square with 14 degrees of freedom.

^aPooled models: All reported statistics are statistically significant at $p < .001$.

^bIndividual country models: Cells report percentage of country cases out of 25 in which the information effect is statistically significant, as based on the likelihood ratio test statistic, where statistically significant is defined as $p < .05$.

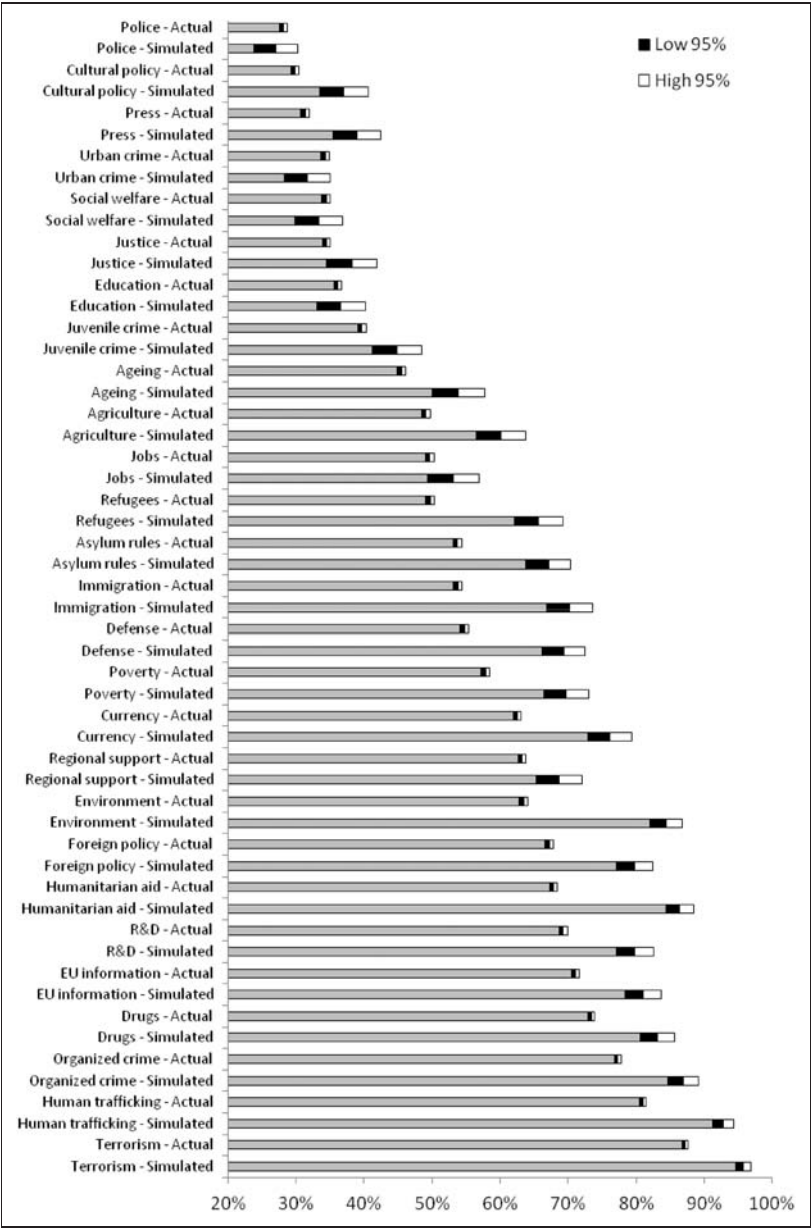


Figure 1. Comparison of actual and simulated support for joint policy control with the European Union, 2004.

Notes: Figure displays the actual percentage of respondents who believe decisions in given policy area should be decided jointly within the European Union for the typical respondent and by simulated full information effects. The black areas of the bars are the lower 95 percent of the confidence interval. The white areas are the upper 95 percent.

Source: Eurobarometer 62.0 (Papacostas, 2005).

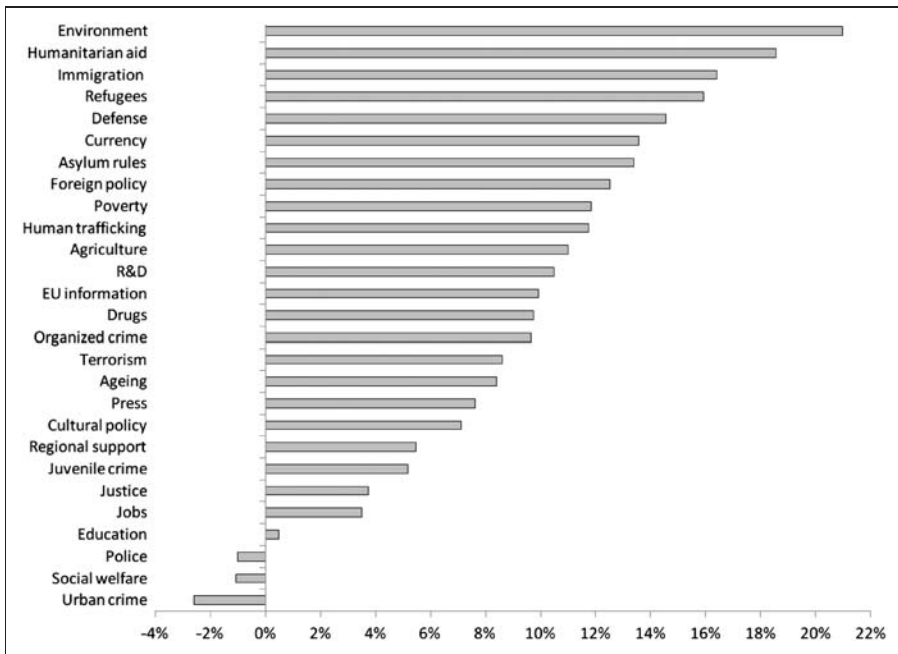


Figure 2. Magnitude and direction of effect of political information on collective preferences for joint policy control with the European Union, 2004. *Notes:* The figure displays the difference in the full information-simulated percentage of respondents who believe decisions in a given policy area should be decided jointly within the European Union (see Figure 1). *Source:* Eurobarometer 62.0 (Papacostas, 2005).

support are statistically significant in 21 of 27 policy areas. Differences in actual and simulated preferences are not statistically significant at the 95 percent level in only six areas: Education, health and social welfare, jobs, justice, urban crime prevention, and police. For each of the remaining 21 domains, simulated, fully informed preferences are *greater* than they are for the less than informed reality. For both urban crime prevention and policing, information leads to slightly less support for EU competency. In these cases and in the case of jurisdiction over health and social welfare, the information bias is quite insignificant – on the order of 4 percent or less. More often than not, however, the estimated information effect is considerable. In most policy domains, a fully informed public is 10 percent or more likely to support joint EU–national policy-making jurisdiction; such an increase is apt to affect the extent to which office-seeking politicians prioritize the need to build European policy competencies.

The magnitude of these effects appears in sharper relief in Figure 2, which displays the same information as Figure 1 but in a single statistic by subtracting the percentage of respondents who actually support EU-level control from the

simulated percentage of respondents supporting EU-level control with full information. Again we see considerable variation in information effects across issues. They range in size from 0 to 21 percent for policies to protect the environment. The mean difference value of 9.1 percent is very close to the median of 9.8, indicating a relatively normal distribution of information effects across the issue domains.⁸

These analyses provide strong evidence that political knowledge matters for how mass publics think about Europe and whether they support the EU's efforts to legislate in policy competences shared with member states. Full information has the effect of increasing popular support for shared European authority from minority to majority levels (> 50 percent) in four domains: Accepting refugees, agriculture and fishing, unemployment, and the challenges of an ageing population. Perhaps more important, there are substantial increases in joint support in several highly visible policy areas. For instance, despite the notion that a majority approves of supranational control on immigration policy, we suspect that decision makers take much less notice of the 54 percent of respondents in support of joint competency than they would of the 70 percent predicted by our fully informed simulated model. Similarly, we see large information effects for the critical areas of defense, humanitarian aid, environmental protection, and the common currency. How individuals perform on our battery of objective knowledge items influences their beliefs about what this still evolving European Union should (and should not) do. The prescription for proponents of deepening integration is clear: To improve public acceptance for increased European-level policy authority and to seek ways to develop a better-informed European citizenry.

Heterogeneity in information effects across policy areas and member states

Research on EU attitudes typically employs very broad measures of support for integration as indications of the public's endorsement of or opposition to the European project. Results reported above suggest that the public does not simply accept or oppose the EU, but rather supports European integration in some areas more than others. An additional finding is that the magnitude of information effects varies across issue areas. Why are information effects more substantial in certain policy areas than in others? This question is important; for, if it is possible to isolate the areas in which public preferences are ill informed, then European officials can develop more efficient strategies for reducing biases and, in the process, place democracy in the EU on firmer foundations.

We consider two issue-based explanations. First, informed citizens may support EU-level control in economic areas, particularly those associated with the single European market. The basis for today's Europe began in the 1950s as a project to create a single market for the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital. This goal was renewed in the mid-1980s. Deepening global market integration since the 1990s has only underlined the necessity of the common market. Indeed, economic policy-making remains the most prominent amongst the EU's activities

Table 3. The determinants of information biases in support for EU-level policy competencies

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Actual support	0.20** (0.06)	0.21** (0.06)	0.09 (0.06)	0.05 (0.08)
Single market policy		−1.49 (2.10)		3.41 (2.79)
Cross-border policy			6.09** (1.87)	8.07** (2.63)
Constant	−1.80 (3.22)	−1.76 (3.38)	1.57 (3.28)	2.58 (3.32)
R ²	.32	.33	.48	.51
N	27	27	27	27

Note: The dependent variable is *Information Effect* as displayed in Figure 2 and described in the text. Entries are coefficients from an OLS analysis on 27 policy areas, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

** denotes significance at .05, * denotes significance at .10.

Source: Eurobarometer 62.0 (Papacostas, 2005).

(Alesina et al., 2005). When extending the EU's influence into non-economic areas, European policy makers have often had to justify their actions as necessary for maintaining the integrity of the single market. The better-informed are likely to be aware of the origins of the European Community as an economic project, and are thus more willing to support the extension of EU authority in areas that are clearly related to the single market. Additionally, the most visible benefits of European integration arguably are economic. Agricultural subsidies support farmers, regional funds improve infrastructure and create new jobs, and EU membership allows businesses and manufacturers to expand into new markets. The more informed Europeans are about these potential benefits, the more likely they might be to support EU authority over the economy.

An alternative claim is that the politically informed are most supportive of empowering Europe with jurisdiction over political matters best addressed through regional cooperation. EU member states must often cope with problems that have extraterritorial origins and that, almost by definition, cannot be addressed by the actions of a single state. Asylum seekers fleeing persecution, policies to counter international terrorism, immigration, and many other issues require regional and global solutions. Political elites, who are presumably better informed about the EU, are more likely to support European integration in such areas (Hooghe, 2003) and at least some members of the public are aware of the inability of national governments to deal effectively with such problems, as research on responsibility attributions for complex phenomena shows (for example Gomez and Wilson, 2008; Malhotra and Margalit, 2010). We assess whether the better-informed may be more likely to recognize the constraints on state power and to support EU competencies in policy areas concerned with cross-border or regional problems.

To identify the types of policies that most benefit from greater levels of information, we estimate a model of fully informed support for EU policy control. Our dependent variable, *Information Effect*, is simply the difference between collective preferences for joint EU authority with full information and the baseline collective

preference for the given issue area, as displayed in Figure 2. Controlling for the baseline actual support levels, we regress *Information Effect* on two indicator variables. The first of these, *Single Market Policy*, is scored 1 for those issue domains included as part of the single market (unemployment, support for regions, science and technological research, agriculture and fisheries, and currency policy) and 0 otherwise. The other, *Cross-Border Policy*, is coded 1 for policy areas that address a cross-border or regional problem (terrorism, drugs, organized crime, human trafficking, foreign policy, asylum, defense, immigration, refugees, humanitarian aid, and the environment) and 0 otherwise (see web appendix B).

OLS parameter estimates are presented in Table 3.⁹ The first model simply regresses *Information Effect* on actual support levels. The positively signed estimate implies that, all else equal, information biases regarding opinions over policy jurisdiction are larger in those areas that already enjoy some level of support. The second model includes the dummy variable identifying an issue area as associated with the single European market to test the claim that information has a greater influence on mass support for EU competencies in economic areas. Results, however, reveal that policies associated with the single European market are no more likely to be affected by information than other domains. We do find, however, that information has a strong and positive impact on popular support for European jurisdiction in cross-border areas. The coefficient on *Cross Border Policy* is positive and precisely estimated in Model 3. And this result holds when both issue domain dummies are included (Model 4). Full information increases collective preferences in support of common policy control more for cross-border or regional issues than it does in all other areas, on the order of 6 percent.

These are particularly interesting results for the research on EU public opinion. Most of the research into support for European integration emphasizes the material benefits accrued from joining Europe (Gabel, 1998; Mahler et al., 2000). There has been little discussion of alternative reasons for the public to support European integration. These findings suggest that non-economic benefits of cross-border cooperation (for example combating organized crime) may also generate positive sentiments toward the EU, particularly as the public learns more about European integration. As theorized above, issue areas associated with the single market would receive the largest knowledge-induced boost in public opinion because the clearest benefits of EU membership are economic. That is not the case. It may be precisely because the economic benefits of European integration are clear that areas not as closely associated with the EU would benefit more from a better-informed public.

Finally, we consider whether conditions unique to each country moderate the relationship between information and collective preferences. Figure 3 displays standard deviations in information effects across the 25 member states for each of the 27 policy areas in the data set. The average (mean) information effect is positive for all of the issue areas, indicating that a better-informed public would be more supportive of EU authority in (at least) a majority of countries. However, in some member states, our simulations indicate that a hypothetical fully informed

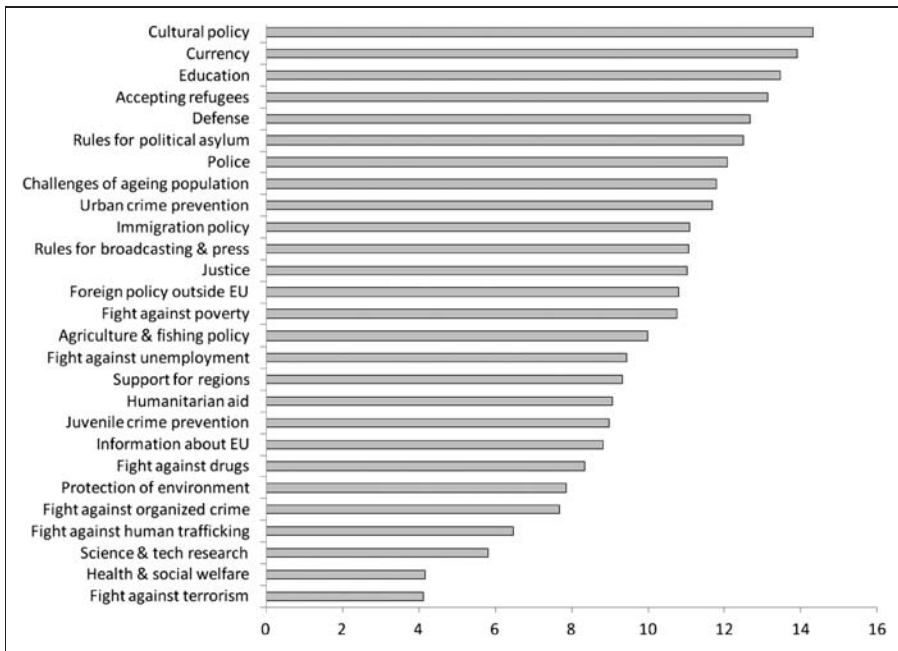


Figure 3. Standard deviation of information effects across 25 EU member states.

Note: For each of the 27 issue areas, the figure displays the 25-country standard deviation.

Source: Eurobarometer 62.0 (Papacostas, 2005).

public would be *less* supportive of European authority. With the exceptions of the fight against human trafficking, information about the EU, and protecting the environment, greater levels of information would depress aggregate support for EU authority in at least one EU member state. Further, the appearance of minimal information effects in some issue areas may mask considerable cross-country variation. For instance, on the issue of competency in the area of policing, the median country information effect is statistically indistinguishable from zero. Yet the standard deviation on the police domain is quite large: Full information has the effect of raising support for joint control by 29 percent in the Netherlands and reducing support levels by a near-equal amount in Cyprus. And other areas, such as protecting the environment, are characterized by large information effects but low variation in these effects across the member states.

What might account for country variation in information effects? We consider several country-level factors that may reduce the need for individual knowledge on matters of European integration. The first of these is the information environment. Here, the media can act as an equalizer. Information-rich contexts may render the need for high levels of knowledge less acute. We would expect there to be a wider understanding of issues related to Europe when national media outlets report on such issues. Second, the political behavior literature has demonstrated that elites

often provide cues to their electorates. Such cues serve as information shortcuts, thereby weakening the impact of knowledge levels on collective opinion. Finally, a general sense of how European institutions work may be deeper in countries with longer histories of belonging to the Community.

We examine these factors statistically by way of regression analyses. The dependent variable is again *Information Effect*. However, rather than pool across policy areas (as in Table 3), our unit of analysis is now the member state. We disaggregate the data by country and then regress *Information Effect* on a set of four predictors. The first is *Actual Support*, as described above. The second, *Media Cues*, is a measure of the share of national media coverage devoted to European-level concerns (De Vreese et al., 2006).¹⁰ Third, to capture the strength of elite cues, we employed a measure *Party Cues* to tap the salience of European integration in the parties' overall programs. The data come from the 2002 Chapel Hill expert survey (Hooghe et al., 2008). The survey asks country experts to assess how important the EU is 'to the parties in their public stance'. To produce a country-level measure of the strength of elite cues on Europe, we sum responses across parties, weighing by vote share. Finally, models include a variable equal to the (logged) number of years a country has been a member of the European Community/Union. If the coefficient on this term is negative, it would support an argument that information effects are weaker in older member states.

With these data we estimate 27 regressions, one for each policy area. Each regression includes 23 countries rather than 25, because we are missing measures for media effects for Cyprus and Malta. For ease of presentation, we summarize findings here and delegate statistical results to web appendix C. Considering first the effects of media cues, if the coefficient on *Media Cues* is negative (positive), then the magnitude of the information effect is weaker (stronger) when the media devote more (less) coverage to Europe. In one policy domain, we find a negative relationship and in three instances the media effect is positive. Compared with media effects, party cues exert a more consistent pattern, but only slightly so. In 6 of the 27 policy domains, the coefficient on *Party Cues* is negative and precisely estimated. These domains are policies on ageing populations, information about the EU, unemployment, juvenile crime, terrorism, and urban crime. In these domains, strong messages from party leaders blunt the effects of political knowledge on collective preferences for EU competencies. Finally, there is some indication that information effects are weaker in older member states. When it comes to domains pertaining to ageing populations, drugs, and the fight against human trafficking, information effects appear weaker in countries with longer membership in the Community.

These findings aside, we conclude that the results of these analyses are by and large underwhelming. To the extent we can systematically account for information effects in collective opinion about EU policy control, factors varying across issue type are more important than factors that vary across national context. For European political elites in Brussels, as well as for proponents of widening Europe's reach, this result should be edifying. It appears not to be the case,

for example, that newer member state publics are disadvantaged in what they know (or do not know) about Europe, at least in terms of the consequences for support for supranational policy control. Rather, what matters is the extent to which Europe's citizens can ascertain the benefits of integration and, we submit, the gains to be had by placing greater authority at the EU level.

Conclusion

This article provides the first analysis of information effects and EU policy control. Simulating the collective preferences of a better-informed European public, we find that low levels of information about the EU distort popular attitudes toward integration. In all but a few policy domains, our simulations find that a fully informed public would support integrating national policy competencies at the supranational level to a greater degree than is indicated in mass survey data. And in no domain for which we have data does information acquisition systematically increase preferences for national control.

These results have clear implications for discussions on EU democracy. Europe's critics often focus on the lack of democratic accountability within EU decision-making. In recent years, the member states and EU institutions have responded with institutional reforms designed to empower the Parliament, to increase the transparency of European-level decision-making, and to open EU institutions to public oversight. However, without a corresponding increase in the public's awareness of EU politics, such efforts may be in vain. Indeed, to the extent that the 'democracy deficit' is defined by the EU's low legitimacy, our findings suggest that the public's relative ignorance of the EU may be the real source of the problem.

This analysis demonstrates larger information effects on political attitudes than found in prior research on collective preferences (Althaus, 2003; Gilens, 2001). This may be for two reasons. First, the obstacles to learning about the EU are much higher than at the national level. The EU is a complex political system, involving a multitude of actors and governed by decision-making rules that seem to be in constant flux. Moreover, compared with the heuristics available in national political systems, there are few reliable sources of information, such as media channels or political elites, for providing information shortcuts for EU politics. Thus, it is not surprising to find evidence of a larger information bias in EU public opinion.

Second, our concern is with collective preferences over jurisdictional authority rather than policy positions. There may be a stronger relationship between political information and jurisdictional preferences than between information and policy preferences. For many people, political ideology and partisanship act as filters for political information: When individuals receive information (whether from a biased or an objective source), they interpret that information in light of their ideological or partisan beliefs. We suspect that partisanship and ideology provide more interpretive cues for locating oneself in favor or against a particular policy position than for a particular policy jurisdiction. Questions of 'who's responsible'

in a multilevel governance system are likely to take on greater urgency as lines of decision-making authority continue to be blurred by Europeanization and globalization.

More broadly, our findings speak to a need to consider the public's support for European integration not just in general terms but in specific policy domains. Research seeking to explain support for the EU focuses on broad support for the European project – commonly represented by the recurrent Eurobarometer survey item asking respondents whether they think their country's membership in the EU is 'a good thing' or 'a bad thing.' This approach does not recognize the potential nuance in the public's views on European integration. Individuals may both support *and* oppose efforts at integration, depending on the policy domain. Farmers, for example, may support EU influence over agricultural policy owing to the significant EU subsidies and market protections, but oppose any integration that displaces more proximate control of, say, education or law enforcement.

Finally, this research points the way for future work to examine how better-informed individuals decide when and why to back efforts to integrate. Earlier work on individuals' cognitive skills and attitudes toward Europe asserted a positive relationship: The more informed are more supportive (Inglehart, 1970). By employing the more specific measure of information effects and by examining preferences for supranational policy control over multiple areas, our research shows that the power of information is not constant. We examine differences in support across different policy areas, finding that information has a greater effect on support for EU authority in areas involving cross-regional political problems. There are other possible considerations that shape jurisdictional preferences, such as which political actor has the legal basis to assume jurisdiction or which actor has demonstrated the most competence in decision making. Many of these considerations may interact to influence better-informed preferences and could shed further light on how individuals develop positions in a multilevel system of governance.

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Notes

1. Few studies examine mass support for the locus of policy control in the EU context. These include Hooghe's (2003) study of the differences between elite and mass support across policy areas, Alesina et al.'s (2005) study of actual and preferred levels of

- EU policy-making across policy domains, and Ray's (2004) analysis of the effect of spending on social protection and mass preferences for national policy jurisdiction.
2. Indeed, De Vreese (2007) finds that, when the public is not exposed to negative media frames about European integration, public cynicism toward the EU actually decreases. Similarly, Hooghe and Marks (2004) argue that, when there is no elite dissent over European integration, the public is less likely to regard the EU as a threat to national identity and more likely to consider the benefits of European integration. Given the distorting effects of Euroskeptic rhetoric, public opinion polls may suggest greater opposition to European integration than would exist amongst a better-informed public.
 3. Eurobarometer 62.0 includes questions that measure support for EU jurisdiction across policy domains and a larger battery of knowledge measures than found in most other Eurobarometer surveys. Additionally, this is at time of writing the most recent Eurobarometer survey to include a measure of income, one of the key demographic measures in our model.
 4. We employ the standard European population weight provided in each Eurobarometer survey. Each national sample is adjusted to reflect its share of the overall EU population. This adjustment is based on population figures provided by Eurostat.
 5. It might be pointed out that our statistical model does not compare probabilities of supporting joint policy control separately, relative to support for national government control as well as relative to the probability of responding 'don't know' (see Table 1). Although true, this dichotomous specification fits our interest in estimating the full information effects of preferring EU policy control; our objective is not to produce accurate in-sample predictions of the share saying 'national government' or 'don't know' (less than 5 percent, on average). We did estimate models with a trichotomous unordered dependent variable (joint, national, DK), and found, unsurprisingly, that it made no difference in our results.
 6. We note that these percentages increase – sometimes dramatically – if we set the bar of statistical significance for the chi-square test at the 90 percent level ($p < .10$) instead of the 95 percent level ($p < .05$).
 7. Individual i possesses mean or modal values on all other independent variables.
 8. In ancillary analyses we found that issue area accounts for more of the variation in information effects than do factors specific to individual member states. We ran the simulations separately on individual country samples and found that the rankings of information effects are generally the same as those shown in Figure 2 for the 25 separate country surveys. Results of these analyses are available upon request.
 9. Note that the dependent variables in these policy-level models are the estimates obtained from calculating the information effects from individual-level data. This 'second stage' analysis must therefore take account of the uncertainty of these estimates. One option is to weight the second-stage analyses by the inverse of the standard error of the estimates of the dependent variable. However, Lewis and Linzer (2005) show that this procedure is not free of problems in that it treats all sources of uncertainty as owing to estimation, ignoring sources owing to the stochastic process governing the second stage. Following Duch and Stevenson (2008), we employ standard errors that are robust to unspecified forms of heteroskedasticity.
 10. The media data are De Vreese et al.'s (2006: 488) measure of the visibility of EU news on national newspaper front pages in 2004. The newspapers were two broadsheets and one tabloid. Data were collected two weeks in advance of the 2004 European elections,

just in advance of when Eurobarometer 62.0 surveys were in the field. De Vreese et al. also code visibility of the EU in television news. We use the newspaper coverage measure, however, because its coverage is wider. Statistical results are similar across the newspaper- and television-based measures.

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