Media and identity: the paradox of legitimacy and the making of European citizens

Book section

7 *Media and identity: the paradox of legitimacy and the making of European citizens*

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Ever since research on European public spheres has emerged in the social science and communication literatures, it has rested on implicit links with the question of European identity. With the crisis that emerged since the beginning of the 2010s, questions on whether a European identity would be strong enough to allow the European Union (EU) to survive through unprecedentedly turbulent waters became even more topical. In turn, European public spheres have been perceived as a cause, a consequence, or a symptom of European identity. Always, however, public-sphere researchers have considered European identity as the "bigger picture" that would bring citizens back into the equation. This chapter makes this implicit link somewhat more explicit and provides a direct understanding of how citizens' European identity is potentially affected by news on Europe, thereby reflecting on the causal links that "bring politics back in."

Much of the research on European identity and the European public spheres seems to have been built around a duality of assumptions that is nothing short of paradoxical. First, many have assumed that European identity could emerge only under the condition that a European public sphere in which European issues are debated exists. Second, any criticism of European institutions and policies perceived as "Euroskepticism" is assumed to potentially prove that the European identity does not exist. Although neither assumption is intellectually obvious, it seems to us that they are largely incompatible and, at face value, the public-sphere condition seems more tenable than the "skepticism-less" condition. Indeed, can a political system emerge without political debate? Can a political community emerge without politicization and political dissent? In this chapter, we support the argument that although politicization is not without risk (see, e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2006), it may not be only a necessary cause but also a necessary consequence of the emergence of a European identity. In other words, we suggest that the more European people feel, the more that they

appropriate debates on Europe, the more polarized they can become about them, and the more politicized is their perception of "their" – thereby appropriated – system. This contrasts with an older perception – still rife in much of the mass media – that citizens would be either pro-European and like everything European as a result, or Euroskeptic and hate everything European as a matter of principle. To support our argument, we examine the findings of our research about the impact of news on citizens' levels of European identity using a three-wave, two-and-a-half-years-long panel-study experiment that was run in six EU member states. We begin this chapter by highlighting paradoxes of EU legitimacy that point out the apparent compatibility between Euroskepticism and European identity. We then analyze the results of the panel-study design, which show how good and bad news on Europe (and symbols of European integration) affect the identity of citizens over time. We conclude the chapter by highlighting the dangerous but necessary role of politicization in the creation of a political identity.

Down or up?

In June 2009, Europeans voted in the seventh direct European Parliament (EP) elections. On this occasion, the average turnout across the entire EU reached a record low, previously set five years earlier in June 2004. Journalists and politicians alike deduced that the democratic crisis of the EU therefore must be symmetrically reaching an all-time high, and they hastened to conclude that Europeans are not interested in the EU, that they do not trust their European institutions, and that – by and large – they simply do not feel European. The starting point of this argument was rather dubious in the first place. When we compare the turnout in the twenty-five member states that voted in both 2004 and 2009, it was largely stable. Similarly, whereas the overall European turnout seemed to dramatically decline between the 1999 and the 2004 elections, when comparing the fifteen old member states that alone voted on both occasions, turnout had in fact increased.

In the context of studying the relationship between the emergence of a European public sphere and that of a mass European identity, this hasty interpretation of an apparently obvious public-opinion measure (whereby we conveniently ignore that completely different countries are voting in the three elections being compared) has a major symbolic purpose. Journalists largely explain their lack of coverage of European

news by the fact that EU citizens would not be interested. Conversely, politicians explain the vastly domestic focus of their EP campaigns by the suggestion that voters would be more interested in them than in European issues. This contrasts with the fact that European Elections Studies show repeatedly that a dominant and increasing proportion of voters want to hear more about Europe (Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996) and that the French 2005 referendum on an EU constitution witnessed – literally – several million citizens effectively reading the incredibly obscure and long document and buying books that described and interpreted its most minute details.

There is, therefore, a triangle of legitimacy crisis associating citizens, the media, and the European project, whereby the media are claiming to not be in a position to force citizens to be interested in something that they do not like (Bain and Holland 2007) – let alone influence them – whereas citizens are claiming that they are poorly and inadequately informed about the EU. This apparently obscure causality between the meager progress of a European public sphere and the lack of democratic engagement of citizens could be sorted out if we better understood the extent to which the media indeed can influence the European identity of citizens by how they inform them about Europe. After outlining the legitimacy paradox of the EU and models of potential influence, this chapter provides the results of a two-and-a-half-year-long panel-study experiment on the impact of news on Europe on citizens' identity.

Paradoxes of popular legitimacy

As discussed, the bulk of popular elite interpretations – from the mass media to many political parties and to EU institutions themselves – is that EU citizens do not feel European and that Euroskepticism is on the rise and has led to a recent string of "no" votes in referenda on EU questions. Moreover, turnout in EP elections allegedly continues to decline[1] and betrays a disaffection of citizens for a EU that is, consequently, supposed to face a widespread and dangerous crisis of legitimacy at the moment. In fact, a significant number of quality academic publications accept this interpretation (Cederman 2001; Hix 2008).

[1] However, this overall decline trend seems to have stopped with the 2014 European Parliament elections.

Although not questioning the fact that European integration indeed is facing a crisis of legitimacy in the sense that there is a mismatch between public preferences in terms of European integration and what is actually proposed to them by their elites, the assumption that this must mean a rise in anti-EU sentiment and a lack of European identity of citizens is less than obvious. In fact, there are as many signs pointing to an increase in general support for the European project, civic engagement, and European identity as there are signs of dissatisfaction with specific aspects of integration. Our suggestion is that European identity in fact is growing but that precisely because an increasing number of EU citizens feel European, they now judge the various policies and institutional reforms of the EU "from the inside," as citizens, and thus on their own merits rather than the principle of integration. Therefore, we would not be witnessing a lack of European identity and rise in Euroskepticism but instead an increasing European identity. We also would observe a reversal from an "outside" Euroskepticism that targets the principles of integration to an "inside" Euroskepticism. The latter takes for granted the principle of durable, continuing integration but targets specific institutional processes, policies, and reforms in the same way it could happen in any other polity. This would explain some of the paradoxical evolution in European opinion.

As discussed previously, turnout between 1999 and 2004 among the member states that voted on both occasions increased. Similarly, the overall decline in turnout in EP elections since the 1970s seems in no way sharper or more troublesome than the parallel participation decline in the context of national-level elections in the same countries (Déloye and Bruter 2007).

The argument that the recent victory of the "no" vote in a number of referenda on questions relating to the EU simply would equate to a popular expression of traditional Euroskepticism is equally weak. The most emblematic of these "nos" – that of the French population in May 2005 – occurred at a time when support for European integration was at its peak. Similarly, for the first time in the history of French referenda on EU questions, the dominant argument of the "no" camp, regardless of its (lack of) credibility was based not on a rejection of integration – or a claim for slower integration – but instead on a claim for faster and more generalized integration that would be increasingly social and political.

Finally, the question of popular legitimacy is difficult to disconnect from the question of institutional trust. Again, the evolution of public opinion when it comes to trust in EU institutions since the early 1980s is highly symptomatic. Twenty-five years ago, there was no EU country where EU institutions were more trusted globally than their national equivalent. By the mid-2000s, however, almost all of the old member states and a large majority of the new states trusted the European Commission more than their national government and the EP more than their national parliament (Tables 7.1 and 7.2). The only exceptions tend to be Sweden and, to a lesser extent, Denmark (parliament only) and Finland (where the scores for national parliament and the European Commission are tied). For those claiming widespread Euroskepticism, this is a shocking truth. Who would think that in thirteen of the fifteen old member states, including the United Kingdom, the European Commission is, in fact, significantly more trusted than the national government? How can we reconcile these findings with suspicion of declining popular legitimacy and never-emerging identity?

The argument of this chapter, therefore, is that it is exceedingly simplistic to start from the assumption that Europeans do not care about the EU and do not feel European. It is equally wrong to assume that because of this presumed lack of interest or, indeed, supposed lack of European identity that powerless media would not be in a position to participate in the strengthening of a European public sphere. We use findings from a long-term panel-study experiment about the impact of news on European identity to show that the media – far from simply following the news demands of citizens – actually participate in shaping their identity over time.

Methods

We use an experimental panel-study design instead of traditional "one-shot" experiments.[1] The sample includes 1,197 respondents from six European countries: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, and Sweden. The two-and-a-half-year-long[2] study included two years of experimental treatment and a final six-month "resting" period before the third questionnaire. The design respects

[2] The study was conducted between 1999 and 2003.

Table 7.1. ***Compared trust in the European Commission and national government***

Country	*European Commission*	*National government*	*Difference*
Poland	49	7	+42
Italy	63	26	+37
Slovakia	54	17	+37
Belgium	63	34	+29
Hungary	58	31	+27
Slovenia	52	27	+25
France	52	29	+23
Ireland	61	39	+22
Portugal	56	34	+22
Germany	39	23	+16
Netherlands	54	39	+15
Lithuania	45	31	+14
Spain	53	42	+11
Czech Republic	35	25	+10
Greece	63	55	+8
Austria	47	39	+8
United Kingdom	26	19	+7
Luxembourg	66	61	+5
Latvia	32	28	+4
Denmark	47	44	+3
Malta	50	49	+1
Sweden	48	48	0
Finland	59	59	0
Estonia	44	45	−1
Cyprus	49	75	−26

Figures in the first two columns correspond to the proportion of citizens who tend to trust the institution. Figures in the third column correspond to the trust advantage (+) or disadvantage (−) of the European Commission when compared to the national government.

Source: Compiled by the authors from Eurobarometer 61 (2004) data, Tables 4.1b and 8.4.

two of the three main advantages of experiments: (1) knowing what news participants are exposed to, and (2) being able to treat this news as exogenous because it is not due to self-selection. However, it relaxes the last traditional experimental assumption: obviously, respondents

Table 7.2. ***Compared trust in the European Parliament and national parliament***

Country	*European Parliament*	*National parliament*	*Difference*
Poland	53	8	+45
Slovakia	59	19	+40
Italy	68	32	+36
Hungary	64	29	+35
Slovenia	59	25	+34
Lithuania	52	19	+33
Belgium	64	38	+26
Czech Republic	44	18	+26
Ireland	64	40	+24
France	57	35	+22
Germany	51	29	+22
Portugal	58	37	+21
Spain	62	42	+20
Latvia	40	20	+20
Netherlands	57	43	+14
Estonia	49	35	+14
Luxembourg	67	56	+11
Malta	55	47	+8
Greece	70	63	+7
United Kingdom	30	25	+5
Finland	61	58	+3
Austria	43	41	+2
Sweden	55	58	−3
Denmark	55	63	−8
Cyprus	55	74	−19

Figures in the first two columns correspond to the proportion of citizens who tend to trust the institution. Figures in the third column correspond to the trust advantage (+) or disadvantage (−) of the European Commission when compared to the national government.

Source: Compiled by the authors from Eurobarometer 61 (2004) data, Tables 4.1b and 8.4.

were exposed to other news during the long experiment.[3] To limit this problem, respondents were randomly allocated into the four

[3] In traditional "one-shot" experiments, however, this advantage is always limited to the very short time of the experiment, without prejudice to what the

experimental groups and the sample used was as follows: (1) larger (i.e., 1,197 respondents) than in much of the literature[4]; (2) comparative, with respondents from six countries (i.e., the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, and Sweden); (3) significantly more diverse than in many experiments in terms of geography (i.e., at least four different regions per country), gender, age, and socioprofessional categories[5]; and (4) begun at two different times – two years apart[6] – in each location. All of these safeguards are intended to improve the validity and generalizability of the results. For instance, many experiments (perfectly legitimately) rely on limited locations (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Sanders and Norris 2005)

respondent might have heard, read, or seen just moments before and that may still influence their attitude (a variation on some of the criticisms of Hovland 1959). Moreover, many recent web-based (rather than laboratory-based) experiments such as those mentioned by Iyengar (2002) also have relaxed this particular assumption while gaining in terms of sample size and design quality.

[4] There are obvious exceptions: for example, Sanders and Norris (2005) used an N of 919 and quota sampling. However, most political science experiments use a small N, between 25 and 250 respondents; for example, Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder 1982; Wittmer 1992; Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997.

[5] The experiment did not aim to use a fully representative sample because this is considered unnecessary in the literature. However, as it turned out, the sample – recruited from professional quota lists – was highly varied in sociodemographic terms. The gender balance is only slightly biased toward women: 58 percent and 42 percent men. The median age of the sample is 40, with a standard deviation of 16.8. The youngest respondent is 18 and the oldest is 89. The sample has a slight over-representation of young people: 27.3 percent were younger than 25 years old at the start of the experiment, 27 percent were between 25 and 39, 31.3 percent were between 40 and 59, and the remaining 14.4 percent were 60 and older. Geographical spread almost reflects census data, with all of the major regions of the six countries included represented, and an almost fair representation of communities of various sizes (with a slight bias toward larger cities). The representation of the various socioeconomic categories also almost mirrors census data but with an over-representation of students and wealthy social categories and an under-representation of unemployed citizens.

[6] The results of the experiments that began two years apart were fully similar; that is, the variable corresponding to the starting year, included as a control, has no statistically significant effect in any of the models tested. In addition to the questionnaires, the study included focus groups on what participants meant by Europe and European identity, their perception of the news they read, and photographs they were shown in the newsletter. The discussion also dealt with their perceptions of news on Europe in real life and EU symbols. They also were invited to react to the experiment, which was conceived as part of the debriefing exercise.

or even student samples.[7] By contrast, with our varied samples and six-country comparison, we can verify that any experimental effect is not an artifact of a microcosmic contextual reality. In other words, as explained herein, whereas numbers are too low to draw firm conclusions about comparative differences, similarities across very different contexts strengthen the value of hypothetical findings by validating them beyond context, as is traditional with most different systems designs (Campbell and Stanley 1963; Przeworski and Teune 1970). Similarly, the division of all experimental groups in each country into two subgroups exposed to the experiment at two different times was important to confirm that any observed effect would not be caused by a systematic impact of the specific news on Europe in a given period, particularly considering the six-month lag between the second and third waves of the survey. Like countries and sociodemographic background, timing can be used as a control variable in all models – and has no statistically significant impact in any of them, suggesting that the effects we identify are general rather than context-specific.

Mostly, this panel-study design – although more costly and more complex to organize than one-shot experiments – aimed to avoid the risk of measuring short-term reactions. Instead, data measure the answers of respondents (1) before the beginning of the experiment, (2) after the end of the twenty-four-month experiment, and (3) six months after the end of the experiment.[8] This also made it possible to distinguish between priming or sleeper effects in the causal links highlighted by the experiment. (See a full discussion of priming and sleeper-effect mechanisms in Bruter 2009 as well as references to the works of Roskos-Ewoldsen et al. 2002 and Hovland, Lumsdaine, and

[7] Sears 1986 criticized the dominant use of pure student samples (Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley 1997).

[8] There is no "exact science" behind either the twenty-four-month stimulus or the six-month lag, but it is conceived as (1) sufficient time to develop a consistent stimulus, and (2) comparable to uses in the literature. Indeed, Monroe (1978) conceived a two-year period as a natural basis to expect citizens to fully absorb economic information. Similarly, a six-month lag is rather traditional in panel studies. For instance, it is often used in the National Election Study in the United States (Markus 1982, in reference to the first two waves of the 1980 panel), and the British Election Study (CREST 1998, in reference to the panel waves between 1994 and 1997). It is also the "pivotal" lag used by Milavsky, Kessler, et al. (1997), who tested multiple wave gaps in their study of television and aggression.

Sheffield 1949, among others.) Briefly, priming happens when exposure to a given stimulus has an impact on subsequent perceptions (Roskos-Ewoldsen et al. 2002) – for example, when buying a specific car makes us notice the make more when we see another one on the street. Priming heightens the sensitivity of human beings to a specific stimulus over time, as if it provided a pair of infrared glasses that made us see specific objects that would not have been visible otherwise. By contrast, the sleeper effect is about an unusual effect of news that, instead of being strong at first and then declining over time, is muted or minored at first and then kicks in more strongly later. In other words, instead of having an immediate effect of communication that then progressively decays over more time elapses between exposure and reaction measure, the sleeper effect works as if a given stimulus were first "unripe" and ineffectual but, after a while, started acting strongly.

The experiment

After being randomly assigned to one of four experimental groups, each respondent received a fortnightly newsletter for twenty-four months. It was based on articles published in European daily and weekly newspapers and illustrated with drawings and photographs. The newsletter was four pages long. The first page focused on non-European international news (the same for all respondents). The fourth page included unusual news (again, the same for all respondents), such as the story of a man facing a camel in his garden in Alaska or the latest controversy on the real height of Mount Everest. The two intermediary pages represented the experimental stimulus per se. They included news on Europe and the EU, which was systematically either positive or negative, depending on the experimental group. The choice of positive or negative news respected a certain balance among economic, political and institutional, social, and other news, and between news on Europe and news on the EU.[9] Details on the types of news included are in Bruter (2009), but examples include an article on how the euro had strengthened against the dollar, which illustrates the good health of the EU economy (good news), or another article on how the strong euro was disadvantaging European exports (bad news); how the European manufacturer Airbus overtook the US Boeing Company as

[9] An additional smaller control group was sent a newsletter without news on Europe and without any photographs.

the world's leading manufacturer (good news), or how the A380 was suffering further production delays (bad news); and how European children had higher educational levels than their American counterparts (good news), or how they were less accomplished in math (bad news).

In addition to text, each newsletter included three photographs or (occasionally) drawings. Again, the respondents were divided orthogonally into two groups systematically exposed to one of two types of photographs: either symbols of Europe and the EU (e.g., a map of Europe, a European flag, or a passport) or placebo photographs (e.g., people and landscapes). The connotation of every item included in the newsletters (i.e., positive, negative, international and other news, and European and neutral photographs) was assessed blindly by three coders. Only the elements unanimously coded by all three researchers were used in the newsletters.

The questionnaires

The questionnaire was written in each language. It included two measures of general European identity, six measures of civic identity, and four measures of cultural identity (Bruter 2009).[10] The questionnaire also included control variables measuring levels of national, regional, and local identity, and – in the context of the pre-test questionnaire – support for and perceived benefits of EU integration, as well as demographic and political control variables (e.g., age, gender, and party preferences). The civic and cultural-identity variables were computed using factor analysis, the results of which are shown in Table 7.3.

Countries and respondents

The study was conducted before the 2004 enlargement, when the EU consisted of fifteen member states. The panel was conducted in six member states. This was not so much to find differences among the countries as it was to ensure the external validity of the experimental results across contexts. This is why our chapter does not discuss

[10] The concepts of civic and cultural identities are defined and discussed fully in Bruter (2005, 2009) and Bruter and Harrison (2012). Briefly, "civic identity" can be defined as our identity as a citizen and relationship to our political system, whereas "cultural identity" is a sense or higher relative closeness to people who belong to the polity than to those who do not.

Table 7.3. *Exploratory factor analysis of civic and cultural components of a European identity*

Extraction Component	Eigenvalue	% Variance	Cumulative% variance
1	4.69	46.9	46.5
2	1.88	18.8	65.8
3	0.84	8.4	74.2
...	...	...	...

Component matrix

	Unrotated solution		Rotated solution	
Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2
Civic 1	0.83	−0.29	0.88	0.05
Civic 2	0.82	−0.11	0.80	0.21
Civic 3	0.87	−0.26	0.90	0.09
Civic 4	0.84	0.02	0.77	0.33
Civic 5	0.76	−0.23	0.79	0.08
Civic 6	0.82	−0.24	0.85	0.09
Cultural 1	0.43	0.52	0.20	0.64
Cultural 2	0.20	0.75	−0.10	0.77
Cultural 3	0.44	0.50	0.22	0.63
Cultural 4	0.43	0.73	0.12	0.85

Notes: Results of an exploratory factor analysis of ten variables (six intended to measure the civic component of European identity and four to measure the cultural component). Results of the unrotated and rotated analyses are from using Varimax.

comparative univariate distributions but instead discusses the extent to which causal relationships are upheld across countries. Given the great variety of EU member states, even pre-2004, the study includes the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, and Sweden. These countries represent various "ages" of European integration: that is, founding members (France, Germany, and Belgium); and the 1973 (United Kingdom), 1986 (Portugal), and 1995 (Sweden) enlargements – as well as East Germany within the German sample.[11] This is important because some models (e.g., Bruter 2005; Hix 2005) claim that when a country joined the EU has an impact on public

[11] Tests of differences of causal results between the East and West German subsamples were run and proved insignificant.

attitudes toward integration. Moreover, the countries chosen include large (i.e., France, Germany, and the United Kingdom) and small (i.e., Belgium, Sweden, and Portugal) member states because some authors claim that small states have a different relationship to the EU (Thorhallsson 2000). The study also includes countries that are traditionally pro-European (i.e., Belgium, France, Portugal, and Germany) and Euroskeptic (i.e., the United Kingdom and Sweden). Finally, it includes relatively rich and relatively poor states.[12] In summary, we maximized variance to provide the harshest possible test of the general validity of the model.

The starting samples included approximately 200 respondents per country, for a total of 1,197. The return rates over the three waves were rather high for this type of study: 75.4 percent for wave 2 and 63.8 percent for wave 3, with no significant bias in the categories dropping out, despite a minimal incentive (i.e., a book voucher of about €3–4 [US$4–5], depending on the country). Return rates were slightly lower in Portugal. Despite the limited drop-out rates, country-specific analyses must be considered with extreme caution. The details of the recruitment, sampling, and representativeness of the groups are detailed in Bruter (2009). To summarize, it is well known that for experimental purposes, samples need not be representative (Brannigan 2004); however, this study, although making no exception, used diversified samples that ensured general sample balance in terms of gender, age, education levels, and so on. Full-randomization tests were conducted and showed no significant differences across groups. Tests also were performed that confirmed no significant differences in experimental effects across gender, social, and demographic groups. The only exception is age: younger and older citizens proved slightly more influenceable than other generations. Age and gender are included as control variables in all equations.

The effect of news and symbols on European identity over time

The specificity of our research design is twofold. First, it is related to the sheer length of the experiment. Second, it allows a "cooling-off" period of six months after the end of the experimental treatment, which enabled us to assess the continued effect of systematic exposure to good

[12] Moreover, the study includes three major players of European integration: France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (Van der Eijk and Franklin 1996).

or bad news about Europe on the European identity of citizens well after this exposure ceased. Our overall models included hypotheses regarding the effects of both symbols of European integration (which are expected to have a direct and accelerating effect on citizens' identity because respondents exposed to symbols of integration are primed to notice them in their natural environment) and other hypotheses on the effect of positive and negative news on Europe.

Hypotheses were tested that obeyed a double logic of time (in other words, how the effect of an identity stimulus is likely to apply or decay consciously under stimulation, or unconsciously, once stimulation is over) (see Bruter 2009) and components (i.e., following Bruter's 2005 empirical typology of self-expressed, civic and cultural components of identity, which is likely to be most affected by which type of stimulus). The result consisted of four hypotheses: good and bad news on Europe have an effect on levels of European identity (H1), particularly on its civic component (H1b); symbols of Europe and the EU have an impact of European identity (H2), particularly on its cultural component (H2b); symbols have an immediate effect, which then will amplify over time (H3); and news has a "time-bomb" effect – that is, no immediate effect but a strong effect post-lag (H4).

The hypotheses were tested using a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions. In total, six models were tested in which the dependent variables were general European identity at the end of the twenty-four-month experimental treatment (model 1); general European identity again, after a six-month gap without experimental treatment (model 2); civic European identity after the twenty-four-month experimental treatment (model 3); again after the additional six-month cooling-off period (model 4); and, finally, cultural European identity, again after twenty-four months and again after thirty months (models 5 and 6). OLS was used because it assesses the effects of the stimuli in a straightforward and rigorous way while fully controlling for pre-test levels of European identity, support for European integration, and various social and demographic variables such as gender and age. However, given existing debates in the literature, the models also were run using generalized least squares (GLS)[13] with entirely similar results

[13] There is significant debate in the literature about how a panel effect is best measured (e.g., Beck and Katz 1995; Hecock 2006). Here, there is no particular reason to suspect heteroscedastic error, particularly considering the split starting

and statistically significant variables. The regressions were run for the entire sample, with country dummies, and then within each country. Of course, it was signaled that country-specific regressions in particular had to be considered with caution because of the relatively limited number of cases.

In the context of this chapter, we do not focus on the effect of symbols of Europe on participants' European identity but rather look only at the model of news. However, because the effect of symbols was part of the models, we briefly mention that news on Europe has a strong effect on European identity, particularly on its cultural component (although it also has a statistically significant effect on the spontaneous expression of European identity). This effect occurs during the experimental phase but accelerates further in the six months that follow the end of the experimental treatment, thereby suggesting that respondents who are regularly exposed to EU symbols are effectively primed to notice them more in their natural environment.

The effect of positive and negative news about Europe

As described previously, hypothesis H2 stated that positive and negative news on Europe will affect European identity, particularly its civic component (H2b); whereas H4, which is grounded on a modified sleeper-effect theory (which would not be due to source-specific idiosyncrasies but rather to an attribute of the citizens – namely, cynicism), claimed that this effect will be delayed until after the lag that follows the end of the experiment. This hypothesis has significant implications for our understanding of the impact of political communication on increasingly cynical citizens. First, the panel-study experiment confirmed that, over time, news on Europe has an impact on the European identity of citizens. This effect is predominantly strong on the civic component of European identity, but news on Europe also affects general identity (Table 7.4). Cultural European identity is less influenced by good and bad news about Europe and the EU, although some of the

dates for each group in each country. However, because only three time points are included, to avoid any unnecessary methodological controversy, all of the models also were tested using a generalized estimating equations extension of GLS instead of OLS with full controls. The results were fully comparable with the same variables appearing as statistically significant and important in the two models.

Table 7.4. *Global impact of news and symbols at the end of the experiment and after the six-month lag*

	General identity				Civic identity				Cultural identity			
	t_{+24}		t_{+30}		t_{+24}		t_{+30}		t_{+24}		t_{+30}	
	b (s.e.)	β	b (s.e.)	β	b (s.e.)	β	b (s.e.)	β	b (s.e.)	β	b (s.e.)	β
News	0.05 (0.05)	0.03	0.79 (0.06)	0.35**	−0.15 (0.04)	−0.07**	0.98 (0.06)	0.49**	0.07 (0.06)	0.03	0.21 (0.06)	0.11*
Symbols	0.14 (0.05)	0.07**	0.28 (0.06)	0.13**	0.05 (0.04)	0.03	0.07 (0.06)	0.04	0.56 (0.06)	0.28**	1.01 (0.06)	0.51**
Age	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.05*	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.01	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.01	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.02	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.03
Gender	−0.11 (0.05)	−0.02	−0.33 (0.06)	−0.15**	0.09 (0.04)	0.04*	−0.11 (0.06)	−0.05	−0.10 (0.07)	0.05	−0.01 (0.06)	−0.01
Pro-EU	0.17 (0.03)	0.15**	0.29 (0.04)	0.27**	0.10 (0.02)	0.10**	0.26 (0.03)	0.27**	0.11 (0.03)	0.11**	0.17 (0.03)	0.18**
DV at t_0	0.63 (0.02)	0.67**	0.37 (0.03)	0.39**	0.69 (0.02)	0.72**	0.08 (0.03)	0.08	0.29 (0.03)	0.31**	0.18 (0.03)	0.20**
France	n.s.	n.s.	0.35 (0.10)	0.13**	n.s.	n.s.	0.61 (0.10)	0.24**	0.23 (0.11)	0.09*	n.s.	n.s.
Sweden	−0.22 (0.09)	−0.07*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	−0.40 (0.10)	−0.15**	n.s.	n.s.	−0.23 (0.11)	−0.09*
UK	n.s.	n.s.	0.26 (0.11)	0.09*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Constant	1.66 (0.15)		2.32 (0.19)		−0.07 (0.10)		−0.48 (0.14)		−0.16 (0.15)		−0.51 (0.15)	
R^2		0.62		0.46		0.67		0.46		0.25		0.37

Notes: Results are OLS regression coefficients, with standard error in brackets.

* Statistically significant at < 0.05; ** statistically significant at < 0.01.

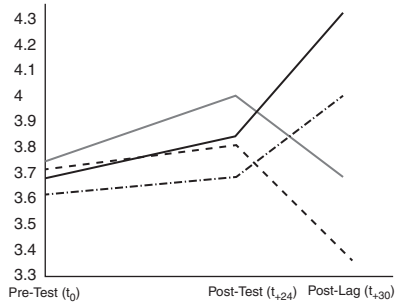
Country dummies were entered in the equation but only those that are statistically significant at 0.05 or better are shown. n.s. = non-significant. The omitted category for the country dummies is Germany. n = 902 (t_{+24}) and 761 (t_{+30}).

national subsamples (e.g., France and Portugal) show strong effects in the context of the third wave (Table 7.5C).

The more complex and interesting finding, however, is related to the modified sleeper-effect hypothesis, which confirms the subconscious – some would say insidious – effect of news on European identity. "Biased" good or bad news on Europe has virtually no effect on citizens' levels of European identity while they are being exposed to it, as illustrated by Figure 7.1. Instead, the unmistakable news effect becomes apparent only after some distance comes between the participants and the systematically connoted news that they were exposed to for two years. Therefore, it is during the months that follow the reception of the last newsletter that the level of European identity of citizens changes dramatically along the lines of the news to which they were exposed. Moreover, when the news becomes effective after the end of the experimental treatment, it is stronger than that of symbols and that of all the control variables (including the respondent's level of European identity prior to the beginning of the experiment and attitudes toward EU integration). By contrast, when the effect of news on the identity of citizens is measured immediately after the experimental treatment, it is virtually nonexistent overall. In a few countries (e.g., France and Portugal), a mild effect exists, but it is nowhere near the effect at t_{+30}. However, by contrast, when it comes to the British sample (with UK citizens being among the most cynical worldwide overall), the effect of news on European identity even appears to be negative (and statistically significant) at t_{+24}, as if respondents were trying to "counterbalance" the bias that constitutes the news they were exposed to in the newsletter (Tables 7.5A and 7.5B). In this context, we call particularly "cynical" those citizens who have a negative response to the news stimulus immediately after being exposed to it (i.e., those who feel less European at t_{+24} when they have been exposed to positive news or feel more European at t_{+30} when they have been exposed to negative news). For those cynical citizens, it is particularly interesting and relevant to see that the effect then is reversed (in the direction of the stimulus) at t_{+30}.

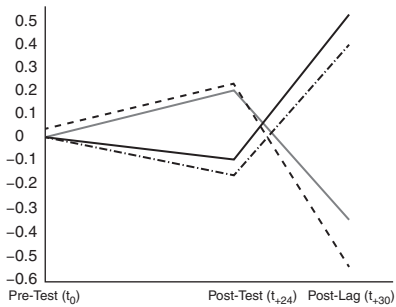
The three-wave panel-study design proves beyond a doubt that the ability of citizens to discount the bias of news on Europe at the time they are being exposed to it does not in any way mean that European citizens are globally immune to the influence of manipulative mass media. Far from it – by the time the last questionnaire was administered

(a) GENERAL



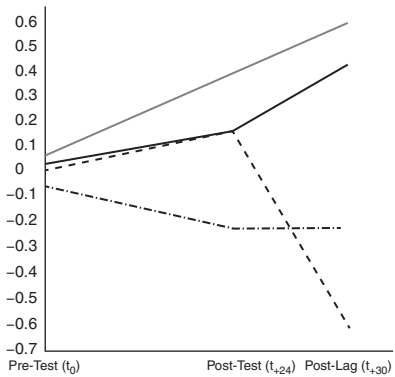
STIMULUS	Pre-Test (t_0)	Post-Test (t_{+24})	Post-Lag (t_{+30})
Negative News Placebo - - - -	3.75 (1.20)	3.80 (1.10)	3.36 (1.28)
Negative News Symbols ———	3.72 (0.96)	3.99 (0.88)	3.71 (1.10)
Positive News Placebo -·-·-	3.60 (1.10)	3.65 (1.13)	3.97 (1.02)
Positive News Symbols ———	3.65 (1.25)	3.83 (1.22)	4.28 (0.85)

(b) CIVIC



STIMULUS	Pre-Test (t_0)	Post-Test (t_{+24})	Post-Lag (t_{+30})
Negative News Placebo - - - -	0.07 (0.99)	0.24 (1.00)	−0.56 (1.03)
Negative News Symbols ———	0.01 (0.83)	0.15 (0.77)	−0.36 (1.06)
Positive News Placebo -·-·-	−0.01 (1.05)	−0.21 (1.07)	0.36 (0.81)
Positive News Symbols ———	−0.01 (1.09)	−0.09 (1.07)	0.47 (0.69)

(c) CULTURAL



STIMULUS	Pre-Test (t_0)	Post-Test (t_{+24})	Post-Lag (t_{+30})
Negative News Placebo - - - -	0.02 (1.14)	0.14 (1.00)	−0.68 (1.11)
Negative News Symbols ———	0.09 (0.97)	0.38 (0.92)	0.56 (0.71)
Positive News Placebo -·-·-	−0.05 (0.88)	−0.26 (0.91)	−0.28 (0.85)
Positive News Symbols ———	0.02 (0.95	0.13 (0.85)	0.39 (0.76)

Figure 7.1. Evolution of European identity over time.

Table 7.5. *The impact of news and symbols on European identity by country*

7.5A. General identity

		UK	France	Germany	Belgium	Sweden	Portugal
Wave 2	News	–0.12*	0.20*	–0.10	0.03	–0.12*	0.18**
	Symbols	0.02	0.08	0.24**	0.14	0.11*	0.11
	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	Control t_0	0.79**	0.38**	0.64**	0.35**	0.70**	0.79**
	R^2	0.80	0.40	0.52	0.45	0.84	0.62
Wave 3	News	0.35**	0.25*	0.29*	0.32**	0.75**	0.37**
	Symbols	0.11	0.12	0.22*	0.27**	0.29**	0.06
	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	Control t_0	0.54**	0.32**	0.60**	0.07	0.43**	0.38*
	R^2	0.42	0.44	0.37	0.47	0.58	0.49

7.5B. Civic identity

		UK	France	Germany	Belgium	Sweden	Portugal
Wave 2	News	–0.19**	–0.13	–0.06	–0.11	0.01	–0.02
	Symbols	–0.04	–0.05	0.34**	0.05	0.09	0.05
	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	Control t_0	0.80**	0.34**	0.64**	0.55**	0.92**	0.67**
	R^2	0.78	0.38	0.52	0.20	0.86	0.78
Wave 3	News	0.29*	0.21*	0.61**	0.57**	0.74**	0.49**
	Symbols	0.13	0.20*	0.18	–0.02	–0.12	0.05
	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	Control t_0	0.15	0.15	0.21	0.37**	–0.06	0.21
	R^2	0.16	0.34	0.50	0.61	0.60	0.56

7.5C. Cultural identity

		UK	France	Germany	Belgium	Sweden	Portugal
Wave 2	News	0.14	–0.02	–0.07	0.03	–0.08	0.16
	Symbols	0.21*	0.16	0.25*	0.29*	0.45**	0.21*
	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	Control t_0	0.44**	0.33**	0.36**	0.31**	–0.20	0.61**
	R^2	0.16	0.18	0.35	0.21	0.49	0.51
Wave 3	News	0.26	0.27*	–0.04	–0.10	–0.08	0.28*
	Symbols	0.32*	0.39**	0.57**	0.60**	0.67**	0.33**
	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
	Control t_0	0.28	0.31*	0.15	0.37**	–0.24*	0.41**
	R^2	0.13	0.36	0.44	0.71	0.70	0.49

Notes: Results are standardized OLS regression coefficients. * Statistically significant at < 0.05; ** statistically significant at < 0.01. N (first figure for wave 2, second figure for wave 3) for 7.5A, 7.5B, and 7.5C:

– United Kingdom (A: 150, 118; B: 148, 116; C: 147, 116)
– France (A: 181, 154; B: 181, 146; C: 169, 138)
– Germany (A: 146, 118; B: 130, 114; C: 126, 114)
– Belgium (A: 171, 136; B: 147, 132; C: 148, 131)
– Sweden (A: 128, 128; B: 128, 127; C: 128, 127)
– Portugal (A: 124, 108; B: 124, 104; C: 124, 104)

thirty months after the beginning of the experiment (at t_{+30}), good or bad news strongly influenced citizens' identity. This very strong effect – measured after the six-month clearing period that followed the end of the twenty-four months of exposure to the experimental stimulus (t_{+24}) – is, in fact, of a magnitude that only can serve to remind us of the ultimate power of political communication. This communication effect – stronger than ever – radically influences citizens' European identity in a way that sharply contrasts with the limited immediate impact of news that was measured at t_{+24}. Indeed, this effect at t_{+30} is even strong among the British and Swedish samples in which citizens originally showed high levels of resistance to what they read (see Tables 7.5A and 7.5B). In fact, the "time-bomb" finding underlines the fact that there is absolutely no contradiction between knowing that someone is trying to manipulate you and trying to resist such manipulation, on the one hand, and ultimately proving overwhelmingly influenced by it. Increasingly sophisticated and cynical citizens apparently may identify or even resist what they think of as biased news and discount journalistic manipulation while exposed to it. Nevertheless, on the other hand, they still show a genuine and significant subconscious vulnerability to this bias when they stop being directly confronted to the potentially manipulative news source (see Figures 7.1A and 7.1B). In other words, the "time-bomb" effect suggests that although citizens have learned that the media are not objective and may well have their own political agenda, this knowledge, which is efficiently operational at the time news is received, does not prevent the news from having an insidious effect, permeating the heart and mind of citizens over time.

As mentioned previously, the proof that cynicism toward the media does not equate to resistance to manipulation in the long term is shown in the Swedish sample, which proves to be most effective at resisting news effects at t_{+24} (indeed, a statistically significant negative effect) before transforming into the most strongly affected sample by news at t_{+30} (see Tables 7.5A and 7.5B). Even more generally, whereas news on Europe has a strong lagged effect on citizens' identity in every one of the six national groups, the lower the effect at t_{+24}, the higher it seems to be at t_{+30}. It is as if the harder citizens tried to "resist" manipulation, the more vulnerable to it they ultimately proved. Thus, the effect develops far more dramatically postexperimental treatment in the Swedish and British cases than elsewhere. In those cases, news

seemed to have a counterproductive effect at first but then a strong positive effect later. In the French sample, however, the barrier of cynicism is weaker at t_{+24}, and good and bad news matter immediately. Whereas it further accelerates later, its final impact is not as strong as in the British and Swedish groups. By and large, however, by t_{+30}, the case remains that the long-term effect of news on civic identity is nothing less than overwhelming. This proves that, ultimately, exposing citizens to regular good news on Europe makes them feel more European over time, whereas exposing them to the type of systematic bad news typically found in the British tabloids is a veritable "identity killer."

Of course, this does not mean that the European Commission simply could send a couple of pages of positive news on the EU every other week and get people to feel overwhelmingly European. Indeed, neither will exposing them to only negative news destroy the Europeanness in anyone. In particular, the most interesting aspect of the translation of our experimental findings into real-life situations is about what will happen to the "immediate cynicism discount" that we observe at t_{+24} for people who are consistently exposed to the same – positive or negative – type of news, and whether the rarity of news on Europe is enough to make this immediate discount irrelevant in real life.

Our strong measures of identity are probably significantly affected only by our experimental stimulus to the extent that, in all likelihood, after two years of intense information on Europe through the experiments, the participants were probably exposed to more news on Europe than the average European throughout an entire lifetime. In this sense, identity is not proven to be more malleable than expected by our findings. What the findings confirm, instead, is the scarcity of news on Europe in the current media landscape and the scope for impact of any potential genuine information on Europe (e.g., through civic education).

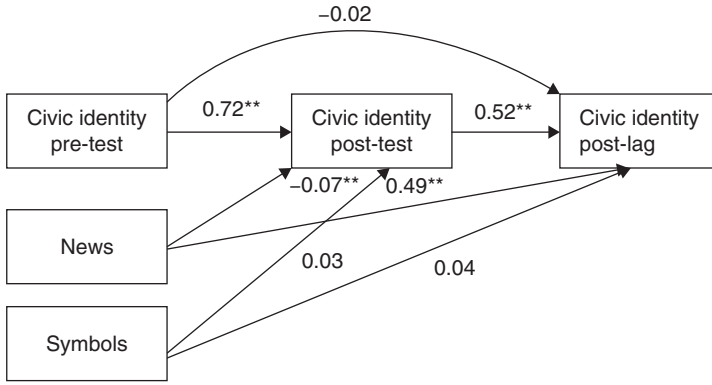
Cynicism, politicization, identity, and the public sphere

The "time-bomb" effect highlighted in this chapter poses in an unusual way the question of the relationship among the emergence of a European public sphere, the politicization of European politics, and the emergence of a mass European identity. Clearly, politicization can be dangerous, in that we found that, ultimately, a steady stream of

bad news on Europe can negatively affect the European identity of citizens – in particular, their civic identity that is most likely to result in a sense of civic duty and allegiance. Conversely, good news on Europe can significantly reinforce the European identity of citizens (this was not obvious as such because much of the political communication literature suggests that, in many respects, bad news frequently has more effect than good news). Even more important, it is unclear whether in the absence of politicization of Europe – and, therefore, of European news – any sense of identity would survive. Our recent work shows that across the EU, levels of European identity are high (see, e.g., Bruter and Harrison 2012, which presents the results of a three-wave time-series study on European identity with a first wave taking place in all twenty-seven member states of the EU with thirty thousand respondents and additional waves in eight member states). In fact, the levels are significantly higher than what has long been assumed by the discipline in the absence of large-scale ad hoc measures. If this is true, it suggests that the emerging collective identity of Europeans can survive the dangers of repeated negative news and instead use the politicization of Europe to anchor citizens' identity on genuine European areas of political contestation. Moreover, if the politicization of Europe is finally occurring and a genuine European public sphere is partly emerging (see Part I), this may be a consequence rather than a cause of a strengthening European identity. Journalists are not known to willingly sacrifice space to questions that do not interest their readers. So we must think of the full consequences of our findings on the case of Europeanized public spheres. We know that European integration is, by any standard, a regular focus of political discussion across national public spheres and occasionally across a Europeanized public sphere (e.g., in the context of the 2005 referenda on the EU Constitution or in the context of the Greek financial crisis). If our model suggests that discussion of polity-relevant political issues, whether positive or negative, is a sign of appropriation of a political system and therefore a sign of identity consolidation, then this is probably evidence that a European political identity has developed in its own right to create a demand for the treatment of such topics.

The relationship among public sphere, politicization, cynicism, and identity undoubtedly is complex and the ability of any actor – whether institutional, political, or individual – to proactively control any of these factors is extremely theoretical at the very least. There is,

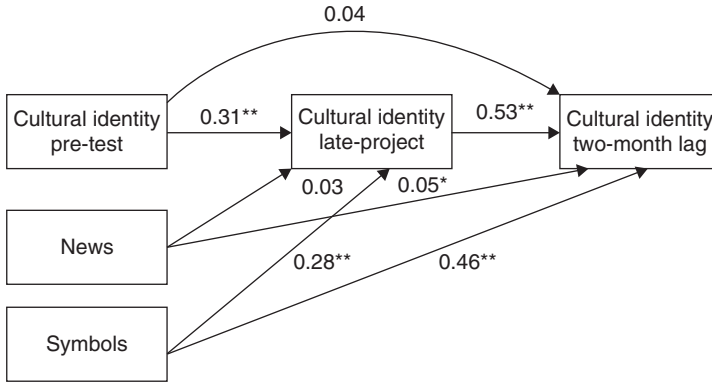
(a) Civic identity model



Valid N = 829 (t_{+24}), 740 (t_{+30})

Other controls included in the equation: age, sex, support for EU, country dummies

(b) Cultural identity model



N = 843, 732

Figure 7.2. Summary three-wave model.

however, little doubt that some underlying causal links are at stake and that, for instance, the existence of a European public sphere or absence thereof would have an impact on the dynamics of politicization experienced across the various EU member states. The likely shape of this dynamic causality is partly illustrated by the fully developed models of European civic and cultural identities over time (Figure 7.2(a) and 7.2(b)). These models deconstruct and distinguish how the immediate

and lagged effects of news on Europe and EU symbols combine to progressively affect identities. They also highlight how cultural identity (i.e., identification with a community) is more volatile than civic identity (i.e., identification with a political system) in the long run, which is a symbol of how entrenched the EU as a political system has become in the political identity maps of Europeans.

Our findings show how the sophistication of citizens and their vulnerability to manipulation paradoxically go hand in hand in our highly critical contemporary polities. When accused of influencing the public, many think that such an accusation is illogical insofar as sophisticated and cynical citizens will treat journalistic messages with a critical eye that immunizes them against manipulation. Instead, we show that even if British citizens effectively know that their mass media (and particularly tabloids) are globally Euroskeptic, this does not undermine the ability of the media to make British citizens feel significantly less European than others. Instead, the "time-bomb" effect suggests that the very sophistication and cynicism of modern-day citizens might well make them even more vulnerable to the influences to which they think they are immune. Moreover, the principle of news self-selection (Zaller 1992) hardly applies to the politicization of European integration because European coverage is most unlikely to constitute a strong basis for news-outlet selection (unlike the general conservative/liberal stance that Zaller predominantly considers in his work). Bias in European coverage often is nationally entrenched rather than splitting national media lines, which limits the ability of any citizen to select news according to the level of "euro-sympathy" of media sources in most cases.

Politicization is not so much a choice as a fatality and not so much a cause as a consequence. In the context of the current crisis, we are witnessing more debate about EU affairs and input than ever before. This debate, however, is a natural consequence of the European political system being integrated by citizens and being perceived as more relevant and "real" than ever before. The existence of a European public sphere that could channel the shape of European political debates into centrifugal directions – whereas its absence would likely result in an explosion of political fracture lines around communities – is key to the likely nature of the news to which various subcategories of EU citizens will be exposed. Therefore, according to our findings, it is the way this news will shape their identities. As such, in a context of necessary and

meaningful politicization, the convergence of national public spheres into a European public pattern will have a significant impact on the expression of political tensions that, in coming years, will continue to oppose determined Euroskeptics to ever-more integrated European citizens.