

## Chapter 5

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# Public Opinion

Theories of the Social Bases of Politics

End of the Permissive Consensus

Explaining Support for the EU at the National Level

Explaining Support for the EU at the Individual Level

Political Context Matters: the Role of Ideology, Parties, and the Media

Conclusion: from Consensus to Conflict?

Citizens' attitudes towards the European Union now matter. As the EU institutions have gained more powers and the policy agenda of the EU has expanded, the public has become more questioning. Europe's political leaders, at both the national and European levels, operate in a political environment where actions at the EU level are constrained by citizens' attitudes. Hence, understanding how citizens' attitudes towards the EU are formed is essential to understand both the possibility of further integration and the lines of political conflict in EU policy-making. We first discuss some general theories of people's attitudes towards politics, before looking at the patterns and determinants of attitudes towards the EU.

## Theories of the Social Bases of Politics

Each individual has a set of beliefs, opinions, values, and interests which shapes their attitude towards politics and the political process. These political 'preferences' often derive from deep historical or cultural identities, such as nationality, religion, or language. Political preferences also stem from economic interests, such as whether a policy will increase a person's income. Inevitably, different individuals and social groups have different preferences and this produces conflicts in the political process.

The 'cleavage model' of politics posits that political divisions derive from 'critical junctures' in the development of a political system (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). For example, at the national level in Europe, the democratic revolution in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries produced a conflict between church and state (between liberals and conservatives), and the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century divided workers and the owners of capital (between socialists and liberals/conservatives). Using the Lipset-Rokkan model to conceptualize

the social bases of politics at the European level, there are two main cleavages in EU politics: (a) national–territorial; and (b) transnational–socio-economic.

First, the combination of a common territory, history, mass culture, legal rights, and duties, and a national economy constitute a powerful force for individual attachment to the nation-state (Smith, 1991, p. 14). The EU is segmented along national lines: that is, between the EU member states, within which the bulk of individual social interactions and experiences take place and interests and identifications are formed (see Lijphart, 1977). This national–territorial cleavage emerges in EU politics when an issue on the agenda puts individuals from different nations on different sides of the debate, for example when one national group appears to gain at the expense of another.

Second, cross-cutting these national divisions are transnational interests. On certain issues a group of citizens in one nation-state may have more in common with a similar group in another nation-state than with the rest of society in their own nation-state. For example, Danish and Hungarian farmers have a common interest in defending the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) against the interests of Danish and Hungarian consumers. Transnational cleavages can be mobilized around traditional social divisions, such as class, but can also emerge around newer ‘issue divisions’, such as post-materialism, age, education, and information. These transnational divisions tend to be less salient in EU politics than national divisions, but they become increasingly important when the EU agenda shifts to questions of economic redistribution between functional rather than territorial groups (such as EU labour market policies) and questions of social and political values (such as EU environmental policies).

These ideas explain why different countries and social groups have different interests in EU politics, but they do not explain how these attitudes change over time. For this, David Easton’s (1965, 1975) theory of ‘affective’ and ‘utilitarian’ support for political institutions is useful. Affective support is an ideological or non-material attachment to a political institution, while utilitarian support is the belief that the institution promotes an individual’s economic or political interests. Rather than seeing these two types of support as competing or contradictory, Easton saw them as related. His idea was that a citizen’s affective support for an institution provides a basic reservoir of goodwill towards a set of institutions. Some citizens have a high reservoir of affective support, while others have a low level. If a citizen then perceives that an institution promotes (acts against) her material interests or policy preferences, this basic level of support will go up (down). Hence, utilitarian cost–benefit calculations determine whether the underlying ideological level of support goes up or down over time. This process can operate at both the national and individual level, explaining how countries’ and individuals’ support for the EU changes over time.

This chapter starts by plotting the general pattern of support for European integration over time. It then looks at what factors explain variations in support for the EU, first across member states, then at the level of individual citizens, and then how the national political context shapes individual-level attitudes towards the EU and its policies.

## **End of the Permissive Consensus**

According to Lindberg and Scheingold (1970), following the signing of the Treaties of Paris and Rome, there was a ‘permissive consensus’ among European citizens in favour of European integration. This term came from V.O. Key (1961), who had used it to describe support by the American public for certain government actions, particularly in foreign affairs. On the whole, on foreign policy issues citizens tended to have the same opinions and hence were willing to trust the government to get on with business, without questioning too much, regardless of the political colour of the government of the day. The same phenomenon was apparent among the publics of the founding members of the European Communities. As Inglehart (1970b, p. 773) explained:

There was a favourable prevailing attitude toward the subject, but it was of low salience as a political issue – leaving national decision-makers free to take steps favourable to integration if they wished but also leaving them a wide liberty of choice.

In other words, most people in Europe were either not interested in European integration, and therefore had no opinion about their government’s actions on the issue, or generally supported their government’s efforts to promote further integration.

These ideas could not be tested without survey data. Since 1973 the European Commission has commissioned Europe-wide opinion polls every six months, conducted by private polling agencies in each member state and involving a sample of approximately 1,000 interviewees in each country. These Eurobarometer surveys provide a large dataset for the study of citizens’ attitudes towards European integration, among other things. As with national governments and national opinion polls, the European Commission, the EU governments, the MEPs, and perhaps even the judges in the ECJ study these polls carefully to gauge the level of support for or opposition towards further EU integration or specific EU policies.

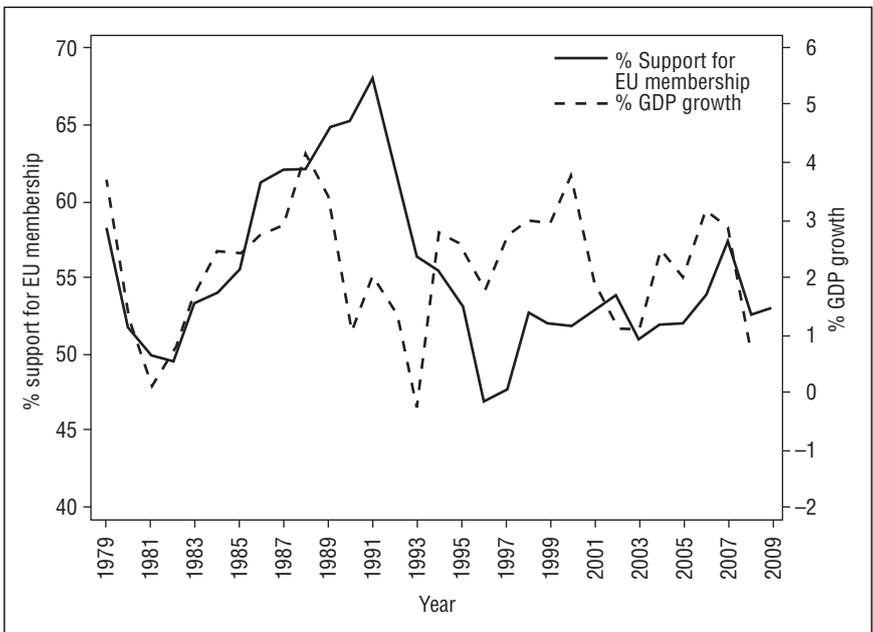
One question which has been asked in all Eurobarometer surveys is about a person’s attitude towards his or her country’s membership of the EU, as follows:

Generally speaking, do you think [your country's] membership of the Common Market/European Community/ European Union is a 'good thing', a 'bad thing', 'neither good nor bad', 'don't know'.

This is a simple question for citizens to understand, and is probably a more accurate barometer of attitudes towards the EU than some of the more abstract questions in the Eurobarometer surveys, such as the questions about support for European integration, or whether a person has a European identity.

As the solid line in Figure 5.1 shows, in the early 1980s just over 50 per cent of citizens were in favour of their country's membership of the then 'European Communities'. Throughout the 1980s support for European integration rose steadily, perhaps as a result of public interest in, and enthusiasm for, the '1992 programme' – the project of completing the single market by the end of 1992 (Inglehart and Reif, 1991; see also Chapter 8). Up to this point, it appeared that support for European integration was a 'fair-weather phenomenon': support rose in economic good times and declined in bad times (see Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993). The average annual economic growth rate is also plotted in Figure 5.1, and seems to follow a similar pattern to support for EU membership until

Figure 5.1 *Public support for European integration and economic growth*



Source: Calculated from Standard Eurobarometer polls and Eurostat data.

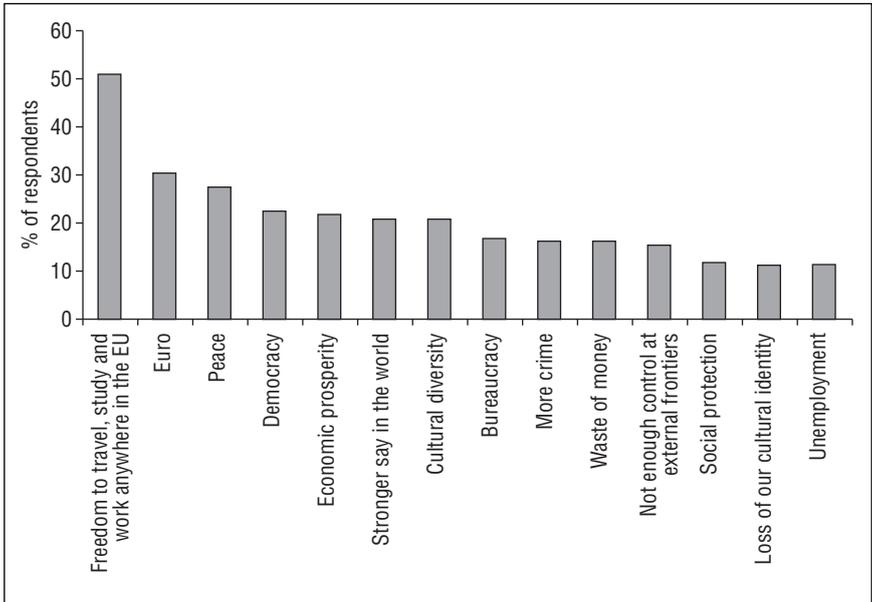
the late 1980s. This made sense, since until the Single European Act European integration largely meant ‘economic integration’ for most people in Europe.

Something happened in the early 1990s, however. Support for the EU peaked in 1991, with 71 per cent being in favour of their country’s membership of the EU, and then declined rapidly after that, and has remain at a relatively low level since then – just above 50 per cent.

Widespread opposition to the EU first emerged during the process of ratifying the Maastricht Treaty, in 1992 to 1993, in the wake of referendums in France, Denmark, and Ireland, the defeat of the government in the British House of Commons on the Maastricht Treaty bill, and a Constitutional Court challenge in Germany. This opposition continued in the form of votes for anti-European parties in the 1994 European Parliament elections, in the 1994 referendums on EU membership in Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Norway, and in the European Parliament elections in 1995 and 1996 in Austria, Sweden, and Finland. Anti-EU sentiment then continued throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, culminating in the defeat of the proposed EU Constitution in referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005 and the defeat of the Lisbon Treaty in a referendum in Ireland in 2008.

Part of the collapse in support for European integration in the early 1990s can be attributed to changing geopolitical relations in Europe, as a result of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany. However, another element is that with the Maastricht Treaty, the ‘European Union’ was now clearly something more than just economic integration. For the first time, many citizens now paid attention to what was happening in Brussels and started to question whether they agreed with everything their governments were doing in their name. For example, as Figure 5.2 shows, when asked what the EU means to people they name a wide variety of economic as well as political factors. By far the most commonly mentioned issue in 2008 was the individual freedom to travel, study, and work in the EU, as a result of the free movement of persons in the single market. The second most commonly mentioned issue was ‘the euro’. However, significant proportions of people also associate the EU with non-economic issues such as peace, democracy, having a stronger voice in the world, cultural diversity, bureaucracy, crime, a waste of money, not enough control of external borders, social protection, and a loss of cultural identity.

If a permissive consensus existed in the first few decades of European integration, as a result of the perceived benign economic benefits of European integration, it certainly no longer exists today. As Franklin *et al.* (1994) elegantly put it: the anti-European ‘bottle’ has been ‘uncorked’. Citizens are now more aware of policies and events at the European level, and their attitudes towards the EU and its policies are now influenced by a range of economic as well as political factors, and

Figure 5.2 *What the EU means to citizens*

Source: Calculated from Eurobarometer 69.2 (March–May 2008) data.

Note: The survey question was: ‘What does the European Union mean to you personally?’ (Multiple answers possible).’

these attitudes shape the way governments, Commissioners, MEPs, and ECJ justices behave when making decisions at the European level (see Hooghe and Marks, 2009).

## Explaining Support for the EU at the National Level

Citizens in Latvia, the United Kingdom, Austria, and Hungary tend to show the lowest levels of support for the EU in recent Eurobarometer polls, with only 30 to 40 per cent of respondents in these countries saying that they support their country’s membership of the EU. At the other end of the scale, citizens in Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Ireland, Belgium, Spain, and Denmark tend to show the highest levels of support for EU membership, in the 65 to 80 per cent range. The remaining 15 member states have levels of support in the 40 to 65 per cent range. Moreover, it is worth remembering that two of the more pro-European states have had referendums in the last five years where a majority of their citizens voted against an EU Treaty: the Netherlands on the EU constitution in 2005, and Ireland on the Lisbon Treaty in 2008. So, even a high level of

popular support for the EU does not guarantee that a public will support everything their government does in Brussels in their name.

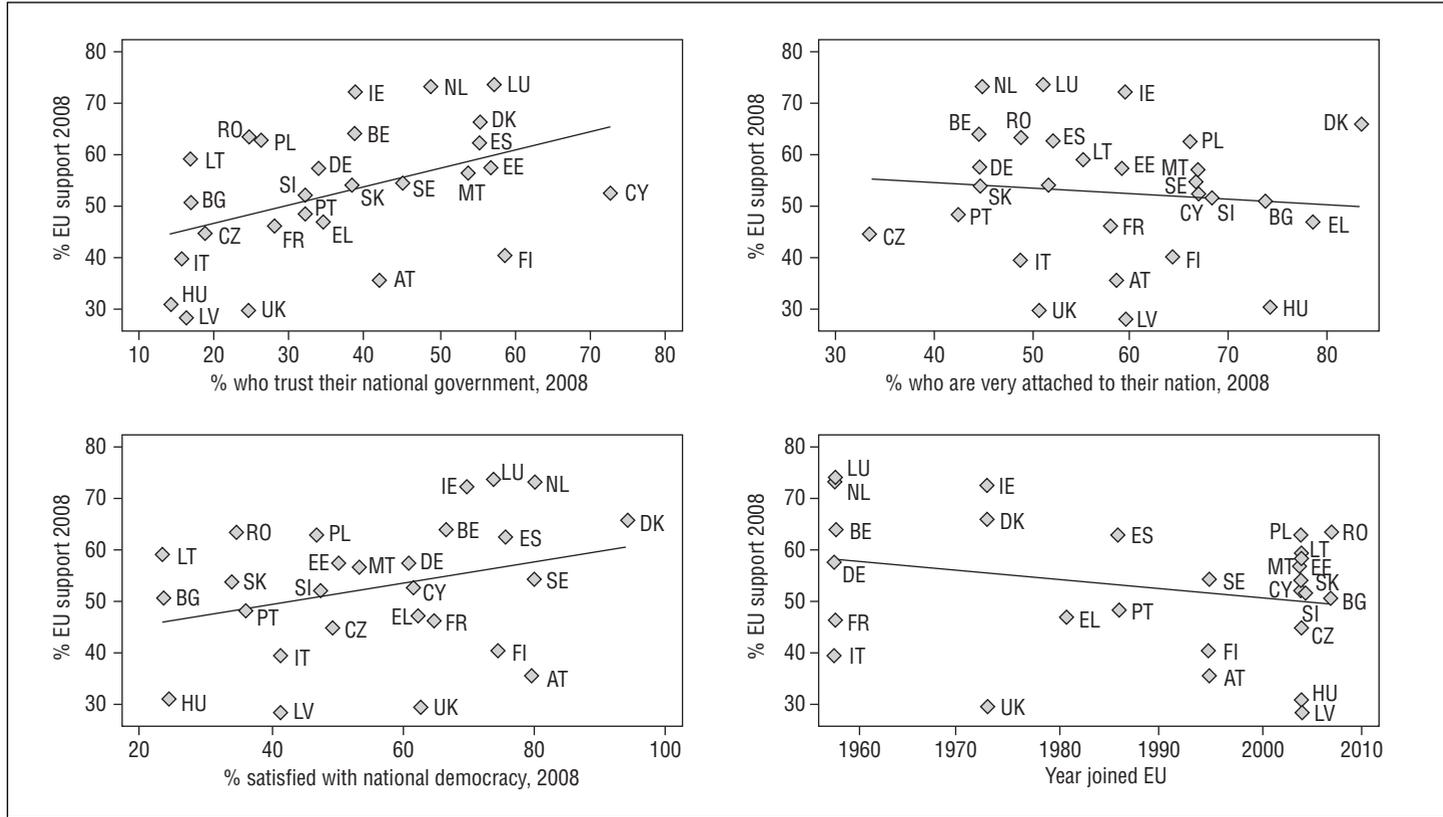
There are a wide range of interests and traditions that differ across the nation-states of Europe which could explain these national-level variations. These include:

- *Political differences*, such as weak versus strong national identities, Catholic versus Protestant, North versus South, East versus West, long versus short democratic traditions, majoritarian versus consensual systems of government, liberal versus social/Christian democratic welfare states, and liberal versus coordinated versions of capitalism (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hall and Soskice, 2001; Lijphart, 1984; Rokkan, 1973).
- *Economic differences*, such as rich versus poor, exporters versus importers, industrial versus agricultural, services versus manufacturing, high versus low unemployment, large- versus small-income inequalities, energy producers versus energy consumers, high versus low levels of public debt, and so on (Cole and Cole 1997; Gourevitch, 1989; Krugman, 1991).

Figure 5.3 illustrates the relationship between some of these political factors and national levels of support for EU membership, using survey data from spring 2008. Citizens in countries with high levels of trust in their national governments tend to be more pro-EU than citizens in countries with lower levels of trust in their governments. Similarly, higher levels of satisfaction with national democracy go hand in hand with support for the EU. Interestingly, the perception is often the reverse: that people in countries with untrustworthy politicians or failing national institutions are thought to support the EU because they trust the EU more than their national leaders. For example, concerns about a ‘democratic deficit’ at the European level have had a larger impact on support for the EU in countries with strong democratic institutions (Rohrschneider, 2002). However, strong democratic institutions can also shape citizens’ attitudes to the EU, in that citizens who trust what their national leaders are doing in Brussels are more likely to support European integration.

In contrast, there is no relationship these days between the length of EU membership and support for the EU. The citizens of the original member states were neither clearly pro- nor anti-European in the 1950s, but there was a high level of trust between these societies and a sense of community (Inglehart, 1991; Niedermayer, 1995). This allowed the national elites to begin the process of European integration. Building on this, the integration process had a socializing effect as the citizens grew used to the idea of integration and were more willing to accept its consequences, which led to increased support for the project (Anderson and Kaltenthaler, 1996). Consequently, in the Eurobarometer polls in the

Figure 5.3 *Some political determinants of national-level support for the EU*



Source: Calculated from Eurobarometer 69.2 (March–May 2008) data.

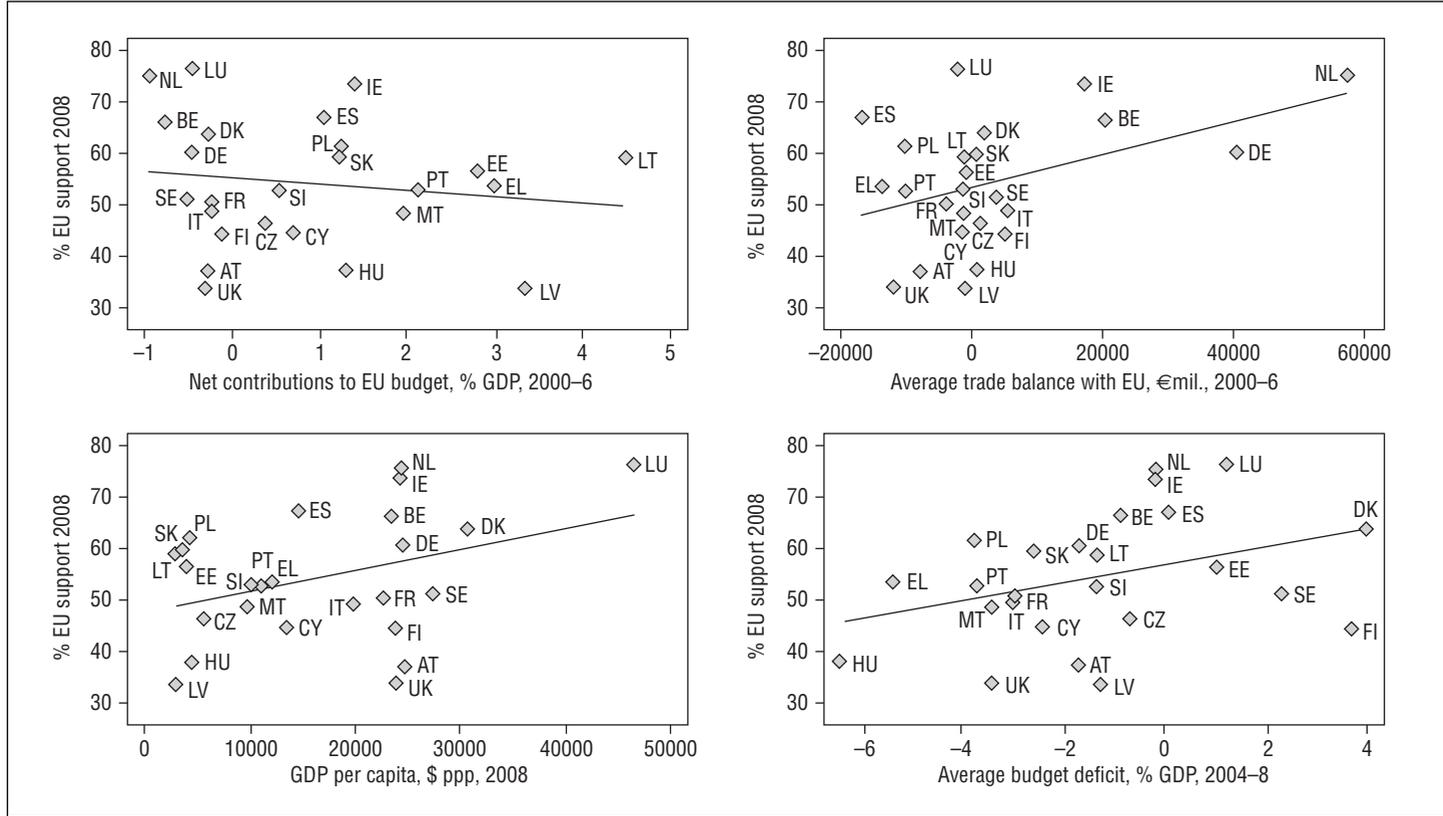
1980s the citizens of the ‘original six’ – Germany, France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg – were on average more supportive of European integration than the citizens in the states which joined later – Ireland, Denmark and the UK (in 1973), Greece (in 1981), Spain and Portugal (in 1987), and Austria, Sweden, and Finland (in 1995). However, the effect of the length of membership has now disappeared. In 2008 there was considerable divergence in attitudes towards the EU among the ‘original six’ member states, among the nine states who joined between 1973 and 1995, and among the ‘new 12’ who joined in 2004 and 2007.

Also, at the aggregate level there does not appear to be any relationship between attachment to the nation and support for the EU. Some countries with strong national attachments, such as Denmark, have high levels of support for the EU, whereas other countries with strong national attachments, such as Hungary, tend to be more opposed to the EU. Attachment to one’s country may be positively or negatively related to support for the EU, depending on whether European integration is perceived to strengthen or weaken a country’s national identity (Diez Medrano and Gutiérrez, 2001; Schild, 2001) or its national political or policy-making institutions (Martinotti and Stefanizzi, 1995; van Keesbergen, 2000). So, for example, some Danish citizens feel that European integration has not undermined Danish identity and instead has enabled Denmark to play a more prominent role on the European and international stage.

Having seen that political differences are not fully capable of explaining different national levels of support for the EU, do economic differences do any better? Figure 5.4 illustrates the relationship between some economic factors and national-level support for the EU, also from the spring 2008 surveys. As citizens have learned more about the EU they have become more aware of how much their country stands to gain or lose economically from European integration or particular EU policies. One issue is whether a national economy has gained or lost from trade liberalization through the EU single market (Anderson and Reichert, 1996; Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Gabel and Palmer, 1995; see also Chapter 8). Richer countries tend to be slightly more pro-European than poorer countries, perhaps revealing that citizens in richer countries feel that they are gaining more from economic integration in Europe. Countries which are net exporters to the rest of the EU tend to be more supportive of the EU than countries which are large net importers. If a country imports more than it exports from the rest of the EU, then European economic integration is likely to lead to increased competition for domestic goods and services providers, whereas if the reverse is the case, then national producers are likely to feel that they benefit from economic integration in Europe.

Regarding public finances, countries with higher budget deficits tend to be more supportive of the EU than countries with lower public deficits.

Figure 5.4 *Some economic factors and national-level support for the EU*



Source: Calculated from Eurobarometer 69.2 (March–May 2008) and Eurostat data.

This perhaps suggests that citizens in high-borrowing states favour economic integration in Europe as a way of constraining profligate politicians.

Nevertheless, as with the political factors, none of these relationships are particularly strong at explaining variations in national levels of support for the EU. For example, there does not seem to be a clear relationship between contributions to the EU budget and support for the EU, with some net contributors (such as the Netherlands and Belgium) being strongly pro-European and other net contributors (such as the United Kingdom and Austria) being less pro-European.

However, economic factors do explain some of the variation over time in the levels of support for European integration among the original member states and the states that joined later (see Gabel, 1998; Gabel and Whitten, 1997). For example, the German and Dutch economies benefit hugely from the single market because these states are large net exporters to the rest of the EU, but the citizens of Germany and the Netherlands have become increasingly aware that they are also the major contributors to the EU budget, which has led to declining levels of support for the EU in these states in recent years. Conversely, between the early 1980s and early 1990s the citizens of Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, and Italy, whose national economies benefited from EU cohesion policies, saw significant increases in their support for the EU. In addition, the economic boom in Ireland in the 1990s was fuelled by foreign direct investment, attracted by Ireland's integration with and relative competitiveness in the wider European single market. When Ireland and Britain joined the EU in 1973 they had similar levels of support for the EU. By the mid-2000s, however, Ireland had become one of the most pro-European countries in Europe, largely as a result of the direct economic benefits to Ireland from EU membership, while Britain remained one of the most anti-European, where many citizens do not identify specific economic benefits from EU membership.

## **Explaining Support for the EU at the Individual Level**

Part of the reason that variations in the national levels of support or difficult to explain is that the real story is at the individual level. The process of economic integration in Europe affects individuals' economic interests in a variety of ways (Gabel, 1998). First, the introduction of free movement of goods in the single market has presented opportunities for citizens connected with export-oriented manufacturing and service industries in the private sector. Entrepreneurs, business owners and company directors can now market their products elsewhere in the EU, and reap economies of scale from a higher turnover. On the other hand, trade liberalization has brought new competition for sectors that are

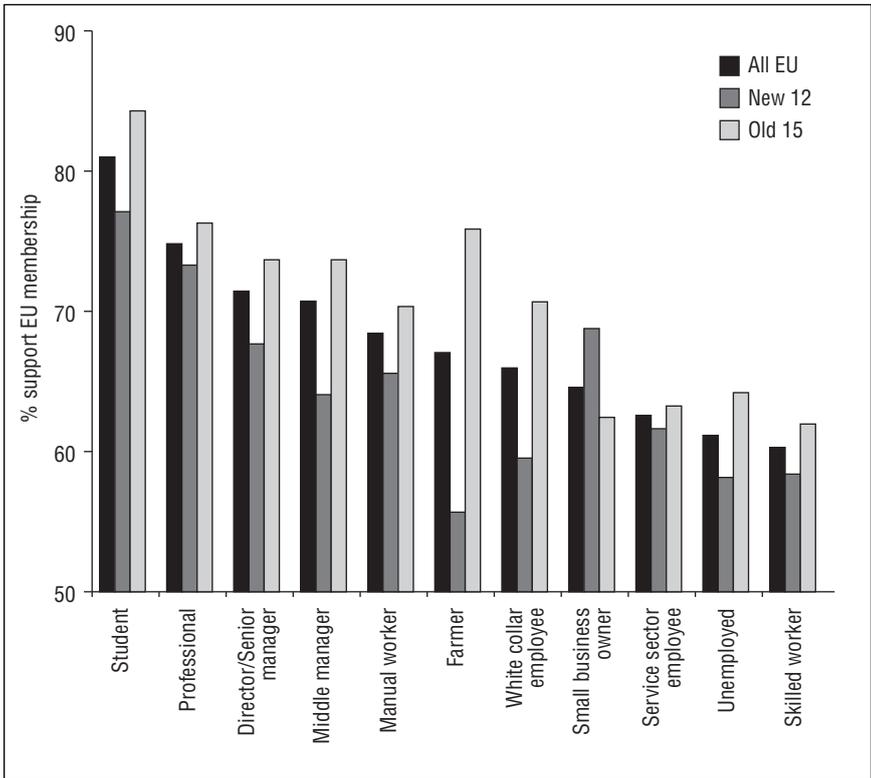
either non-tradable (such as the public sector), or cater to national markets (for example small businesses in the retail sector) or compete with imported goods (such as local manufacturers). Furthermore, EU state aid policies have presented new challenges to jobs in industries that rely on government subsidies or protectionist trade policies (see Frieden, 1991; Smith and Wanke, 1993).

Second, the free movement of capital and the single currency have created new investment opportunities for citizens with capital to invest. Capital liberalization has also led to cross-border competition for investments. Skilled workers attract investment by offering advanced skills, while manual workers attract investment by offering lower wages. Consequently, capital liberalization has increased the opportunity of low-wage manual workers (in Eastern Europe, for example) to attract investment, but threatens manual workers in high-wage regions (primarily in Western Europe) who might become victims of capital flight. Also, the fiscal policy rules of EMU have forced governments to restrict their public expenditure, thus threatening welfare programmes that support low-income citizens and the unemployed (see Chapter 10).

Third, the free movement of persons has increased competition for jobs in all sectors of the economy, as citizens move between member states to seek better economic opportunities. Citizens with considerable human capital, such as a high level of education and employment in professional or management positions, are likely to see this as a chance to improve their status. On the other hand, low-skilled manual workers in Western Europe are likely to see it as threatening their jobs, as immigrants from other EU countries (mainly from Eastern Europe) move to other states, and so suppress wages for some low-skilled sectors of the economy (in the service sector, for example).

Fourth, the CAP is the only clearly distributive EU policy (see Chapter 9). The benefits of CAP subsidies are concentrated on farmers, whereas the costs are spread among all EU taxpayers and consumers. However, some farmers benefit from the CAP more than others. In general, farmers with high incomes, particularly in Western Europe, are likely to perceive that the CAP helps them to secure markets for their products and subsidizes their production, whereas farmers with low incomes are likely to perceive that the CAP does not benefit them.

Figure 5.5 consequently shows attitudes towards EU membership in 2009 by social group and whether a person is from an old 15- or a new 12-member state. In general, social groups with high incomes and high-skill levels are more supportive of the EU than social groups with lower incomes and lower-skill levels. Professionals (such as doctors, lawyers, accountants, architects, and university professors!), with highly mobile skills in the single market are most supportive of integration, as are company directors and senior managers, who can benefit from new profit opportunities.

Figure 5.5 *Social group and EU support*

Source: Calculated from Eurobarometer 71.1 (January–February 2009) data.

In contrast, white-collar employees (who make up 15 per cent of EU citizens) are less supportive of the EU, as are small business owners, who are predominantly in non-tradable sectors, and so face more competition in the single market. Similarly, skilled workers and workers in the service sector (who together comprise over 20 per cent of EU citizens) are also less favourably disposed towards European integration. These groups of workers are the most threatened by the free movement of labour, which creates more competition for relatively low-skilled jobs. In contrast, manual workers, who are mainly in manufacturing jobs, are the most supportive of EU membership among the lower-skilled social groups, perhaps as they feel protected from labour market competition by restrictive hiring-and-firing practices in many manufacturing contracts.

Of the two social groups in Figure 5.5 which are not active in the labour market, students are highly supportive of integration, while the unemployed are far more sceptical. In addition to students' immediate opportunities for subsidized education elsewhere in the EU, through such

programmes as Erasmus and Socrates, many students aspire to enter the professions or take up senior management positions, and hence their attitudes are similar to those held by these social groups. At the other end of the social spectrum, the unemployed may have lost their jobs as a result of competitive pressures in the single market or government cutbacks to meet the convergence criteria for EMU, and also face more competition for jobs in the labour market.

When comparing the attitudes of social groups in the old 15 and new 12 member states, on average within a social group, citizens in the old 15 states are more supportive of EU membership than citizens in the new 12. This could reflect socialization, as a result of a longer history of membership of the EU. However, it might also reflect the fact that within each social group, citizens in the old 15 are on average more highly paid than comparable people in the new 12, and so can benefit more from the freer circulation of goods, services, and labour in Europe's single market.

When comparing attitudes in the two groups of member states, two social groups are particularly interesting. First, the biggest difference in support levels between the old and new member states is among farmers: with farmers in the old 15 showing very strong support for EU membership while farmers in the new 12 showing very low levels of support. This clearly reflects the effect of EU agricultural subsidies via the CAP, which farmers in the old 15 states have directly benefited from for many decades, while farmers in the new 12 states may feel that they have not done as well out of the CAP as they expected, as a result of the budgetary bargain that was struck between the old and new member states in the enlargement negotiations.

Second, owners of small businesses in the new 12 states are more supportive of the EU than owners of small businesses in the old 15 states. In fact, this is the only social group where support is higher in the new member states than in the old member states. This perhaps reflects the new market opportunities for small businesses in the new member states, either to attract capital investment or to seek to expand their businesses. In contrast, small businesses in the old member states, who are mainly providing goods and services for domestic markets, face more competition in their sectors as a result of economic integration in Europe and EU enlargement.

Social group is, of course, not the only significant division between individual citizens in Europe. Indeed, since the 1960s, social class has declined as an indicator of general political attitudes. For example 'class voting', whereby working classes vote for socialist parties and middle classes vote for liberal, Christian or conservative parties, has declined throughout Europe (Dalton, 1988; Franklin, 1992). Class identity has also eroded as different patterns of production, consumption, and educational and life experiences have produced new and cross-cutting socio-economic attitudes, interests and values (Bell, 1960; Dahrendorf, 1959). These social

changes, together with economic prosperity and peace, led Ronald Inglehart (1977a) to argue that a 'silent revolution' had taken place in advanced industrial societies: whereby class-based materialist values of economic and political security were being replaced through generational-change by post-materialist values, such as environmentalism, women's and minorities' rights, democratic participation, and nuclear disarmament.

Applying his theory of post-materialism to European integration, Inglehart (1977b, p. 151) argued that:

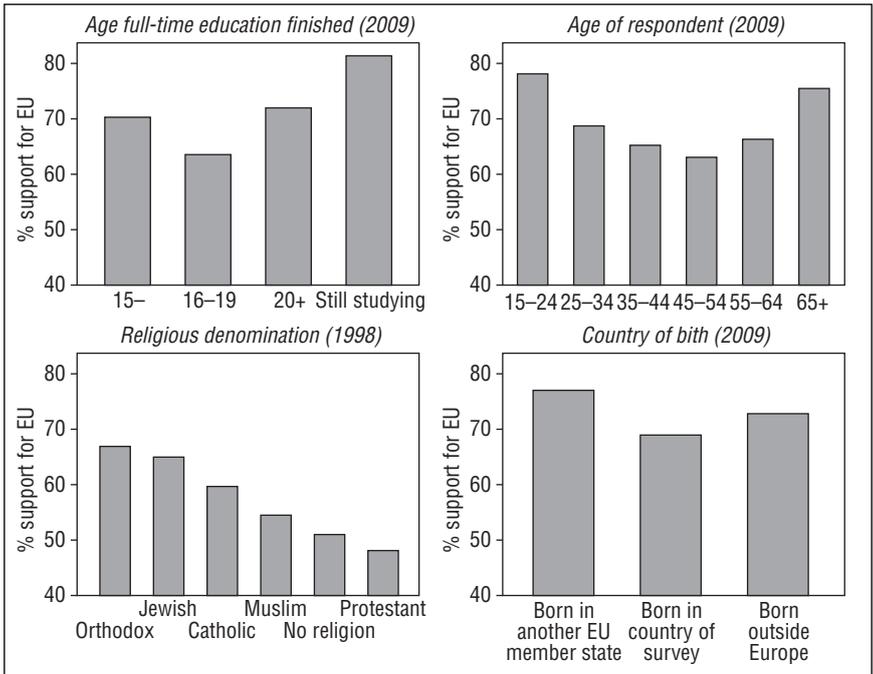
we would expect post-materialists to have a significantly less parochial and more cosmopolitan outlook than materialists ... First, the post-materialists are less pre-occupied with immediate concrete needs than are materialists; other things being equal they should have more psychic energy to invest in relatively remote abstractions such as the European Community. Moreover ... the relative priority accorded to national security has fallen ... [hence] one of the key symbols of nationalism has lost much of its potency – especially among post-materialists.

Because Inglehart expected that younger-age cohorts would be more post-materialist, he proposed that support for European integration should be stronger among younger people (Inglehart, 1970b, 1977b). He also developed several related hypotheses: for example that individuals with greater cognitive skills, as a result of higher levels of education, are more able to understand the abstract process of European integration (Inglehart, 1970a; Inglehart and Rabier, 1978; Janssen, 1991). The opposite might also be the case, however, in that the more someone understands the process of European integration the more they might realize that they personally do not benefit or perhaps even lose from this process.

There are other non-economic factors which might play a role at the individual level. One such factor is religion. As Nelson and Guth (2003, p. 89) explain:

The very idea of a united Europe reaches back to early medieval conceptions of Christendom united under the spiritual and temporal authority of the Roman pontiff. Moreover, integration in the postwar period was largely a Christian Democratic project led by Catholic politicians – such as Konrad Adenauer, Robert Schuman and Alcide de Gasperi – who enjoyed unwavering support from the church hierarchy. On the other side of the Reformation divide, Protestant politicians in Britain and Scandinavia feared joining a European project dominated by 'wine-drinking Catholics'.

And what about the other major religions in Europe: Orthodox Christianity, Islam, and Judaism? In contrast to the national churches of

**Figure 5.6** *Education, age, migration, and religion and EU support*

*Source:* Calculated from Eurobarometer 71.1 (January–February 2009) data, for the education, age, and migration questions, and Eurobarometer 50.0 (autumn 1998) data, for the religious denomination question.

the Protestant faith, these other faiths are based on transnational religious organizations and identities, as is Catholicism, and might hence be considered to be anti-nation-state in their ideologies.

Figure 5.6 consequently illustrates the effects of some of these non-economic factors on support for the EU. As Inglehart predicted, below the age of 55, age seems to be negatively related to support for the EU: the older a person is, the less likely she is to support the EU. Interestingly, though, people in the 55 to 64 and 65+ age groups are more supportive of the EU than people in the 45 to 54 age group. This is probably because people in these older age groups more closely relate European integration to peace and the prevention of war than the younger generations, all of whom were born after the Second World War and so might see the EU as primarily an economic project.

Regarding education and support for the EU, people with university degrees are significantly more supportive of the EU than people with only secondary school education. It is impossible to know before whether this effect is due to higher cognitive skills, as Inglehart predicted, or whether it is due to the fact that people with university degrees have more social

and economic capital that they can trade in the single market. Somewhat surprisingly, people who left school before 15 are more supportive of the EU than people who completed secondary school. However, this is probably a result of the fact that most people who left school before 15 are in the older generational groups (since the expansion of education in the 1960s fewer people left school at such a young age) and the older generations are more supportive of the EU.

Inglehart (1977b) concluded that his theory would bode well for European integration, as successive generations and higher levels of education would lead to greater support for European integration. However, the opposite has happened. Despite an increasing proportion of every generational cohort going to university, support for the EU has declined since the early 1990s rather than increased. Also, rather than Inglehart's generational cohort effect, the evidence suggests that while younger people are generally more supportive of European integration, as they get older they become more critical.

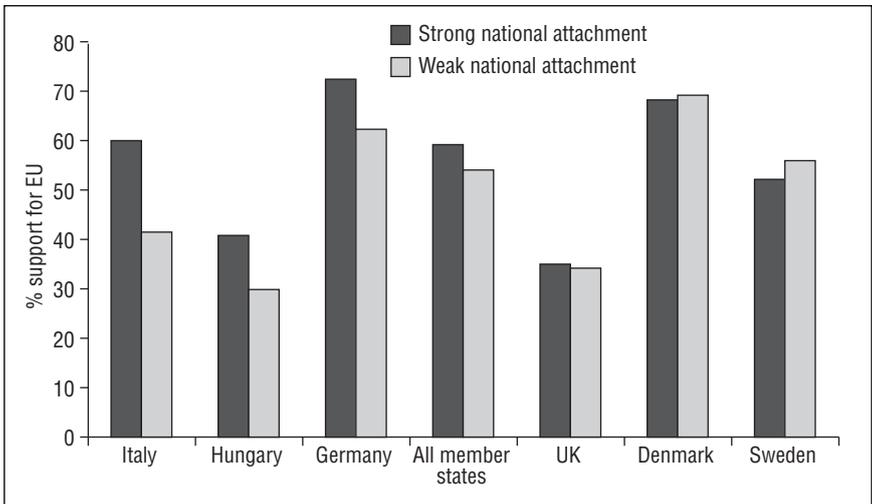
There is also some evidence that a person's religious affiliation has a stronger influence on their attitudes towards European integration than her age or education, in that there are larger variations in the levels of support for the EU across religious groups than across age or educational-level groups (Nelson *et al.*, 2001), although this result is contested (e.g. Boomgaarden and Freire, 2009). Catholics are considerably more pro-European than Protestants, as are Orthodox Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Atheists and agnostics are more critical of the EU than all citizens who declare a religious affiliation, except Protestants. Nelson and Guth (2003) also find that the degree of devoutness of a person – as measured, for example, by how frequently a person attends a religious service – affects support for the EU in opposite ways for different faiths. More devout Catholics and Orthodox Christians are more pro-European than less devout Catholics, while more devout Protestants are less pro-European than less devout Protestants. In general, Europe is an increasingly atheist or agnostic continent (compared with the US for example), and because less devout people and people of no religious faith are less likely to support the EU, declining religiosity may be one factor behind declining support for the EU, at least in the Catholic parts of Europe.

The final panel in Figure 5.6 looks at a different personal experience of European citizens, relating to migration. Immigrants, both into the EU from third countries, as well as from one EU member state to another, make up increasing proportions of the populations of the EU member states (see Chapter 11). Immigrants are more pro-European than non-immigrants. This is true both for migrants from one EU member state to another as well as immigrants into the EU from third countries. These attitudes reflect the fact that migrants directly experience the economic and social benefits of being able to move freely into and around the EU (see Favell 2008a). They also reflect the fact that

migrants tend to be ‘self-selecting’, in that they are generally more highly motivated and skilled than the resident population of a country, and so are on average more likely to benefit from market integration in Europe than less skilled or motivated citizens (e.g. Geddes 2003).

Another political factor which shapes individual attitudes towards European integration is a person’s attachment to his or her nation-state (Carey, 2002b; Hooghe and Marks, 2005, 2009; Kaltenthaler and Anderson, 2001). On average, the stronger a person’s attachment to her nation, the more likely she is to support the EU. This might seem counter-intuitive, in that one might expect people who have strong national identities to feel threatened by European integration. However, as Figure 5.7 shows, the relationship between attachment to the nation and support for the EU works differently in different countries. In Italy, Hungary, and Germany, people with strong national attachments are more supportive of the EU than people with weak national attachments, while the reverse is the case in Denmark and Sweden, and the strength of a person’s national attachment does not seem to have much of an effect in the UK. This might be because European integration is more compatible with national identity in some countries than in others. For example, many

**Figure 5.7** *National attachment and support for the EU*



*Note:* The survey question was: ‘People may feel different levels of attachment to their village, town or city, to their country or to the European Union. Please tell me how attached you feel to (your country).’ The figure shows support for EU membership among respondents who answered ‘very attached’ compared to respondents who answered ‘fairly attached’ or ‘not very attached’ or ‘not at all attached’.

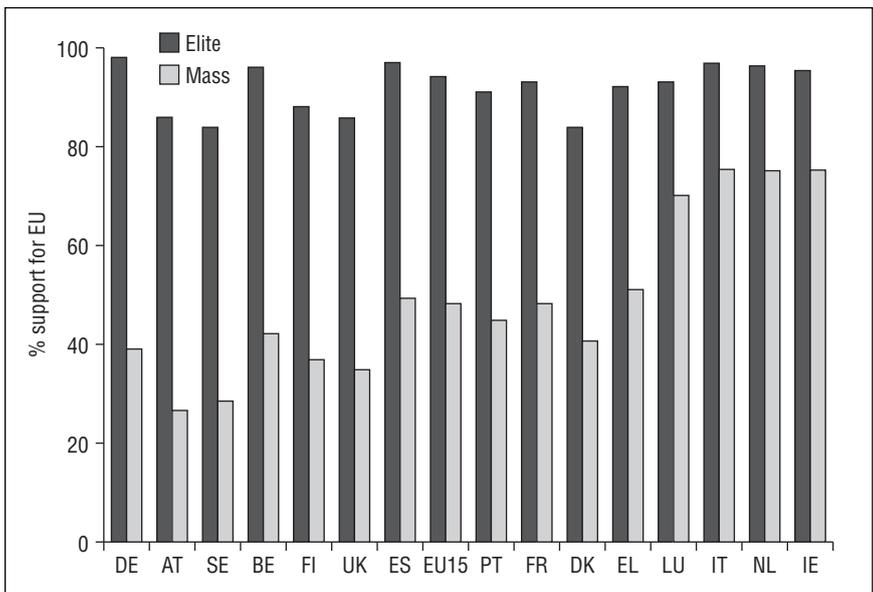
*Source:* Calculated from Eurobarometer EB 68.1 (September–November 2007) data.

Italians feel both strongly Italian and strongly European, whereas many Swedes feel either Swedish or European. However, McLaren (2002, 2004) finds that fear of the threat to national identity is a weaker factor in explaining opposition to the EU than utilitarian calculations about national economic costs and benefits from the EU.

Finally, Europe's elites are more pro-European than are European citizens (see Hooghe, 2003; Katz, 2001; Slater, 1982). In February to May 1996 the Commission undertook the only Eurobarometer survey of elite attitudes towards European integration; the so-called Top Decision-Makers Survey. In every member state, interviews were conducted with 200 to 500 senior elected politicians, senior civil servants, business and trade union leaders, leading media owners and editors, public intellectuals, and leading cultural and religious figures. Figure 5.8 shows support for EU membership among these elites compared with support for EU membership among the general public, as revealed in the general Eurobarometer survey in the same period in 1996.

The data reveal three things. First, in all member states elites are more supportive of the EU than is the public. For example, 94 per cent of all elites see EU membership as a good thing, compared with only 48 per cent of the general public, at that time. Second, there is considerable variation

Figure 5.8 *Elites compared to mass support for the EU*



Sources: Calculated from Eurobarometer 45.1 (spring 1996) and Top Decision-Makers Survey (spring 1996) data.

in the elite–public gap across the member states. The gap is much larger in Germany, Austria, Sweden, and Belgium than in Luxembourg, Italy, the Netherlands, and Ireland. Third, there is a higher degree of cohesion among elites from different nations than among the publics – as indicated by the lower variation in the elite scores compared to the higher variation in the opinions among the national publics.

The gap between elite and mass attitudes towards the EU might offer some insights into why some referendums on European integration have not always turned out as governmental and party elites have hoped (see Chapter 6). It might also explain why mass-based anti-European protest movements have emerged, with demonstrations being held on an almost weekly basis outside one or other of the EU institutions in Brussels, by citizens who feel that their domestic elites are not properly representing their views at the European level (Imig 2002; Imig and Tarrow, 2001; Marks and McAdam, 1996; Tarrow, 1995).

### **Political Context Matters: the Role of Ideology, Parties, and the Media**

In general, citizens are not well informed about the EU. This does not mean that if citizens were more informed about the EU that they would be more supportive of the project. Indeed, more information can lead to a better understanding of why some people are winners of European economic integration while others are losers. What the low level of information does mean, though, is that citizens' attitudes can be influenced by other actors: such as political parties, interest groups, and the media. Put another way, the 'information deficit' means that citizens' attitudes towards the EU are influenced by their national context (Anderson, 1998; Brinegar and Jolly, 2005; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000).

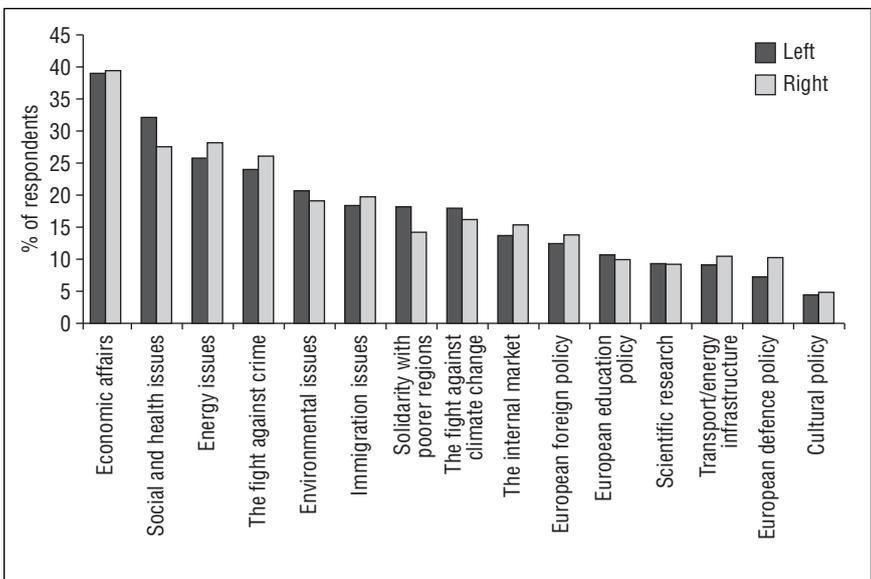
To understand how national context shapes attitudes towards European integration, let us first consider what citizens with different political views might want the EU to do, irrespective of their national contexts. On average, citizens who have left-wing views tend to favour equality of outcomes: intervention to promote equitable outcomes in the market, but liberty to promote social and political equality before the law. Citizens who have right-wing views, on the other hand, tend to favour equality of opportunities but not outcomes, thus allowing the inequalities inherent in the free market and the privileges of authority and tradition to be protected (Bobbio, 1996). This does not preclude intermediate positions: intervention–authority (the traditional stance of Christian democrats), and laissez-faire–liberty (such as liberals). However, these positions were less common in the 1990s than those of the oft-observed 'left-libertarians' (such as greens and social democrats) and

‘right-authoritarians’ (such as conservatives and contemporary Christian democrats) (see *Finer, 1987; Kitschelt, 1994, 1995*).

Irrespective of national political context, then, in EU politics we should expect individuals on the left to favour economic intervention by the EU (such as social policies, tax harmonization, aid to poorer regions, and aid to the developing world), and EU policies to promote social liberty (such as environmental regulation, consumer rights, minority rights, and gender equality). Conversely we should expect individuals on the right to favour EU policies which promote economic freedoms (such as the single market, deregulatory policies, and a single currency), and social authority (such as EU policies on drug trafficking, organized crime, immigration and asylum, and security and defence) (see *Hix, 1999; Hooghe and Marks, 1998*).

Figure 5.9 shows what citizens on the left and right think should be the priorities for the EU in the coming years (see *Gabel and Anderson,*

**Figure 5.9** *Ideology and support for EU policies*



*Note:* The survey question was as follows: ‘European integration has been focusing on various issues in the last years. In your opinion, which aspects should be emphasized by the European institutions in the coming years, to strengthen the European Union in the future? (maximum of three answers)’. Citizens were allocated to ‘left’ and ‘right’ according to their answers to the question: ‘In political matters people talk of “the left” and “the right”’. How would you place your views on this scale? (Left) 1–2–3–4–5–6–7–8–9–10 (Right)’. Answers 1 to 5 were coded as ‘left’ and 6 to 10 as ‘right’.

*Source:* Calculated from Eurobarometer EB 71.1 (January–February 2009) data.

2002; de Winter and Swyngedouw, 1999). Data on citizens' self-placement on a left–right scale and their attitudes towards EU policy priorities shows that there are not huge differences on the issues citizens on the left and right would like the EU to address. There are, nevertheless, some interesting differences. Citizens on the left are more in favour than citizens on the right of the EU promoting social and health issues, environmental issues, solidarity with poorer regions, and the fight against climate change. In contrast, citizens on the right are more in favour than citizens on the left of the EU promoting energy issues, the fight against crime, immigration, the internal market, EU foreign policy, and EU defence policy. So, in general, this pattern fits what one would predict.

However, several national contextual factors shape how these political views about what policies individuals would like translated into attitudes towards the EU. One key factor is the role played by political parties. On low-salience issues, such as European integration, voters take 'cues' from party leaders about what positions to take on these issues. So, in the UK, for example, the switch in the positions of the Labour Party and the Conservative Party towards European integration in the mid-1980s affected the attitudes of the supporters of these parties, with Labour voters becoming more pro-European than Conservative voters for the first time (Carey, 2002a). In this context, voters did not change their basic ideological views, but fundamentally changed their opinions about whether the EU would promote their political views or not as a result of the changing positions of the British political parties on this issue.

There is evidence that the relationship between parties and their supporters on the issue of Europe is a two-way interaction: with parties responding to voters and voters responding to parties (Hellström, 2008; Mattila and Raunio, 2006; Steenbergen *et al.*, 2007). Interestingly, the ability of parties to shape voters' preferences on EU issues seems to be declining (Steenbergen *et al.*, 2007). This might be because of weaker leadership by political parties. A more likely explanation, though, is that citizens have increasingly stable positions on European integration, which are more difficult for parties to shape.

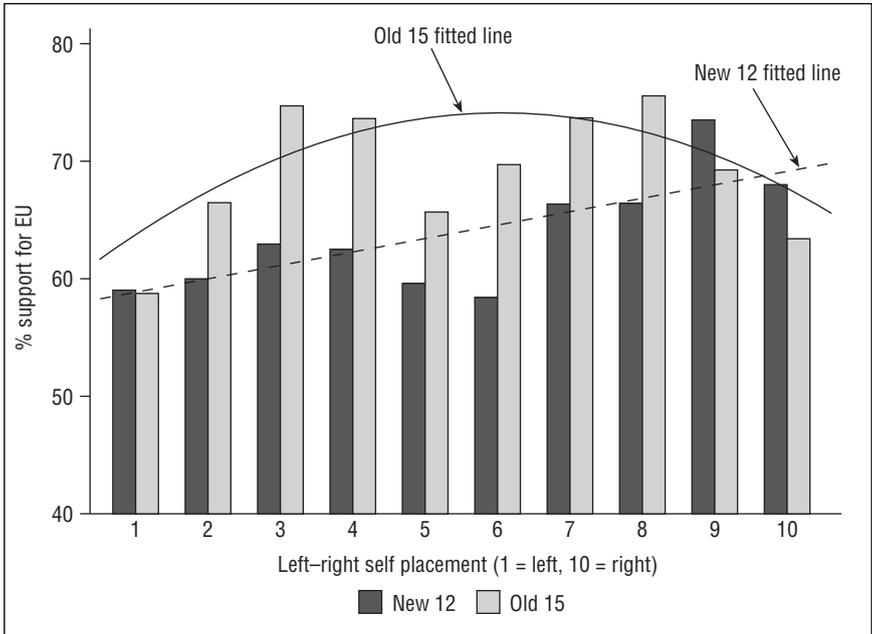
In addition, an increasing number of parties are divided on European issues. For example, Gabel and Scheve (2007) find that dissent within parties reduces party voters' support for Europe. One way of interpreting this finding is that dissent within a party reveals that the party's leadership is uncertain about the consequences of European integration, which leads to a split among the party's supporters. Alternatively, party supporters receive mixed signals from their party, which leads them not to trust the party leaders on this issue. Either way, citizens are less responsive to cues from divided parties on what to think about European integration.

Even if the ability of parties to shape citizens' attitudes towards Europe may be declining, the relative position of domestic policies compared to the EU shapes how parties, interest groups, and citizens see the EU (Hix, 2007). As a result of the multiple checks and balances in the EU system, the policy mix of the EU single market – a mix of deregulation plus common social and environmental standards (see Chapter 8) – is relatively centrist, and perhaps not too far from some notional European-wide average voter (Crombez, 2003). However, the EU-level policy mix is considerably different from the policy mix in several member states (Brinegar *et al.*, 2002). For example, the EU's regulatory framework is considerably to the left of the United Kingdom's more liberal and deregulated economy. On the other hand, the deregulatory side of the EU single market is considerably to the right of France's more highly regulated and managed economy.

From the perspective of the British Conservatives, EU policies can seem like 'socialism through the back door', or as Margaret Thatcher famously put it in her 1988 speech to the College of Europe in Bruges: 'We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them reimposed at a European level.' In contrast, from the perspective of the French Socialists, the liberalizing effects of the single market programme and the associated privatization and state aids policies seem like an Anglo-Saxon plot to undermine protected French workers. In other words, despite the same general ideological positions and policy preferences, the different domestic policy context explains why the British right are more critical of the EU while the French right are more supportive, and the British left are more supportive while the French left are more critical.

Figure 5.10 illustrates this intuition further, showing the different attitudes of citizens in the old 15 and new 12 states towards EU membership at different points on the left–right dimension. The two lines in the figure illustrate the general patterns shown by the two sets of bar charts. On average, in the old 15 states, citizens with centrist political views are more supportive of the EU than citizens with more extreme political views (e.g. Taggart, 1998). Meanwhile, in the new member states, citizens on the right (who support the free market), expect to benefit more from the economic transition process, and hence tend to be more supportive of European integration than those on the left, who fear further economic transformations (Christin, 2005; Cichowski, 2000; Tucker *et al.* 2002).

Related to the significance of domestic political context, Garry and Tilley (2009) look at how the domestic economic context shapes citizens attitudes towards the EU. They specifically focus on two factors – national identity and attitudes towards immigration – and how these affect support for the EU under different national economic contexts. They find that having a strong national identity only moderately

Figure 5.10 *Political ideology and EU support*

*Note:* The lines in the figure are fitted regression lines. The quadratic relationship fits best for the old 15 member states whereas a linear relationship fits best for the new 12 member states.

*Source:* Calculated from Eurobarometer 71.1 (January–February 2009) data.

decreases citizens' support for the EU in member states that are net beneficiaries from the EU budget, whereas having a strong national identity leads to a lot less support for the EU in member states that are net contributors into the EU budget. Equally, in richer countries, which are more attractive to economic migrants, if an individual is generally anti-immigrant, then he or she is also likely to be opposed to the EU, whereas in poorer countries, which are less attractive to economic migrants, anti-immigrant attitudes have a much weaker effect on individual attitudes towards the EU.

Finally, the domestic media play a significant role. Several member states, in particular the UK and Austria, have populist national newspapers which are vehemently anti-European, and which some people believe has contributed to the low levels of support for the EU in these two countries (see Diez Medrano, 2003). In addition to the variation in the way the EU is portrayed in the national media, there is considerable variation in the volume of coverage of EU politics and events in national newspapers and on television news broadcasts (esp. Peter *et al.*, 2003).

The effects of the variations in the volume and content of the coverage of the EU in the national media on individual attitudes towards the EU is difficult to identify. Pro-European citizens tend to consume pro-European media, and anti-European citizens tend to consume anti-European media. But, which way round is the relationship: are media outlets shaping voters, or are the media simply reflecting the opinions of their readers and viewers? On the one hand, with low information about the EU, there is considerable room for newspapers and TV news programmes to influence what people know about the EU, and hence how they feel about the EU – and there is some evidence that this occurs (e.g. Maier and Rittberger, 2008; de Vreese and Boomgaarden, 2006; de Vreese and Kandyla, 2009). On the other hand, newspaper and TV news programme editors are competing in an ever more competitive media market, and hence have strong incentives to tailor their news coverage to fit the attitudes of their core readers and viewers, otherwise they risk their readers/viewers switching to other news sources.

### **Conclusion: from Consensus to Conflict?**

Until the early 1990s the EU was essentially a consensual system of governance (see Taylor, 1991). The result was the so-called ‘permissive consensus’, whereby citizens were content to delegate responsibility to their leaders to tackle the European integration project. However, this permissive consensus collapsed in the early 1990s, which has resulted in much more contested attitudes towards the EU among Europe’s citizens. European integration no longer commands widespread support and a complex web of economic interests, social values, political preferences and national contexts shape individuals’ attitudes towards the EU.

In this new post-consensus environment, Europe’s elites are faced with a dilemma. They can continue the practice of consensus politics, but this risks provoking more public opposition to the EU and a wider gap between the attitudes of the public and the elites. Alternatively, Europe’s elites could abandon consensus politics and seek to politicize the question of Europe in domestic politics and at the European level: with different national politicians and political parties taking up different positions on issues on the EU political agenda. This would make politics at the European-level more conflictual and less amendable to consensus, but might close the gap between the increasingly divisive attitudes of citizens across Europe and the currently disconnected elites at the national and European levels.