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Chapter 10

Summary and Conclusions. Europe in Equilibrium – Unresponsive Inertia or Vibrant Resilience?

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Political systems across Europe have experienced extraordinary changes in the last three decades. The process of globalisation – which arguably began in the 17th century or earlier – has continued apace, fed by increasing levels of global trade and the revolution in information technology associated with the internet and the mobile phone. Across much of the world, the feminist revolution has radically changed the position and status of women as economic, social and political actors. In Europe, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War after 1989 have transformed the character of international relations – even though the emergence of loosely organised Islamic terrorism, focused on Al Qaeda and potential ‘rogue states’, has ensured that ‘security’ has remained a major preoccupation for both governments and mass publics. Increased personal mobility, as a result of expanding transport networks, and increasing concerns about the human rights of migrants of various sorts have produced a significant increase in immigration to many European countries, from both inside and outside the EU. The European Union itself has changed considerably since the late 1970s. From an organisation of nine (west European) member states that focused primarily on developing a genuine ‘single market’ for goods, capital and labour whilst at the same time ensuring that agricultural production remained high and stable, the EU has evolved into a genuinely supranational system of governance that embraces 27 democracies across western, central and eastern Europe. This broadening and deepening of the EU has necessarily affected the formal decisionmaking autonomy of member state governments. Since the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, notwithstanding the limited opt-outs secured by some member states, the range of policy areas where EU-level policies or directives hold sway over the preferences of national governments has gradually increased (Alesina and Wacziarg 1999). EU policy competence is now generally considered to be high in relation to agriculture/fisheries policy and currency policy –

though this latter competence applies only to those fifteen member states that belong to the Eurozone. It is also moderately high – and growing – in relation to the environment, policing and organised crime, humanitarian and regional aid, immigration/asylum, research and unemployment (Ahrens, Meure and Renner 2007).

On the face of it, it might be expected that any or all of these long-term structural changes – which, for presentational purposes, we describe here as ‘exogenous’ – could have affected the operation of democratic politics in Europe. Globalisation, mass immigration, changing security threats and reductions in national decisionmaking autonomy all potentially produce ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ at both the national and the individual level. Some societies and some individuals are less able to cope effectively with change than are others – especially if the changes involved are either undesired or unapproved. In these circumstances, it might be expected that, as a result of the exogenous macro-level political and economic changes outlined above, European mass publics – or some parts of those publics – might take a different view either of domestic politics in their own countries or of the EU itself. It is this mass public response to macro-level change that we have sought to describe and explain in this book. We begin this concluding chapter by restating the features of domestic, national-level and European Union-level politics that our analysis has sought to illuminate. Part 2 summarises the key changes in mass public political attitudes and behaviour that have occurred across Europe in the last 3 decades or so. Part 3 reviews the central theoretical ideas that have been developed both in earlier studies and in this volume to explain why citizens change their political views and behaviours. Part 4 summarises the results of our various empirical analyses and outlines the key individual- and macro-level drivers of changing (and sometimes unchanging) mass attitudes and behaviours. Two core substantive conclusions emerge from our analysis. First, the large-scale, external macro changes that have affected both national politics and the EU over the last 30 years have had relatively little enduring impact on the political attitudes and behaviours of European mass publics. Second, those changes that have occurred have been driven by a complex mixture of instrumental rational calculation, heuristic cue-taking, cognitive mobilisation and affective/emotional adjustments. In the final section of the chapter, we speculate as to whether the absence of major attitude change reflects a stubborn, unresponsive inertia or a vibrant resilience on the part of European mass publics. We conclude that it probably reflects mixture of both.

1. The focus of our study: what we have been trying to explain

It is clearly not possible to identify and measure all the possible ways in which citizens in modern, complex democracies might respond to major political changes in their respective domestic

and international environments. Indeed, bearing in mind the constraints of data availability, in order to make sense of citizens' responses, we have been obliged to focus on those attitudes and behaviours that are susceptible to systematic and sustained empirical examination across time and space. We have accordingly concentrated our efforts in two areas: on key attitudinal and behavioural features of national politics; and on attitudes towards the European Union.

In terms of national politics, our analysis has focused on two attitudinal and two behavioural variables. The first attitudinal measure concerns people's satisfaction with democracy. This is clearly one of the key expressions of popular support for the regime – indeed, on some accounts, it reflects the overall legitimacy of the political system itself. Regardless of what citizens think of the government of the day, it is vitally important that they remain committed to the democratic system itself. It is accordingly crucial to assess how far the sorts of exogenous macro-level changes outlined above might have affected their sense of democracy satisfaction. The second attitudinal measure analysed is left-right ideology, one of the crucial sources of division and differentiation in global twentieth century politics. It is more than fifty years since Daniel Bell proclaimed 'the end of ideology', yet still today many political parties, actors and observers continue to think and speak in the language of 'left' and 'right'. Several observers in the mid 1990s noted that, from the 1970s onwards, there was a period of 'ideological depolarisation', in which both parties and mass publics in Western Europe shifted their ideological positions towards the centreground of democratic politics. Our analysis considers the extent to which these trends continued after 1990 and whether or not they were replicated in the new democracies of central and Eastern Europe. It also assesses how far the ideological thinking of mass publics across Europe has been affected by exogenous macro-level change.

The two behavioural variables that we consider relate to formal and to informal political activity. On the formal side, our analysis has focused on the most common way in which most citizens participate in their respective political systems – by voting (or not) in national and in European elections. On the informal side, we would ideally have liked to look at a wide range of actions, such as participation in protests, petitions, boycotts and political associations. However, given the absence of comprehensive crossnational timeseries measures of these variables, we concentrate instead on a more general, but nonetheless crucial, measure of informal political engagement – the extent of people's participation in political discussion and persuasion. The key questions that we examine in relation to these two behavioural measures is how far they have varied systematically over time and whether or not any such variations can be linked to any of the exogenous macro changes that were identified earlier.

In terms of attitudes towards the European Union, we draw clear theoretical distinctions among four different categories of attitude. On our account, people exhibit generalised attitudes towards the EU which are captured by their sense as to whether their country's membership of the EU has been 'a good thing' or 'a bad thing'. We distinguish this generalised sense of EU support, however, from three more specific sets of attitudes, which are probably causally prior to it and which in our view represent the three core dimensions of 'European citizenship'. The first of these concerns the extent to which people feel a sense of *European Identity* or attachment. This sense of European identity may be in competition with, or complementary to, any national or subnational identity that a particular individual may hold. The second attitude set – *EU Policy Scope* – refers to people's preferences about the policy competence of EU institutions in comparison with the competencies of national or subnational levels of governance. The final attitude set – *EU Representation* – relates to people's sense that they are 'represented' or not by EU institutions, which we operationalise in terms of citizens' levels of 'trust' in the key democratic institution of the EU, the European Parliament. In our view, although these four attitude sets may be empirically related to some degree, since they are conceptually distinct there is no ineluctable reason why they should move together over time. Accordingly, our analysis here considers how each of them has varied over the last three decades or so across different countries, and the extent to which any observed variations can be linked to exogenous macro changes at the national, European and global levels.

2. How, if at all, have European mass political attitudes and behaviour changed?

Figures 10.1 to 10.8 provide graphical representations of the broad changes in European attitudes and behaviour (or lack of them) that have been described in this volume. Apart from the data for electoral turnout, the figures are all based on data from the long-running Eurobarometer series and, more recently, the European Social Survey. The use of this common source – notwithstanding the additional sources cited in earlier chapters – ensures that the results reported are broadly comparable both across countries and over time. The idiosyncracies of individual country patterns were described in previous chapters. Here, we focus on the general, pan-European pattern as a whole.

For each of Figures 10.1, 10.2 and 10.4-10.8, two graphs are reported. One shows the changes over time on the response measure for the 'EU nine' (the six founder members plus Denmark, Ireland and the UK) – countries for which data are continuously available on an annual basis, for the majority of variables, since 1976. The other graph shows the picture for the EU as a whole at the time each survey was conducted – it includes an increasing number of countries as the

number of member states progressively increased after 1973. No comparable over-time data on these measures are available for countries *before* they became EU member states. We accordingly report both sets of graphs here to show that the changes we describe are *not* a function of the changing pattern of EU membership. The graphs are all produced using data weighted by population size. With a few minor exceptions, the changes that we describe for all EU member states also occurred among the longstanding EU nine. This suggests that the changes were not the result of the changing composition of the EU itself, arising from the accession of new member states, but rather reflects real variations in opinion and behaviour across Europe – real variations that, in the next section, we seek to explain.

Figure 10.1 reports variations in average Democracy Satisfaction across Europe for the period between 1976 and 2006. The figures reported are based on a simple scale index in which those ‘very satisfied’ score 4, those ‘satisfied’ score 3, ‘dissatisfied’ score 2 and ‘very dissatisfied’ score 1. The fact that the graph for all EU citizens falls in the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall could be construed as an artefact of the inclusion of the new states that were progressively included in the Eurobarometer series – especially after 1994. Such an inference would be mistaken, however. This is precisely why we include the figures for the EU nine, where the same group of countries is being surveyed over time. The pattern for the EU nine shows exactly the same sort of post 1989 decline and subsequent recovery as the ‘all EU’ series. This clearly suggests that there really was a decline in satisfaction with democracy in the wake of the end of the Cold War, but that by the late 1990s, satisfaction levels had re-established themselves at levels broadly similar to those observed up to the late 1980s.¹ We will examine the possible reasons for these changes in subsequent sections. We simply note here that, notwithstanding the changes in and external shocks to European societies that have occurred in the last three decades, mass satisfaction with the democratic process itself certainly not declined – if anything, it has increased slightly from just under an index score of 2.5 in the 1970s to just over 2.5 in the 2000s.

Figure 10.2 reports the long-term changes in left-right ideological polarisation that have occurred among European mass publics since the mid 1970s. The index numbers reported are calculated by measuring how far each individual’s position deviates from the mid-point of the 1-10 left-right ideological scale. (The scale has a theoretical minimum of 0 and a theoretical maximum of 4.5). These deviations are then averaged across the whole EU and across the EU nine to produce the graphs shown. A relatively high annual score on the index indicates that there were more people located towards the extremes of left and right; a lower score that fewer people took extreme views. As in Figure 10.1, there is no differentiation between the ‘All EU’ and ‘EU9’ graphs between 1976 and 1980 – when the EU9 constituted the EU. Although minor differences in the two

graphs develop after 1985, they clearly follow the same broad pattern, with sharp upward movements in 1988, followed by equally sharp declines in 1990. The only noticeable difference in the two graphs is towards the end of the series, when the EU9 graph falls below that for all EU countries. The flattening of the all-EU graph reflects the fact, noted in chapter 4, that in Eastern Europe there has been a progressive polarisation of opinion, rather than the general depolarisation observed in the West. This produces an average figure that rises very slightly after 2001. The overall European-wide trend is clear, however. Across the EU as a whole, the period between 1976 and 2007 was one of declining ideological polarisation – the index fell from above 1.8 in 1976 to around 1.6 by 2007. Whatever was responsible for this pattern of change – a question that we consider in the next section – it is clear that European mass publics (in the West at least) have progressively moved towards the political centre over the past thirty years or so.

Figures 10.3(a) and 10.3(b) show, respectively, the long-term changes in national and European election turnout that have occurred in European democracies since 1945. Figure 10.3(a) presents data from the 14 largest west European countries for the period 1945-2009. Figure 10.3(b) reports the figures for all EU member states (9 in 1979; 10 in 1984, 12 in 1989; and so on) for the period since the first European Parliament elections in 1979. The implications of both figures are clear. European mass publics have become progressively less inclined to participate in both national and European elections. In 1945, average turnout in national elections in Western Europe was around 85 percent; by 2009, it had fallen to 74 percent. In 1979, over 60% of eligible citizens turned out to vote in European Parliament elections; the corresponding figure in 2009 was 43 percent. These progressive long term declines, though by no means uniformly distributed across different countries (as we saw in chapter 5), represent an important change in the way that many citizens exercise their most basic of civic duties – a change that, as discussed below, clearly demands some sort of explanation.

Figure 10.4 outlines the changes in *informal* political engagement during 1976-2007. The index used in the figure is described in detail in chapter 3. The pattern is interesting, particularly in comparison with the declines in *formal* participation documented in Figures 10.3(a) and (b). Whereas formal participation clearly trends downward, informal engagement briefly rose quite markedly in the aftermath of the Cold War. Moreover, the levels of informal engagement are broadly the same at the end of the series as they were at the beginning, suggesting that informal engagement was not affected by whatever long-term factors were responsible for the decline in electoral turnout.

Figures 10.5 to 10.9 describe changes in various EU attitudes. The time periods vary as a result of variations in data availability. The general measure of EU support – the percentage of

people who believe that on balance the EU has been ‘a good thing’ for their respective countries – covers the period from 1976 to 2007. The more specific measures are available on a more restricted basis – the EU Identity and EU Policy Scope data begin in 1992 and the European Parliament Trust measure starts only in 1999. As Figure 10.5 shows, average general support for the EU varied in a similar way to informal political engagement. After an initial decline, support recovered, reaching a peak at around the end of the Cold War, and then subsequently fell back, with the consequence that support levels were marginally lower (around 55 percent) at the end of the period than they had been at the beginning (support in 1977, for example, was 60 percent). The decline in support that appears to have set in around 1992, after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty which was designed both to broaden and deepen the Union, has been well characterised elsewhere as signalling the point at which the EU’s mass public’s ‘permissive consensus’ over elite efforts to strengthen the intergration process transmuted into a ‘constraining dissensus’ that has exercised something of a brake on further efforts to develop the European project (Hooghe and Marks 2008). In any event, it is evident that mass support for the EU did decline at this time – and, again, this is certainly something that requires explanation. Figures 10.6, 10.7 and 10.8 respectively show little systematic trend variation in levels of European Identity, Preferences for EU Policy Scope or Trust in the European Parliament. There are perhaps very slight declines in the Identity and Policy Scope graphs, but they are so modest as to be barely visible. The safest inference from the three graphs, however, is that since the early 1990s, when systematic over-time measurement started, mass attitudes towards European Identity, EU Policy Scope and EU Representation have changed very little.²

What conclusions, if any, are suggested by the trend evidence reported in Figures 10.1-10.8? While it is always dangerous to try to draw firm inferences from comparisons of different trends, the general impressions that trends provide can still be either interesting or useful. One obvious point of temporal symmetry in the various graphs is the increase-decline pattern that characterises the graphs for EU Support (Figure 10.5) and Informal Political Engagement (Figure 10.4), since both rise to a peak in the early 1990s and then decline thereafter. However, this temporal similarity may mask rather different causal mechanisms. As implied earlier, the decline in general EU support is widely attributed to the effects of the Maastricht process, which began in 1992. As discussed below (and in Chapter 3), the rise in Engagement appears to be linked much more directly to the end of the Cold War. Thus, the two trend patterns – though similar – may well be unrelated in terms of causal mechanisms. A second point of symmetry across the different graphs is the coincidence of a long-term trend *decline* in turnout (Figures 10.3a and 10.3b) with long-term trend *increases* in Democracy Satisfaction (Figure 10.1) and Ideological Polarisation (Figure 10.2).³ A

possible interpretation here is that the trends are causally linked. As voters become progressively more satisfied with democracy, and/or as they become less polarised and move to the political centre, they are less motivated to make the effort to choose between parties and they are therefore less inclined to vote. Again, however, such an inference could only be made with considerable caution, since it would require rather more careful, systematic analysis than the sort of impressionistic weighing of trends that we have provided here. This more systematic approach is precisely what we provided in the various substantive chapters of this volume – analysis that is reviewed in the remainder of this chapter. Note, finally, that the trends in the various graphs relating to EU attitudes are by no means coterminous. The EU Support graph rises and falls. The Identity and Policy Scope graphs fall very slightly. The Trust in the European Parliament graph oscillates a little over time but finishes almost exactly where it starts. These differences are modest but nonetheless evident. They emphasise the idea that the different components of EU attitudes are not monolithic, but rather, that they need to be differentiated from one another. What drives people's general support for the EU may not be the same as what drives people's sense of European Identity, their preferences for EU policy competence, or their perceptions of the European Parliament. In short, the differentiated time-series patterns shown in Figures 10.5-10.8 demonstrate the importance of adopting a differentiated approach to the analysis of EU attitudes – exactly the sort of approach that has been adopted here.

3. Towards Explanation: Theoretical Perspectives

In the previous section we cautioned against the employment of simple trend data for identifying possible causal relationships between variables. The substantive chapters of this book have instead used a range of theoretical perspectives to generate testable hypotheses about the sources about the phenomena that they have respectively sought to explain. Five main perspectives have been employed: cognitive mobilisation; 'hard' instrumental rationality; 'soft' cueing rationality; identitarian attachment; and equity/fairness calculation. Here, we briefly review the core theoretical claims of each of these perspectives and illustrate the ways in which our substantive chapters employed them in their analyses.

Cognitive Mobilisation

The basic claim of cognitive mobilisation theory is that, as people become more informed about politics through greater education and exposure to political information (the latter often through the mass media), they are more likely to take a more progressive, cosmopolitan view of politics, policy and political institutions (Inglehart 1970a). Inglehart used cognitive mobilisation

theory in order to explain the developing sense of European identity that was emerging during the 1960s, arguing that rising levels of cognitive mobilisation – of education and knowledge – were stimulating an increase in support for the then EEC.⁴ This core idea is used in two of the chapters here – in the discussion of the sources of European Identity in chapter 6 and in the discussion of EU Support in chapter 8. Because chapter 6 provides a purely aggregate-level analysis, it does not provide an empirical test of the effects of cognitive mobilisation on Identity. However, chapter 8 – since it provides an analysis at both individual and aggregate levels – is able to test the effects of cognitive mobilisation on general EU Support, by considering the extent to which educated and informed individuals exhibit higher levels of EU Support than their less educated and uninformed counterparts.

'Hard' Instrumental Rationality

The idea that people's views and preferences reflect rational, 'economic' calculations about their own or their countries' interests is widespread in the analysis of public attitude formation and change. Instrumental or economic rationality assumes that, when faced with a choice, people will weigh the perceived costs and benefits of each option in order to judge between them. Since it is difficult directly to observe people engaging in this kind of 'weighing' activity, individual- and aggregate-level research typically has to make assumptions in order to test for the effects of instrumental rationality. In chapters 7 (Trust in the European Parliament) and 8 (EU Support), *individual-level* tests are conducted which assume either that instrumental rationality can be operationalised by examining people's beliefs about the relative costs and benefits that have accrued to their respective countries as a result of EU membership, or that likely individual benefits of integration can be captured through objective personal characteristics. The simple empirical proposition tested is that those who believe their country has benefited, or who are themselves more likely to benefit, will be more likely to support the EU than those who believe otherwise. It is also possible, however, to test the effects of instrumental rationality at the *aggregate level*. Three general sets of variables are deployed in the aggregate-level analysis conducted in this volume. The first set involves measures of economic performance, where it is assumed that good (bad) economic performance – specifically, higher gdp growth and lower unemployment – instrumentally encourages (discourages) satisfaction with current political institutions, at both national and EU levels. The effects of this sort of instrumental rationality are investigated in chapters 2 (Democracy Satisfaction), 6 (European Identity), 9 (EU Policy Scope) and 8 (EU Support). The second set of aggregate variables also refers to the economy, but focuses on the extent to which an individual's country is dependent on trade with other EU countries. This sort of measure is used in chapter 6,

where it is assumed that it is more rational to think in pan-European terms (in this case, to develop a sense of European identity) in countries with higher levels of intra-EU trade. The final set of aggregate variables that captures important aspects of instrumental rationality focuses more on politics. The first of these is the 'Quality of Governance', where it is assumed that low quality national governance is likely to elicit dissatisfaction with domestic political institutions (thereby reducing Democracy Satisfaction, as argued in chapter 2) and a greater degree of sympathy for supranational decisionmaking (thereby increasing support for EU Policy Scope, as argued in chapter 9). The second aggregate 'political' variable is ideological polarisation, which elsewhere in this volume (chapter 4) is treated as a dependent variable. In chapter 3, the level of Informal Political Engagement is regarded as a rational response to the level of ideological polarisation: the greater (lesser) the level of polarisation, the stronger (weaker) the incentive to discuss with and to seek to persuade others that it is important to adopt a similar ideological position to oneself.

'Soft' Cueing Rationality

In recent years, rational choice analysts have increasingly recognised the possibility that individuals with access to very limited information might still behave rationally, by using heuristics or 'cognitive shortcuts' in order to make decisions. They might, in short, use 'cues' with which they are relatively familiar in order to make judgements about issues and objects with which they are relatively unfamiliar. In electoral research, one classic heuristic or cue for individuals who have neither the time nor inclination to familiarise themselves with the detailed policy stances of rival parties is to focus on likely managerial capabilities of the rival party leaders. There are two main sorts of cueing effect that relate to mass attitudes towards the EU: substitution and transfer cueing. Substitution cueing occurs when an individual evaluates domestic institutional performance negatively (positively) and therefore assumes that it would be desirable (undesirable) for more (fewer) decisionmaking powers to be ceded to supranational institutions. Reasoning of this sort is assumed to operate in chapters 6, 8 and 9, where it is hypothesised that a measure of the Quality of Governance should exert *negative* effects, respectively, on European Identity and EU Policy Scope. In both cases, the core idea is that if things are badly run at home, people are more likely to look to Europe; if they are well run at home, Europe is not so important. The second type of cueing is 'transfer cueing'. This sort of cueing is based on the idea that people who evaluate their own national institutions positively (negatively) may uncritically extend these positive evaluations to the supranational sphere and, as a result, also make positive (negative) evaluations of EU institutions. In contrast to substitution cueing, this *transfer effect* clearly implies a *positive* relationship between

attitudes towards national and EU institutions. These sorts of transfer effect are hypothesised to operate in chapters 7 and 8, where trust in domestic political institutions is hypothesised to have a positive cueing effect, respectively, on trust in the European Parliament and on general support for the EU.

Affective/identitarian factors

The suggestion that people might have affective feelings towards political objects that can influence their attitudes and preferences just as strongly as rational calculations is neither novel nor contentious. It is clear from a large number of psychological and attitudinal studies people's feelings and sense of political and social identity can have profound effects on their political attitudes and choices. The notion of identity has been widely used in analyses of EU attitudes and it is used in three ways in the chapters in this volume. First, in chapter 7, following Easton (1965), trust in the European Parliament is seen as a manifestation of 'specific support' for EU institutions that itself stems from a deeper and more generalised, affective sense of 'diffuse support' for the EU as a whole. The chapter uses people's preferences for a faster or a slower speed for integration as a loose indicator of their diffuse, affective support for the EU, which it predicts will have a positive effect on Trust in the European Parliament. Second, in chapter 6, which explicitly tries to specify the causal antecedents of European Identity, the length of time that each member state has belonged to the EU is used to indicate the extent of people's exposure to EU norms and practices. It is predicted that, other things being equal, greater exposure is likely to generate a greater sense of affective identity towards the EU. Finally, chapter 6 also sees a tension between a strong sense of national identity and the development of European identity, with the former acting as a direct impediment to the development of the latter. The expectation here is accordingly that strong national identity should exert a negative effect on identification with Europe.

Equity/Fairness

One of the commonest factors that researchers in a wide range of fields have identified as motivating diverse forms of political action is a sense of relative deprivation or injustice (Gurr 1970; Sniderman, Brody and Tetlock, 1991). People who feel that either they or some group they care about are failing to benefit fully from the opportunities/or and rewards that society offers are more likely to be driven by a sense of injustice to challenge the political *status quo*. The reverse side of this discontent-driven sort of activity is that people who believe that the society or political system they live in is basically 'fair' and/or 'equitable' are more likely to be supportive of the *status*

quo and for this to be expressed in their political attitudes. The notion of equity fairness is used several of the analyses developed in this volume. The most direct usage is in chapter 2, where it is hypothesised that Democracy Satisfaction is likely to be higher, *ceteris paribus*, in countries where the electoral system is proportional, thereby ensuring a relatively fair distribution of seats in the legislative assembly. The idea of ‘fairness’ is also employed in chapter 3, where it is assumed that systems with relatively high welfare spending are likely to be perceived as being more equitable than those with low spending. It is further hypothesised that, net of all other effects, informal political engagement is likely to be higher in countries where equity/fairness in the form of social welfare spending is more deeply entrenched.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that a range of theoretical perspectives have been used in a diverse set of ways in different chapters. We regard this eclectic approach as entirely appropriate. The phenomena that the different chapters seek to analyse, though often empirically related, are conceptually distinct. It would be decidedly odd if a single theoretical perspective – or even a single set of perspectives – could satisfactorily account for all of the cross-national and over-time patterns of change and variation that we have described in our substantive chapters. In the next section, we offer a summary account of the factors that each chapter has identified as being responsible for the changing political attitudes and behaviours of European mass publics over the last three decades. As we will see, although the various theories outlined above all play a role, they by no means provide – even in combination – a full explanation of the complex and diverse pattern of change that we have outlined.

4. Core Empirical Findings: What explains variations in European political attitudes and engagement?

There are in principle three main types of variation in political attitudes and behaviour that require description and explanation: variations across individuals; across different geographical regions or countries; and, within any given region or country, over time. Because the sorts of statistical modelling techniques we have employed in the different chapters of this volume are capable of handling cross-national and over-time variations simultaneously, in our discussion we have distinguished mainly between micro- or individual-level factors and macro- or aggregate-level factors. Ideally, any analysis of either attitudes or behaviour should be conducted at both the micro/individual and macro/aggregate levels – and given perfect data availability, this is exactly what we would have attempted to do here. However, practical empirical analysis and hypothesis testing always involves a compromise between what is theoretically desirable and the availability of suitable, comparable, representative data. In our case, data constraints have forced different choices on the authors of different chapters. In the chapters on Informal Political Engagement, EU Support and Turnout in EU Elections, there are sufficient comparable individual- and aggregate-level data available over enough countries and time points to allow for the simultaneous estimation of a range of individual- and macro-level effects. For the chapter on Trust in the European Parliament, the data available on suitable explanatory variables are far more restricted. In order to assess the consequences of the changes in the nature of the EU that have resulted from the process of monetary union, this chapter uses a quasi-experimental design that deploys individual-level data collected both before (in 1999) and after (in 2006) the introduction of the euro. The remaining chapters all use a purely aggregate-level approach. This necessarily involves making stronger assumptions about the precise mechanisms through which causal effects might operate than is the case with individual-level data. Nonetheless, in each of these chapters the aggregate-level approach enables important hypotheses about the sources of the various dependent variables to be systematically assessed empirically over both time and space.

Democracy Satisfaction. Chapter 2 regards the extent to which people feel satisfied with democracy as a response to instrumental rational calculations about system performance. The core assumption, following valence theories of electoral politics (Stokes 1963; Clarke et. al. 2009) is that the better the system performs, the higher the level of democracy satisfaction. The chapter considers system performance under three main headings: (1) the performance of *the economy*, which is measured in terms of growth in Gross Domestic Product; (2) the extent to which the

political system operates under the *rule of law*, which is operationalised in terms of the Quality of Governance within the state and public bureaucracy; and (3) the extent to which the legislative system delivers *political representation*, which is captured by whether or not the electoral system is based on proportional representation. Data constraints mean that the effects of these macro variables on democracy satisfaction can only be estimated across the whole of Europe for the period between 1994 and 2006. Although the time period covered in the analysis is relatively limited, the empirical results are robust. Economic performance clearly exerts a consistent positive effect on democracy satisfaction: across a wide range of institutional contexts, a stronger economy means more support for democracy. The same conclusion also holds with regard to the rule of law, where the Quality of Governance is used as an indicator: low governance quality (a weak rule of law) is consistently associated with lower levels of democracy satisfaction. Finally, democracy satisfaction is also found to be higher in systems with proportional representation. These findings clearly support the idea that people are instrumentally rational in their judgements about the democratic quality of their respective countries' political systems. They also indicate both the strengths and the vulnerabilities of contemporary European democracies. As long as they continue to perform well in terms of delivering prosperity, public probity and electoral fairness, levels of democracy satisfaction will be maintained or even enhanced. In contrast, serious economic crisis, departures from the rule of law or failures of political representation clearly threaten to weaken support levels.

Ideological Polarisation. Ideological Polarisation is the only area studied in this volume in which there appear to be major differences between western and eastern Europe. In the west, it is clear that ideological polarisation has been in long term *decline*, with mass publics in most countries moving towards the political centre, as the traditional left-right divide between capital and labour has diminished in importance. In the east, however, the picture is reversed. Here, since the establishment of democratic systems in the early 1990s, the tendency has been towards *greater* ideological polarisation. This distinctive eastern pattern probably reflects the effects of the emerging party systems in the post-Communist countries, where parties have progressively found it useful to differentiate themselves in terms of left-right ideological appeals and have therefore been more inclined to structure their political discourses in ideological terms. This sort of party cueing has in turn affected the ideological thinking of east European mass publics. In contrast, in western Europe, there has been a progressive weakening of mass affiliation to established left-right political parties – a long term decline in levels of party identification with established left-right parties – and this in turn probably underpins the long term decline in the ideological polarisation of west European mass publics. These differences in the trends of ideological polarisation in the eastern

and western parts of Europe are complemented by the fact that different sets of factors appear to underpin variations in polarisation in each. In the east, polarisation is most strongly influenced by the age of the democratic regime and by the number of electoral parties. In the west, the main drivers are unemployment and the existence of federal political institutions. These differences almost certainly reflect the different levels of maturity of the political systems of eastern *versus* western Europe. In the west, party competition and left-right ideological thinking have been embedded in the practice of democratic politics for much of the period since 1945 – or even longer; as a result ideological thinking is less influenced by relatively short-term factors than it is in the east. Note, finally, that the discussion in chapter 3 established an important differential *consequence* of ideological (de)polarisation in the eastern and western parts of Europe. In the west, polarisation has positive causal effect on turnout – the long-term decline in polarisation has accordingly been one of the key long-term factors responsible for declining levels of turnout in western Europe. In short, as ideological differences have declined, citizens have had less incentive to bother to vote because there has been less at stake if one government rather than another is elected. In the east, however, the effect is reversed: polarisation has a negative effect on turnout. Here, therefore, rising levels of polarisation after 1990 have provoked a *decline* in turnout – perhaps reflecting the tendency for east European voters, given the years of ideologically-driven Communist rule, to regard more intense ideological discourse as a disincentive to participate in electoral politics.⁵

Informal Political Engagement. Notwithstanding the trend decline in national election turnout across Europe that was documented in Figure 10.3(a), it is clear from Figure 10.4 that informal political engagement has not been subject to same sort of linear trend decline. Rather, informal engagement – discussing politics and seeking to persuade others to change their views – has oscillated over the last three decades. Engagement declined slightly after 1976, recovered in the mid 1980s, reached a peak in the wake of the end of the Cold War, subsequently declined again, and then, after 1999, returned progressively to the levels of the mid 1970s. In attempting to explain both individual- and macro-level variations in Engagement, Chapter 3 considered the rival merits of factors based on cognitive mobilisation, equity/fairness and instrumental rationality. At the individual level, as Cognitive Mobilisation theory predicts, education and employment status exert positive effects on engagement. At the macro level, as the equity/fairness model predicts, engagement is stimulated by higher levels of social welfare spending. The remaining effects, apart from those concerned with demographic and other controls, focus on the role of instrumental rationality. Higher levels of unemployment act as a demotivator and *discourage* people from informal engagement. Ideological polarisation, in contrast, represents a sharpening of fundamental

political divisions and accordingly provides a *greater* incentive for people to engage in informal political activity. As noted above, great events – in this case the end of the Cold War – also seem to stimulate greater levels of informal engagement, albeit temporarily, with an effect that produced a rapid increase in engagement in 1991, which then discounted over time. The analysis in Chapter 3 also produced an important ‘null’ finding. It was expected that, given the considerable successes of the feminist movement across Europe after the 1970s, the negative effect on political engagement of ‘being female’ would progressively reduce over time. No such effect was in fact observed. In spite of the increasing role that women play in many aspects of contemporary economic and political life, informal political engagement in Europe remains a predominantly male activity.

Formal Political Engagement: Turnout in European Elections. It was noted above that the general decline in turnout in national elections across western Europe over recent decades is in part due to the long-term decline in ideological polarisation that has also occurred over the same period. Indeed, it is likely that the same factors that have driven down national turnout have also been responsible for declining turnout in elections for the European Parliament. These elections, after all, are generally regarded as ‘second order’ – that is to say, people vote in them primarily on the basis of national, domestic, rather than strictly ‘European’, factors and calculations. This said, the analysis in Chapter 5 shows that, at the individual level, people’s orientations towards the EU *do* have an effect on whether or not they decide to vote in elections for the European Parliament. Measures of EU support, affinity or identity all consistently furnish significant, positive coefficients for EU parliamentary turnout over the 1979-2004 period. In short, people seem to be behaving rationally in the sense that the more positively they feel about the EU in general, the more likely they are to participate as citizens in the EU political process. The individual-level analysis in the chapter also shows that some of the standard drivers of national election turnout – age, interest in politics and strength of party identification – also figure significantly in models of EU turnout. The significance of the ‘age’ and ‘interest in politics’ terms is clearly consistent with Cognitive Mobilisation accounts of turnout. The significance of the strength of partisanship term indicates that EU turnout is also affected by ‘transfer cueing’. Individuals who exhibit strong partisanship at home are likely to use the cues represented by such attachments to decide to vote in European elections. Taking all these factors together, it is relatively easy to appreciate why turnout in European elections has fallen progressively since 1979. Three of the key drivers of EU election turnout – the age profiles of European democracies, people’s interest in politics, and general support for the EU – have, with minor variations in specific countries, been broadly constant over time. However, the two big drivers of turnout in all sorts of election – ideological polarisation and partisanship – have witnessed secular declines over the last three or four decades in almost all the contexts in which

they have been measured. Small wonder, therefore, that turnout has also declined in European elections.

European Identity. One important conclusion drawn in chapter 6 was that, contrary to the hopes of the EU's functionalist founding fathers, a strong sense of European identity has not developed amongst European mass publics as the EU itself has broadened and deepened. Using aggregate level data, the chapter sought to explain why this should be the case. As in other chapters, a range of theoretical positions was brought to bear. The empirical analysis conducted in the chapter shows that instrumental rationality, substitution cueing and affective attachments all play a role in the development of European identity. In terms of instrumental rationality, identity is strongly and positively influenced by public beliefs about the benefits of EU membership: the more that mass publics perceive that the EU brings benefits to their respective countries, the stronger the sense of European identity. In terms of substitution cueing, it is clear that the sense of European identity is far stronger in countries where the quality of governance is low: doubts about the effectiveness and probity of one's own political system clearly translate into a stronger sense of European identity. Finally, in terms of affective/identitarian considerations, there is a strong tendency for countries with a high proportion of immigrants to fail to develop a cosmopolitan sense of European identity, precisely because high levels of foreign immigrants engender a stronger, and competing, sense of national identity among indigenous populations. Again, in these circumstances it is easy to envisage why a greater sense of European identity has failed to develop over time. While there has been a slight growth in the proportion of people who consider that the EU has brought 'benefits', the positive effects on European identity of such a development have been more than outweighed by the negative effects of mass immigration, which most European countries have experienced in recent years.

Trust in the European Parliament. Chapter 7 views levels of trust in the European Parliament as an indicator of European citizens' 'specific support' for the institutions of the EU. It deploys three theoretical perspectives to account for variations in such support, over time, at the individual-level. Instrumental rationality is captured through perceptions of the benefits that accrue (or fail to accrue) to the respondent's country as a result of EU membership. Transfer cueing is operationalised using people's levels of trust in their own national political institutions. Affective attachments to the EU are measured through preferences for a 'faster' or 'slower' approach to EU integration ('EU Speed'). The effects of these different stimuli, given the constraints of data availability, are tested against data for the period 1999-2006. The empirical results suggest three main conclusions. First, the measures of instrumental rationality, transfer cueing and affective attachment all produce significant positive coefficients over the 1999-2006 period, supporting the

idea that all three theoretical positions contribute to the explanation of European Parliament support. Second, the analysis shows that the effects of affective attachments weaken over time, whereas those associated with instrumental rationality strengthen. The third conclusion relates to the role of European Monetary Union. Several previous studies have suggested that the extension of EU policy competence to the monetary sphere after Maastricht – which culminated in the introduction of the Euro as the official circulating currency of the ‘Eurozone’ in January 2002 – engendered a more critical approach among European mass publics towards the EU. This was because Europeans gradually became more aware of the costs of EU membership that were associated with the budgetary and public spending disciplines imposed by membership of the Eurozone. Chapter 7 uses the fact that several EU countries did *not* join the Eurozone as a ‘natural experiment’ to determine if the weakening effects of affective attachment were indeed due to the Maastricht process. The findings show that the change in the relative effects of instrumental versus affective considerations was almost exclusively confined to Eurozone countries; where the Euro was *not* introduced, the balance of instrumental and affective effects on Trust in the European Parliament remained more or less constant. This strong finding leads to the conclusion that the deepening of the EU integration process – in particular its extension to the field of monetary policy – has enhanced the role of instrumental calculation in people’s evaluations of the Union itself. If specific support for EU institutions is to increase in the future, they must deliver – and be seen to deliver – tangible benefits to citizens.

Support for the EU. Chapter 8 offers an analysis of the sources of general support for the EU. As in other chapters, theoretical ideas from instrumental rationality, heuristic or cueing rationality and cognitive mobilisation are used to develop explanations for variations in support across time and space. Data availability constraints mean that aggregate-level analysis is the most appropriate for evaluating the various theoretical claims that are made. A key feature of the chapter is its focus on the extent to which different causal factors operate uniformly or unevenly across geographical and temporal contexts. The empirical results indicate that, although instrumental rationality is an important driver of EU support in certain contexts, its impact varies considerably across time and space – and on occasion it disappears altogether. This variegated pattern contrasts strongly with the impact of cognitive mobilisation and transfer cueing. The evidence reported suggests that these latter two mechanisms operate with remarkable evenness across contexts: where cognitive mobilisation is high, the greater cosmopolitanism it engenders consistently seems to promote support for the EU; and where domestic politics works, people are more likely to be cued to support the EU. These results suggest that future generalised support for the EU will perhaps depend less on the performance of its own institutions than has sometimes been the case in the past.

It will depend more on the continuing process of cognitive mobilisation that has occurred as education levels across Europe have risen over the last 50 years, and more on the performance of domestic political institutions and their ability to provide their populations with transparent, fair government. Indeed, if EU policymakers are seriously interested in generating increased support for the EU in the future, they might well consider the benefits of developing processes that could ensure ‘more cognitive mobilisation’ and ‘better governance’ at national and sub-national level throughout the EU.

EU Policy Scope. The question of the policy competencies that should be the preserve of national as opposed to EU-level decisionmaking has been at the heart of debates about the future of the European project since the 1950s. One important argument that has been advanced in this context is that there are certain policy areas (for example, the environment or the fight against organised international crime) that are ‘inherently internationalised’, whereas others (such as education or health policy) are not (Hooghe and Marks 2008). Chapter 9 shows that a similar set of factors appears to drive popular preferences for EU competence in policy areas of both ‘high’ and ‘low’ ‘inherent internationalisation’. In line with previous arguments about ‘substitution cueing’, people living in countries with relatively low Quality of Governance are more likely to want to see an extension of EU policy competence in all areas. EU mass publics also display practical common sense in recognising that EU-level policymaking is desirable in precisely those areas where competence has already been ceded to the supranational level. The chapter also finds evidence that the strongest support for EU competence is in those policy areas that correspond to the ‘European Social Model’ – particularly in relation to the environment, regional policy, social inclusion and policies for dealing with unemployment. Two of the more important ‘null findings’ of the chapter are also worth highlighting. First, it is sometimes thought that it is instrumentally rational for people living in poorer EU countries to prefer EU to national policy making, on the grounds that an EU policy approach is more likely to provide subsidies from Brussels that will disproportionately benefit poorer regions and economies. The evidence provided in Chapter 9 shows clearly that this is only the case for those policy areas with high budgetary implications. In the remaining cases, economic development has a *positive* effect on preferences for EU policy competence rather than the reverse. The second null finding relates to the role of Maastricht. As indicated above, in relation to trust in the European Parliament, the changing character of the EU since Maastricht has led to some changes in the pattern of mass public support for the EU itself. Some authors have even gone as far as to identify a transition from a ‘permissive consensus’, in which mass publics deferred to elite judgements about the future course of the Union to a ‘constraining dissensus’, in which increasing mass public doubt about the benefits of the Union act as a brake on further

integration. However, the evidence reported in Chapter 9 suggests that, as far as mass preferences for EU policy scope are concerned, the position is rather more complicated and inconsistent. Maastricht appears to have exerted little or no *general* effect on these preferences. In some policy areas support for Europeanisation increased after 1992; in others it remained stable; in yet others, it fell. In Social Model policy areas, mass publics appear to be just as committed to EU-level decisionmaking as they were before the mid 1990s – even if they are more reticent about the benefits of EMU. As the title of the chapter suggests, mass publics are in fact quite discriminating in terms of the policy areas in which they wish to see the EU develop: they are instrumentally rational; they want a Europe *a la carte*, with more EU-level decisionmaking in some areas – and less in others.

Postscript

This volume has covered a lot of empirical ground, embracing analyses of up to 27 EU countries over a period of almost 40 years. In spite of the large-scale changes that have occurred at the global and European levels – globalisation, the end of the Cold War, the expansion of the EU, the introduction of the Euro, and significant increases in migration both within and into the EU – the political attitudes and behaviours of European mass publics have changed relatively little. Indeed, it is tempting to conclude in this context that *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. This is not to say, of course, that nothing (important) has changed. Turnout in both national and European elections has declined progressively over the long-term, in part as a response to the systematic long-term decline in ideological polarisation which has certainly occurred extensively in western Europe. At the same time, however, democracy satisfaction has, if anything, increased – and *informal* political engagement is certainly no lower now than it was in the mid 1970s. Although levels of European identity have barely changed in four decades, attitudes towards the European Union have matured. Citizens are somewhat more sceptical towards the EU than they were in the 1970s, and – since the introduction of the single currency – they place more emphasis on instrumental rational considerations in evaluating institutions like the European Parliament than they did previously. They are also more inclined to differentiate their attitudes towards the EU, favouring more EU policy competence in some policy areas and less in others.

In order to explain these different changes and stases, we have employed a number of theoretical perspectives and identified several practical developments that appear to have had important empirical consequences. Instrumental rationality and either substitution or transfer cueing feature significantly in most of our statistical models. Cognitive mobilisation and affective attachments play in important roles in a substantial number of others. The effects of equity/fairness

considerations are more limited but they nonetheless play a role in a minority of models. In contrast to these more deep-seated psychological mechanisms, the ‘great events’ of the last three decades or so have played relatively minor roles in changing the political views and behaviours of Europe’s mass publics. The end of the Cold War appears to have affected informal political engagement – but only temporarily. The Maastricht process of Monetary Union has affected EU-related attitudes towards institutions but not – in any consistent way – towards issues of EU policy competence. The inclusion of a new set of post-Communist states in the European family has injected some new attitudinal patterns – Eastern European states, for example, have become more, rather than less, ideologically polarised since 1990. Yet the behaviour patterns of the new member states have been very similar to states that joined the EU in earlier accession waves – electoral turnout continues to decline almost everywhere.

All of this begs the question as to whether the relative lack of attitudinal change among European mass publics betokens a dangerous complacency in the face of potentially disruptive exogenous change or an adaptive resilience that refuses to be diverted from deeply-held convictions when challenged. In many respects, the question is unanswerable, but there are two reasons for supposing that the ‘adaptive resilience’ characterisation may be the more important. The first is that there is a considerable degree of over-time stability across so many different attitudinal sets, covering both domestic and EU-related politics. The lack of marked linear trend change or instability in most of the attitude measures reviewed here suggests that European mass publics are not easily swayed in their fundamental political views by ‘events’. We would argue that this stability of trend signifies a stability of view that is not easily shaken, rather than an indifference to the threats and challenges that exogenous change might engender. The second reason for supposing ‘adaptive resilience’ relates to evidence that we present in a companion volume to this study. That study involved conducting two surveys of political opinion among European mass publics. The first survey was carried out in the spring of 2007 – before the ‘credit crunch’ of late 2007, which transmuted into a full blown recession in 2008. The second wave of the survey – which asked an identical set of questions to the first – was conducted in the summer of 2008. These surveys covered the same set of issues analysed in this volume – satisfaction with national politics and democracy, political engagement, ideological positioning, European versus national identity, and attitudes towards the EU in terms of policy scope and representation. What is fascinating about the results is that although people’s economic perceptions were transformed between 2007 and 2008 (becoming massively more pessimistic and negative), all of the key political and European attitudes examined here remained broadly stable – indeed, most of the marginal distributions were identical within the margins of sampling error across both survey waves. It is possible that the continuing economic

uncertainties since 2008 will eventually provoke a change in the currently stable political attitude set that we have described. However, the fact that these attitudes did not change in the face of the most intense economic shock administered to Europe's political systems since 1945 suggests to us that reflect, at heart, a deep seated stability in European public opinion. This stability reflects a basic contentment – despite local and localised frustrations – with the way politics is practiced in most of Europe and the EU. We do not know, particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, whether national political systems and the emerging EU political system will continue to deliver the kind of policy outcomes that European mass publics favour and demand. But if they do, there is good reason to suppose that levels of satisfaction with national political systems and with the EU will continue to be maintained in the future.

Endnotes

¹ This finding of a recovery in democracy satisfaction after the 1990s contrasts with the sort of analysis provided in Norris (1999a). It is perhaps the case that the rise of 'critical citizens' or 'dissatisfied democrats' that was described in that volume reflected changes during a specific time period, rather than an inevitable feature of mature democracies.

² As pointed out in Chapter 9, there are also specific – and varying – trends in different policy areas.

³ The turnout graph, of course, covers a longer period than the polarisation graph. The shorter time period for the polarisation data is because they are available only since 1976. Note, however, that even for the period since 1976, both graphs clearly trend downward.

⁴ Inglehart's analysis also embraces the connected idea of post-materialism, which together with cognitive mobilisation is seen as being responsible for increasing distrust of hierarchical institutions and an increasing disposition to engage in protest and other forms of unconventional political action (Inglehart 1977a; Barnes and Kaase 1979).

⁵ This, of course, is only one possible interpretation of these observed relationships. An alternative possible interpretation is that turnout is falling in both east and west because of 'political normalisation'. Democracy pushes parties towards less polarised positions in advanced democracies. Economic growth and consolidation of democratic institutions such as a functioning party system help party politics to become less dramatic – and accordingly less mobilising in terms of turnout.