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Is anyone listening? Mass and elite opinion cueing in the EU

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses the connections between elite and mass opinion in the European Union. It considers both the ways in which mass publics use heuristics supplied by political elites to form their EU opinions, and the ways in which political elites respond to the opinions of the mass publics they represent. The paper employs data from simultaneously-conducted elite and mass surveys carried out in sixteen European countries in 2007. The results show that masses and elites in Europe do appear to take cues from one another in forming their EU opinions. Political elites base their individual-level opinions on the average position taken by their respective (national) party supporters. Mass respondents base their opinions on the average position taken by elite members of the (national) party with which they identify.

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There has been considerable popular and scholarly debate in recent years about the possible disjunction between elite and mass opinion in the EU. For much of the late twentieth century, a 'permissive consensus' held sway (Dalton and Eichenberg, 1999), in which mass publics tended to defer to the judgements of elites who were largely determined to press forward with 'the European project'. In contrast, in the present century, what has been described a 'constraining dissensus' has emerged in which mass publics have been less prepared to share the enthusiasm of elites for ever greater European integration, exacerbating concerns about the EU's possible 'democratic deficit' (Hooghe and Marks, 2008; Hix, 2008).

This paper focuses on two main issues. The first is descriptively empirical: to what extent do European mass publics and political elites share similar views as to the ways in which the EU should develop in the future? In order to answer this question, we present evidence from identical elite and mass opinion surveys which were conducted simultaneously across 16 EU countries in 2007. The second issue concerns the ways in which elite and mass opinion

might affect each other. Are the opinions of different national political elites influenced by their respective mass domestic constituencies or, ignoring mass opinion, do political elites pay more attention to the views of national business elites? From the mass perspective, to what extent do mass publics arrive at their judgements about Europe on the basis of cues provided by *national* and/or *party* elites?

There is, of course, no shortage of previous studies that have explored these linkages at the *aggregate* level. Steenbergen et al. (2007), for example, have demonstrated that elite and mass views on the EU influence each other reciprocally over time; Hooghe (2003), Ray (2003), and Gabel and Scheve (2007a, 2007b) have all shown that elites influence mass opinion; and Carrubba (2001) has shown that mass views affect elites. The present study makes three important contributions. First, using data from simultaneously conducted elite and mass opinion surveys, it offers an *individual-level*, rather than an *aggregate-level*, analysis of mass and elite opinion cueing mechanisms across the EU. Second, it analyses the connections between elite and mass opinions across *five different sorts of EU attitude* and shows that similar patterns of relationship hold across all these different domains. Third, it explores the impact of *economic elite opinion* on both political elites and mass publics by

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incorporating explicit measures of business preferences into the models that are estimated.

Part 1 of the paper compares mass and elite attitudes towards the EU under five headings: general beliefs about the need to 'strengthen the EU'; preferences for greater or lesser EU 'Policy Scope'; the extent of 'trust in EU institutions'; feelings of European identity or attachment; and preferences for a 'Social' rather than 'an Economically Competitive' Europe. Part 2 describes the putative cueing mechanisms that potentially underpin the connections between elite and mass EU attitudes. It also outlines the models that we specify to test these mechanisms. Part 3 reports our empirical results. These show that, although there are significant asymmetries involved, masses and elites in Europe do appear to take cues from one another in forming their opinions about the EU. In particular, there is a clear tendency for political elites to base their individual-level opinions about the EU on the average position taken by their respective (national) party supporters. There is a corresponding tendency for mass respondents to base their individual-level opinions on the average position taken by elite members of the (national) party with which they identify. The positions of national economic elites, however, influence only the opinions of their respective national political elites.

1. Differences and similarities in mass and political elite attitudes towards the EU

The mass and elite attitude data that we employ here are taken from the collaborative IntUne project, funded under the EC's FP6 programme. The surveys covered sixteen countries, including states from all five EU 'Accession waves'. The mass surveys were national representative samples conducted either by RDD telephone or face-to-face by TNS-Gallup. The target number of cases in each national sample was 1000. Data were weighted by age and gender to the profile of all adults in each country. The mass survey dataset (weighted $N = 16,130$) was subjected to country-by-country multiple imputation procedures for all item non-response missing data, using the Amelia program developed by Honaker, King and Blackwell. See <http://gking.harvard.edu/amelia/>. Where this was relevant, the standard errors estimates reported in this paper were adjusted for the multiply imputed nature of the citizen data using the *mim* package of Carlin et al. (2008). The elite data were collected through in-person interviews conducted by members of the collaborating research teams. The political elites ($N = 1354$) were recruited by quota sampling from each national legislature, ensuring a balance of front and backbench opinion from the major national parties in each country. Economic elites ($N = 706$) were selected from the top 100 companies, defined by turnover, in each of the countries sampled. The mass surveys were conducted in March 2007. The elite surveys were conducted over the period January to May 2007. Full details of the elite and mass surveys are reported, respectively, in Best et al. (2012) and Sanders et al. (2012). The numbers of respondents interviewed in each country in the mass, political elite and economic elite surveys are described in Annex 1.

In order to obtain comparable elite and mass measures, we use only those survey items that appeared in both the mass and elite IntUne surveys. First, we measure *General Dispositions towards the EU* using a question that asks respondents to place themselves on a 0–10 scale, where high values connote a preference for strengthening the EU further and low values connote a belief that 'European Unification has already gone too far'.¹ This scale has been employed extensively in previous work and gives a good indication of the respondent's overall degree of sympathy with (or antipathy towards) 'the European project' (see e.g., Mattila and Raunio, 2006; van der Brug et al., 2007). Our second attitude measure concerns preferences for EU policy competence in four key policy areas – taxation, social security, foreign policy and regional aid.² We combine responses in these four areas to produce a single (1–5) index of *EU Policy Scope*, which sums up support for maintaining and extending EU jurisdiction in specific policy domains. A high score indicates that the respondent favours an extension of EU policy competence in the future; a low score that she/he opposes it. Our third measure of EU attitudes relates to the most visible institutional manifestations of the EU – the extent to which the respondent trusts the European Commission and the European Parliament 'to make the right decisions'. Here, we combine two standard 0–10 trust items to produce a single *Trust in EU institutions* 0–10 scale.³

The three items above all capture different aspects of people's *support* for the EU. Our fourth measure shifts the focus to *European identity*. We measure this through a question that asked respondents about their degrees of 'attachment' to their locality, their region, their nation and Europe.⁴ This produces a 1–4 European Identity scale. Finally, we also seek to measure the respondent's *preferred future 'vision' of the EU* itself. Our mass and elite

¹ The question asked in both mass and elite surveys was: 'Some say European unification has already gone too far. Others say it should be strengthened. What is your opinion? Please indicate your views using a 0–10 scale. On this scale, '0' means unification 'has already gone too far' and '10' means it 'should be strengthened'. What number on this scale best describes your position?'

² Respondents were asked: Thinking about the European Union over the next ten years or so, can you tell me whether you are in favour or against the following: A unified tax system for the EU; A common system of social security in the EU; A single EU foreign policy toward outside countries; and More help for EU regions in economic or social difficulties. 'Strongly in favour' was coded as 5; 'In favour' as 4; 'Neither agree nor disagree or No opinion' as 3; 'Disagree' as 2; and 'Strongly Disagree' as 1. Factor analyses of a large number of survey items indicated that these four items consistently loaded together on the same factor independently of what other variables entered the analysis. The index of EU Policy Scope was constructed as the arithmetic mean of each respondent's scores on the four 1–5 scales.

³ Respondents were asked: Please tell me on a scale of 0–10, how much you personally trust each of the following institutions to usually take the right decisions. '0' means that 'you do not trust an institution at all' and '10' means 'you have complete trust'...the European Commission...the European Parliament.

⁴ Respondents were asked: 'People feel different degrees of attachment to their town or village, to their region, to their country and to Europe. What about you? Are you very attached, somewhat attached, not very attached or not at all attached to...your town/village...your region...your country...Europe?'. 'Very attached' was scored as 4; 'Fairly attached' as 3; 'Not very attached' as 2; and 'Not at all attached' as 1.

respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought the future of the EU should be more about ensuring Europe's global economic competitiveness or about ensuring improved social welfare provision across the EU.⁵ The individual responses clearly reflect rather different visions of what respondents think should be the primary purpose of the EU. Those selecting the first option incline towards an 'Economically Competitive Europe' model supported by most national and European-level business organisations. Those selecting the second option favour what has been referred to as the 'European Social Model' supported by collectivist organisations such as the European Trades Union Confederation (Barr, 2004). Here, we focus on the relative weight accorded to each of these competing visions by our elite and mass respondents.

Table 1 reports the inter-correlations among these five items for both mass and political elite respondents. The table suggests two main conclusions. First, at both mass and elite levels the inter-correlations among the Strengthen EU, EU Scope, EU Trust and Attachment to Europe terms, are positive but fairly weak: the highest bivariate correlation in the mass segment of the table is $r = .29$; the highest in the elite segment is $r = .35$. It is unlikely that such low correlations among elites can be explained away as method artefacts and they would rather seem to imply that each of the measures in the table is picking up a *different* aspect of EU attitudes – each of which potentially requires a distinctive explanation.⁶ Second, it is clear that the Social Europe/Economically Competitive Europe item – again at both elite and mass levels – does not correlate consistently with the other support and identity items. In the mass segment of the table, the Social EU term correlates at $r = <.10$ with all other measures. Even in the elite segment, where the overall correlation levels tend to be a little higher, only one correlation (between Social EU and EU Scope) is noticeably above $r = .10$. This lack of relationship between the Social EU term and other EU attitudes probably reflects the

⁵ Respondents were asked: I'm going to read you two statements. Please tell me which of them comes closest to your view: (1) The main aim of the EU should be to make the European economy more competitive in world markets. (2) The main aim of the EU should be to provide better social security for all its citizens. Elite respondents were allowed the volunteered option of agreeing with both statements equally (22% did so), whereas mass respondents were not given this opportunity. Extensive experimentation with this slightly different set of response options (involving dropping respondents who responded with 'both' and coding them as a neutral middle category) makes no significant difference to any of the statistical results reported here.

⁶ The fact that the inter-correlations among these items for elites are not much higher than the equivalent inter-correlations among mass respondents might at first seem surprising, since elites might be expected to be more familiar with EU matters and therefore to be more consistent in their EU attitudes. We interpret the similarities in the elite and mass inter-correlations as evidence that both elites and masses differentiate among the different aspects of the EU that our five attitude measures are intended to capture. There is no necessary logical reason, for example, why an individual (whether from the elite or mass sample) who wishes to see a strengthening of the EU should also wish to see an extension of EU Policy Scope or have a high level of trust in current EU institutions. These attitudes are likely to be *correlated* at both mass and elite levels (as they are), but we see no reason why they should be more *highly* correlated at either the mass or the elite level.

Table 1

Inter-correlations among five EU attitude measures, mass and political elite samples compared.

	Strengthen EU	EU scope	EU trust	Attachment
Mass				
EU Policy Scope	.28			
EU Institutional Trust	.29	.21		
Attachment to Europe	.23	.22	.29	
Social EU	.01	.04	-.04	-.07
Political elite				
EU Policy Scope	.35			
EU Institutional Trust	.41	.28		
Attachment to Europe	.32	.22	.34	
Social EU	.11	.24	.04	-.01

N for Mass = 16,130; N for Political Elite = 1251.

tendency for people's visions for the EU to be conditioned more by ideology than are other EU attitudes. People with a leftist (rightist) perspective are more (less) likely to favour the European Social Model – just as they are more (less) likely to favour a *national* Social Model. This is a theme to which we return in Section 3 below. In any event, this putative ideological conditioning effect helps to explain why the pattern of Social Europe responses appears to be more or less orthogonal to the other EU attitudes outlined in Table 1.

Table 2 reports the mean scores on each of the five indices for mass and political elite respondents respectively. All the mass/elite differences are statistically significant, though this is not surprising with such large Ns. The column on the right hand side of the table provides a standardised summary of the relative magnitudes of the mass/elite differences. The general pattern that emerges from the table is clear. On the three EU 'support' items – Strengthen EU, EU Policy Scope and EU Institutional Trust – and in terms of Attachment to Europe, political elites in Europe are consistently more pro-European than their mass counterparts. Elite opinion is 'furthest ahead' of mass opinion in terms of EU Institutional Trust (mass mean = 4.70; elite mean = 5.81; standardised difference = 30%), with Strengthen EU (standardised difference = 18%) and Attachment to Europe (17%) not far behind. Elites and masses do not differ much with regard to EU Policy Scope (standardised difference = 4%). However, in relation to

Table 2

Average mass and political elite scores on five EU attitude measures.

	Range	Mass average score	Political elite average score	Mass minus elite score as percentage of mass average score
Strengthen EU	0–10	5.57	6.71	+18
EU Policy Scope	1–5	3.71	3.85	+4
EU Institutional Trust	0–10	4.70	5.81	+30
Attachment to Europe	1–4	2.75	3.22	+17
Social EU	0–1	.67	.51	–24

N for Mass = 16,130; N for Political Elite = 1251.

All differences significant at .0000.

Social Europe, the masses are ‘ahead’ of elites. The standardised difference of -24 indicates that masses are far more in favour of Social Europe than their political elite counterparts – the latter, in contrast, being more in sympathy with the idea of an Economically Competitive Europe.

Figs. 1–5 summarise the national variations in mass and political elite EU attitudes across the 16 countries sampled in the IntUne surveys. With a few exceptions, the general picture portrayed is consistent across all five figures. The degree of sympathy with the EU varies fairly predictably across countries, with Spain, Italy, Greece and Germany typically leading the way as the most pro-European, and the UK and Denmark together with some of the new Eastern member states typically marked out as the most anti-European. As in Table 2, the largest differences between average mass and elite opinion are observed in relation to EU Institutional Trust (Fig. 3), Strengthen EU (Fig. 1) and Attachment to Europe (Fig. 4). In all of these cases, political elite opinion within each country is more pro-European than its mass counterpart. The differences between mass and elite opinion are

smallest in relation to EU Policy Scope (Fig. 2). In the majority of countries, elite opinion tends to be more pro-EU than mass opinion. However, there is also a significant minority group of countries in which elite opinion is more anti-EU than its mass counterpart in relation to Policy Scope. This group includes three of the more Eurosceptic nations (UK, Denmark and Poland) together with Germany and Slovakia. As also anticipated in Table 2, Fig. 5 shows that with regard to the idea of Social Europe, political elites (except in France and Serbia) lag behind their respective mass publics. These exceptions apart, it is clear that Europe’s political elites tend to see the main aim of the EU as being about ensuring Europe’s economic competitiveness; its mass publics, in contrast, tend to see the main aim as being about raising standards of social security across the union.

2. Specifying ‘cueing’ models of mass and political elite opinion towards the EU

The five measures of mass and elite attitudes described in the previous section constitute the dependent variables

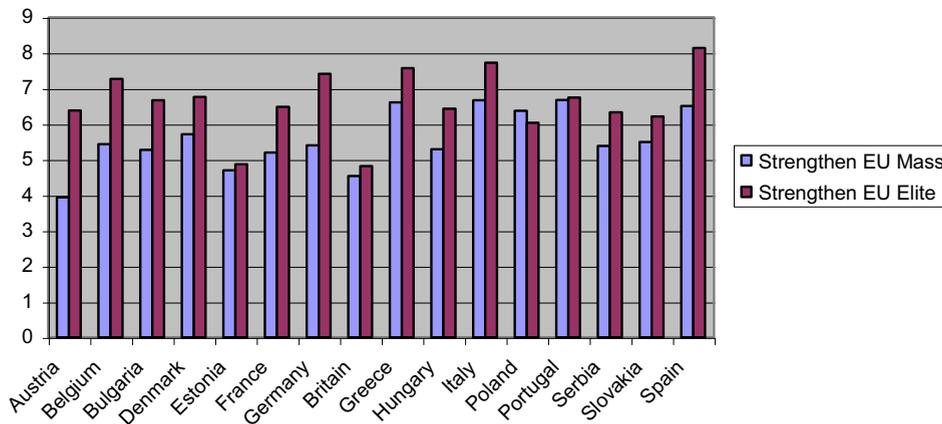


Fig. 1. Average mass and political elite scores on Strengthen EU.

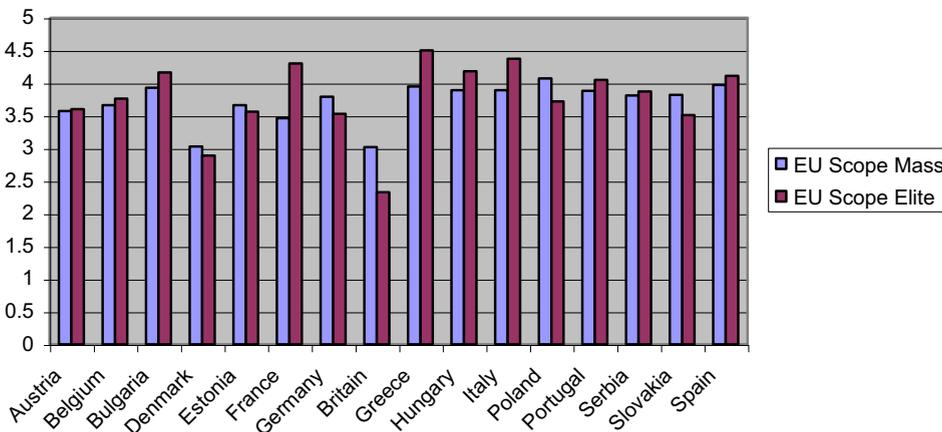


Fig. 2. Average mass and political elite scores on EU Policy Scope.

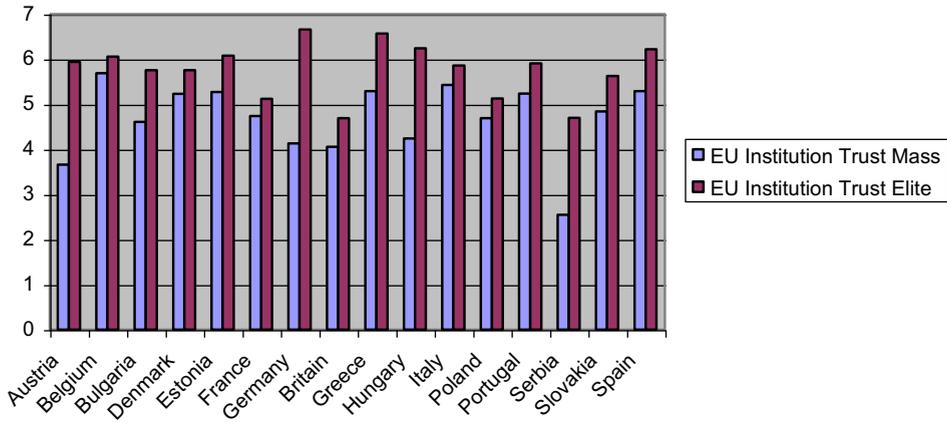


Fig. 3. Average mass and political elite scores on EU Institutional Trust.

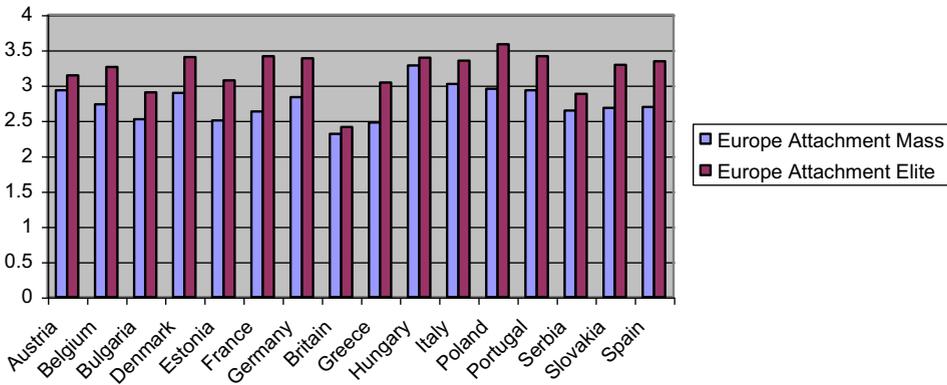


Fig. 4. Average mass and political elite scores on Attachment to Europe.

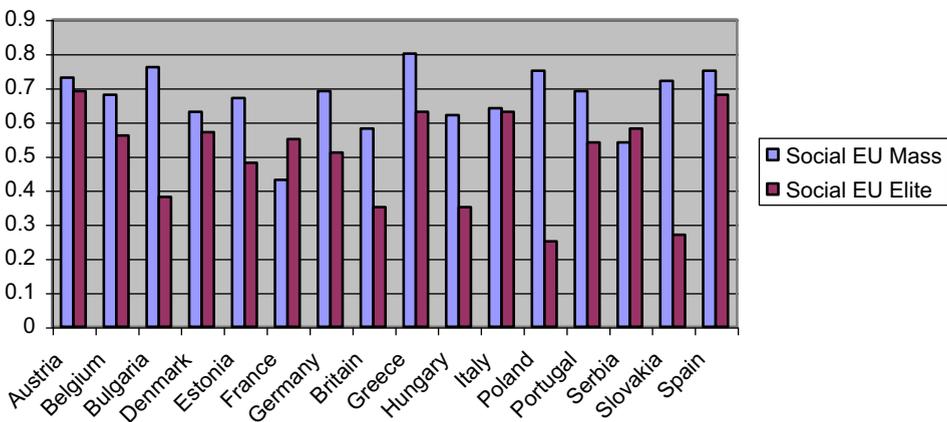


Fig. 5. Average mass and political elite scores on Social Europe vs Economic Competition.

of the analysis conducted here. Our core aim is to assess the extent to which elite and mass attitudes towards the EU act as cues or heuristics for each other, controlling for other variables (such as rational calculations about the costs and benefits of EU membership) that might plausibly be expected to affect EU attitudes. Our approach is to specify near-identical models of mass and elite opinion, in which the only differences are that in the mass models we insert elite cues as predictor variables and in the elite models we insert mass cues as predictors.⁷

The common core of predictors for all our model specifications draws directly on previous work on EU opinion formation (see, for example, Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Alesina and Wacziarg, 1999; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2005; McLaren, 2002; Magalhães, 2009; Duchesne and Frogner, 1995; Citrin and Sides, 2004; Risse, 2006). Fundamentally, these variables are included primarily as controls so that the effects of our hypothesised elite and mass cueing mechanisms can be properly estimated. The common core contains individual-level expressions for left–right ideology, perceived benefits of EU membership, perceived sense of EU political efficacy and standard demographics. It also contains macro-level terms for Quality of Governance and EU Net Budgetary Transfers. Extensive macro analysis (not reported) showed that these two variables account for most of the country-by-country variations in EU attitudes. With only 16 countries in the analysis, there are insufficient degrees of freedom to permit the inclusion of more than two or three macro variables if robust parameter estimates are to be obtained.

The rationales for the inclusion of each of these common core variables are as follows.

*Left–right ideology.*⁸ Since the 1980s, leftist parties have tended to be more sympathetic than those of the right to the European project. Given that we are interested, as discussed below, in estimating the magnitude of party cueing effects on EU attitudes, it is important to control for an individual's left–right position in order properly to estimate those effects. We nonetheless expect left–right ideology to exert a significant negative effect on (pro) EU attitudes, with right-wingers being less pro-EU. In addition, as anticipated above, we expect this negative effect of ideology to be strongest on our Social Europe attitude

measure, given that a pro-Social Europe position reflects a more collectivist approach to both national and EU politics.

Perceived benefits of EU membership. This variable is intended to capture a straightforward rational calculation about the overall costs and benefits of EU membership to the respondent's nation.⁹ Individuals who believe that their country has benefited from membership are expected to display more pro-EU attitudes than those who do not (Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Gabel and Palmer, 1995; Anderson and Reichert, 1996; Anderson, 1998; Gabel, 1998a, 1998b; Christin et al., 2005).

*Sense of political inefficacy at EU level.*¹⁰ This variable is intended to capture a further aspect of rational calculation. The more that people feel that the EU fails to respond to their needs and preferences, the less likely they are to view it sympathetically. We accordingly expect sense of inefficacy to exert a negative effect on pro-EU attitudes.

Standard demographics. We include age cohort, sex, religion (we distinguish Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, with all other groupings including 'no belief' as the reference group), and education (graduate or not) as control variables. We have no particular expectations about the signs or significance levels of this group of variables.

Quality of Governance. This is a macro-level variable that uses the standard World Bank measure of the overall quality of national governance.¹¹ The index employed is average of the national scores for the three years prior to 2007, when the elite and mass surveys analysed here were conducted. The *transfer* heuristic hypothesis implies that Quality of Governance should be positively associated with pro-EU attitudes, on the grounds that people who live in high performing political systems will also view EU governance positively (Gabel, 1998a). The *substitution* heuristic hypothesis implies that Quality of Governance should be negatively related to pro-EU attitudes on the grounds that people who live in poorly performing systems are more likely to view EU governance positively and are more likely to wish to see it extended in the future (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2000; Sanders et al., 2012).

*Net EU Budgetary Transfers.*¹² The assumption here is that people living in countries that are clear net beneficiaries of the EU budgetary process, other things being equal, will be more likely to display pro-EU attitudes (see, e.g., Anderson and Reichert, 1996; Hooghe and Marks, 2005). We accordingly expect this variable to exert a positive effect on EU attitudes.

⁷ There are clearly other ways of specifying what might constitute an 'elite cue' than the attitudinal approach we take here. Some analysts, for example, have made use of party manifestos data to characterise cues provided by party positions on different issues; others have used elite surveys. We prefer to use attitudinal measures for two reasons. First, manifestos, though they are agreed party documents, are rarely read by most citizens. They typically make a large number of assertions and promises that most citizens are in fact unfamiliar with. Second, manifestos are produced by definition at election times and are therefore not generally objects of media attention or campaigning in the long periods between elections. National Assembly members, in contrast, are constantly engaged in a dialogue with their respective publics. They continually try to make their views known to their constituencies (however conceived) on an almost daily basis. It seems far more likely to us that the views expressed in this sort of continuous campaigning over time provides a far better indication of 'average party opinion' than the formal and formalised statements of party manifestos.

⁸ Respondents were asked to place themselves on a 0–10 scale where 0 denotes Left and 10 denotes Right.

⁹ Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (OUR COUNTRY) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union? Response options: has benefited; has not benefited.

¹⁰ Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement/disagreement with the following statement: Those who make decisions in the European Union do not care much what people like me think. Response options were Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.

¹¹ The index is based on an aggregation of evidence from a variety of different sources. For details, see Kaufman et al., 2008.

¹² As with our Quality of Governance measure, we take the average net transfers for the three years (2004–2006) prior to the date of the surveys.

2.1. Operationalising cues

Although the inclusion of most of these ‘common core’ variables has a strong theoretical rationale grounded in earlier research, we include them here primarily for the purposes of statistical control, to ensure that we do not overestimate the effects of the key explanatory variables in which we are interested. These ‘key explanatory variables’ all involve attempts to measure the effects of different ‘cues’ or heuristics that mass and/or elite respondents might use in forming their attitudes towards the EU. We expect mass respondents to use cues provided by elite actors and institutions as part of their cognitive efforts to make sense of a relatively unfamiliar political object like the EU; and we expect elite respondents to use cues provided by mass respondents as part of their democratic efforts to respond to mass opinion. We are not able here to analyse the actual transmission mechanisms either (a) by which mass publics come to ‘know’ what elite opinion is or (b) by which elites become aware of the views of mass publics. In our view, such mechanisms cannot be properly examined using the sort of survey materials available for this study. What we can do here, however, is to establish whether or not there is a *prima facie* case for believing that such reciprocal (or conceivably one-way) cueing effects do indeed operate. The question of how any putative cueing effects are actually transmitted must await further research.

The analysis here explores five related sorts of mass-elite cueing effects. Two of these are concerned with the effects of elite cues on mass respondents; two focus on the effects of mass cues on elites. One is common to both mass and elite attitudes.

Consider, first, the *possible effects of elite cues on mass respondents*. Gabel and Scheve (2007a, 2007b), Steenbergen and Jones (2002), and Ray (2003), among others, have shown that people who support pro-EU parties are more likely to display pro-EU attitudes themselves. Here, we try to take this finding a step further. We know from our mass survey which party each respondent voted for in the last general election and which party, if any, they ‘identify’ with.¹³ From our political elite survey, since each political elite respondent is a national assembly member whose views we ascertain, we also know quite a lot about average political elite opinion in each country. For each of the five EU attitude sets described in the previous section, we use this information to make three sorts of characterisation of elite opinion. First, we can produce a measure of *average political elite opinion in each country*. We know from Figs. 1–5 that there are clear differences between average mass and average elite opinion in regard to each attitude set. The key empirical question is whether, for a particular attitude set, the average position adopted by the political elite in a given country acts as a cue to mass attitudes over and above the effects of other influences on those attitudes. Second, we can construct measures of *average political elite opinion in*

each national political party.¹⁴ The critical empirical question here is whether, for a particular attitude set, mass respondents take their cues from the average position adopted by the elite members of the party with which they identify – again, net of other effects on mass attitudes.

In principle, either or both (or neither) of these average political elite opinion measures could act as cues to mass opinion. Mass publics could take their main cues about Europe from the overall tenor of elite debate within their own countries. Equally, they could rely more on the general impression conveyed by the parties (or party groupings) with which they identify. In the absence of being able to test for specific ‘transmission mechanisms’, we assume that mass respondents learn what these cues are from continued exposure to the mass media over time, from interpersonal contacts, and from the campaigning efforts of political parties both at election times and (at lower levels) in the periods between elections.

Now consider the *possible effects of mass cues on political elite attitudes*. A similar set of arguments applies. In trying to respond to mass opinion, political elites could take note primarily of the *average national position* adopted by the mass publics in their respective countries. Equally, they could seek to respond primarily to what they perceive to be their ‘party constituencies’ – *average opinion among their own national party supporters*. Again, we cannot specify precisely how elites might come to ‘know’ what their respective mass publics think, but we assume that it is through over time exposure to media debates, opinion poll findings, and personal and professional contacts. In any event, if we found that none of these average mass opinion measures affected political elite opinion, we could legitimately infer that elites were failing to respond to the views of their respective mass publics, with the implication, perhaps, that political representation was not functioning effectively in the EU sphere.

A final set of cues potentially applies to both mass and elite opinion. Our discussion of elite opinion thus far has focused on the views of the political elite sample that was interviewed in the IntUne surveys. These surveys also interviewed members of each country’s economic elite. To avoid overburdening the preceding text, tables and figures, we did not report the views of the various national economic elites. Although we think it unlikely that the opinions of economic elites have significant effects on mass opinion, given the continuous lobbying activities of many economic organisations it is clearly possible that the views of national economic elites could affect those of the corresponding *political* elites. Our expectation, therefore, is that the average position taken by national economic elites on a given EU attitude will affect political elite views; in contrast, economic elite positions will *not* affect mass opinion. To ensure a ‘fair’ test of the operation of the various cues identified above, we include average economic elite positions in all of the models that we test below.

Combining our common core variables with the hypothesised cueing mechanisms outlined above, our model specifications are as follows.

¹³ Respondents were asked if they “feel close to any political party and (if yes), which one they feel closest to”.

¹⁴ Clearly we can only do this if there is a sufficient number of elite respondents in each party. We accordingly restrict our analysis here to parties that have 9 respondents or more in IntUne political elite survey.

For mass respondents:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Mass Respondent EU Attitude}_j = & b_0 + b_1 \text{ Average Attitude}_j \text{ Political Elite Score in Respondent's Country} \\
 & + b_2 \text{ Average Attitude}_j \text{ Political Elite Score in Respondent's Party} \\
 & + b_3 \text{ Average Attitude}_j \text{ Economic Elite Score in Respondent's Country} + b_4 \text{ Left} \\
 & - \text{right ideology} + b_5 \text{ Perceptions of EU Benefits} + b_6 \text{ Lack of Perceived EU Political Efficacy} \\
 & + b_{7-12} \text{ Demographic Controls} + b_{13} \text{ Quality of Governance} \\
 & + b_{14} \text{ Net EU Budgetary Contributions} + e_i
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where j connotes a given EU Attitude; some combination of b_1 – b_2 is expected to be positive and significant; b_3 is expected to be non-significant; b_4 and b_6 are expected to be negative and significant; b_5 is expected to be positive and significant; there are no strong expectations for b_7 – b_{14} ; and e_i is a random error term.

For political elite respondents:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Political Elite Respondent EU Attitude}_j = & b_0 + b_1 \text{ Average Attitude}_j \text{ Mass Score in Respondent's Country} \\
 & + b_2 \text{ Average Attitude}_j \text{ Mass Score in Respondent's Party} \\
 & + b_3 \text{ Average Attitude}_j \text{ Economic Elite Score in Respondent's Country} + b_4 \text{ Left} \\
 & - \text{right ideology} + b_5 \text{ Perceptions of EU Benefits} \\
 & + b_6 \text{ Lack of Perceived EU Political Efficacy} + b_{7-12} \text{ Demographic Controls} \\
 & + b_{13} \text{ Quality of Governance} + b_{14} \text{ Net EU Budgetary Contributions} + e_i
 \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

where j connotes a given EU Attitude; some combination of b_1 – b_2 is expected to be positive and significant; b_3 is expected to be positive and significant; b_4 and b_6 are expected to be negative and significant; b_5 is expected to be positive and significant; there are no strong expectations for b_7 – b_{14} ; and e_i is a random error term.

Two sets of robustness checks are conducted on the specifications in (1) and (2). The first involves testing for the cueing effects estimated in b_1 , b_2 and b_3 using *median* scores on the respective variables rather than *average* scores indicated in (1) and (2). These ‘median’ specifications are intended to capture the idea that median positions might provide stronger signals to both masses and elites rather than potentially amorphous averages. The second set of checks, following Gabel and Scheve (2007a, 2007b) and Steenbergen et al. (2007), involves taking account of the *distributions* of elite and mass opinion on each of our five attitude cue measures. The idea here is that the effects of an average score cue might be strengthened (weakened) if opinion is narrowly concentrated (widely dispersed) around the mean value. Thus, for example, mass-level British Conservative Party identifiers might make more use of elite Conservative Party attitudes as a cue in determining their views about the EU if Conservative elites convey a unified message about their position on Europe. We test for the potentially distorting effects of the various opinion distributions by adding three terms to (1) and (2). For Attitude j ,

the additional terms in (1) are *standard deviation* measures for the Political Elite Score in the Respondent’s Country; the Political Elite Score in the Respondent’s Party; and the Economic Elite Score in the Respondent’s Country. The corresponding terms in (2) are standard deviation measures for the Mass Score in the Respondent’s Country; the Mass Score

in the Respondent’s Party; and the Economic Elite Score in the Respondent’s Country. Our expectation is that the broad pattern of cueing effects will be unaffected by the inclusion of these additional terms. Our supposition is that the attitudinal signals sent and received by both elites and masses are fairly broad gauged; they are insufficiently refined to be influenced significantly by dispersal measures.

3. Empirical findings

Tables 3 and 4 report the results of estimating (1) and (2) respectively for mass and political elite respondents for each of our five EU attitudes. To render the tables more manageable, we report only coefficients for which we have directly relevant theoretical expectations. Full results, including estimates for all (other) control variables, are available from the authors on request. All estimation is clustered by country and uses a sandwich estimator of standard errors. Bearing in mind that the attitude scales differ in their respective levels of measurement, estimation for the Strengthen EU, EU Policy Scope and EU Institutional Trust equations is by OLS; for the Social Europe equation it is by logistic regression; and for the Attachment to Europe equation, by ordered logit.

Table 3 provides our summary results for our mass respondents. Although the r^2 values are modest, the models reported are reasonably well-determined. The control variables shown all behave broadly in line with

Table 3

Five cueing models of EU attitudes, mass respondents.

Mass respondents	EU support								EU main aim	
	Strengthen EU (0–10)		EU Policy Scope (1–5)		EU Institutional Trust (0–10)		Attachment To Europe (1–4)		Social Europe (0/1)	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Political Elite National Average Score	.58**	.14	.27	.26	.15	.28	.71*	.35	.29	.52
Political Elite National Party Average Score	.20***	.03	.08**	.02	.11*	.05	.27***	.10	.85*	.23
Economic Elite National Average Score	-.25	.14	-.10	.22	.17	.16	.00	.70	-.93	.84
Left–right Ideology	.01	.02	-.01*	.00	.01	.02	-.00	.01	-.08**	.02
Perceived EU Benefits	1.58***	.12	.44***	.06	1.57**	.07	1.01***	.15	-.24**	.08
Perceived Political Inefficacy	-.20***	.05	-.00	.01	-.24***	.04	-.10***	.02	.02	.02
R ² /Pseudo R ²	.15		.14		.19		.04		.11	
N	16,120		16,120		16,120		16,120		16,120	

****p* < .001; ***p* < .01; **p* < .05.

Strengthen EU, EU Policy Scope and EU Institutional Trust Models estimated by OLS; Attachment to Europe by Ordered Logit; Social Europe by Logistic Regression. All estimates clustered by country, robust standard errors reported. Full models estimated include controls for Demographics (Age cohort, Sex, Religion (Catholic/not, Orthodox/not, Protestant/not) and Graduate/Not), Quality of Governance (average World Bank score, 2004–6) and Net EU Budgetary Contributions (average 2004–6). Coefficients on these control variables not reported here – full results available on request. Constants and cutpoints for ordered logit not reported.

theoretical expectations, which reinforces the plausibility of the overall model specification. As anticipated by rational choice approaches, the Perceived EU Benefits term is positive and significant in all five equations. Similarly, the Perceived Inefficacy term is negative and significant in all of the ‘EU support’ equations. Its non-significance in the Social Europe equation is not troubling in the sense that this model is concerned with people’s preferences about the main aim of the EU, rather than with their support for the EU itself. The ideology term achieves significance in only the EU Institutional Trust and Social Europe equations. As expected, it is negatively signed in both cases, with a much larger effect being observed in the Social Europe equation. The non-significance of the ideology term in the remaining equations is also non-troubling, since its effects are likely being ‘driven out’ by the inclusion of ‘party cue’ terms. The key point here is that ideology is being controlled for in the models – so that any observed ‘party cue’ effect will clearly be operating over and above the effects of ideology.¹⁵

What, then, does Table 3 reveal about elite cueing effects on mass attitudes towards the EU? The first conclusion suggested by the table is that the cues provided by elite National Parties yield positive and significant coefficients in all of the five models – Strengthen EU, EU Policy Scope, EU Trust, Attachment and Social Europe. These findings indicate that party heuristics play a very important cueing role in the determination of EU attitudes. In any event, parties matter: mass publics appear to take note of elite party opinion over and above their own ideological positions, their perceptions of the benefits (or otherwise) of EU membership and their

sense of political (in)efficacy. A second conclusion suggested by Table 3 is that in certain circumstances mass publics also seem to take note of the overall tenor of political elite opinion in their respective countries. The positive and significant coefficients on the Political Elite National Average terms in the Strengthen EU and Attachment to Europe equations indicate that mass opinion can be swayed by the overall climate of national elite discourse – albeit on a more limited scale than is the case with elite-level party cues. The final conclusion suggested by Table 3 relates to the absence of impact exerted by *economic* elite opinion on mass views. The Economic Elite National Average terms are non-significant in every equation in the table. This is an important non-finding. It shows that while mass publics might be swayed by elite opinion within the political parties they support (or to which they are relatively close), they appear to be unaffected by the opinions of economic elites. As we will see below in relation to the Table 4 results, this establishes a clear difference in the cueing influences on masses and elites.

Table 4 reports the results for elite respondents. There are similarities with the findings in Table 3 but also important differences. The similarities relate primarily to the reported individual-level control variables. As in Table 3, the Perceived EU Benefits term is positive and significant in the four EU support equations – Strengthen EU, EU Policy Scope, EU Institutional Trust and Attachment to Europe. The political inefficacy term is significant and negative in the same three equations as in Table 3 – those for Strengthen EU, Institutional Trust and Attachment to Europe. The Left–right Ideology term is also significant and negative in the same two equations as for mass respondents – in the models for EU Policy Scope and for Social Europe (i.e., support for extending the EU’s Policy Scope and a Social Europe is lower on the right than the left). Thus, although these three individual-level control variables do not affect all five EU attitudes uniformly, there is nonetheless a clear symmetry in the way that they affect EU attitudes at mass and elite levels.

Against the backdrop of these controls, the cueing effects on political elite opinion reported in Table 4 are particularly interesting. By far the most consistent (and the most significant) effects on political elite opinion are exerted by average economic elite opinion in the respondent’s country.

¹⁵ Although we do not report the detailed results here, we can confirm that the cueing effects we describe in Tables 3 and 4 here appear to apply across the ideological spectrum. We divided both our Elite and Mass samples into three groups: left (scores 0–3 on the 0–10 left–right scale); centre (4–6); and right (7–10). We then examined the correlations among each of our dependent variable measures and the relevant elite/mass ‘average’ measures within each ideological group. The correlations were virtually identical across all three ideological groupings. The only exception was in relation to the Strengthen EU measure, where the correlation between political elite views and Economic Elite National average scores was significantly lower for right-wingers than for other respondents. Results are available from the authors.

Table 4
Five cueing models of EU attitudes, political elite respondents.

Political elite respondents	EU support								EU main aim	
	Strengthen EU (0–10)		EU Policy Scope (1–5)		EU Institutional Trust (0–10)		Attachment to Europe (1–4)		Social Europe (0/1)	
	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE	Coeff	SE
Mass National Average Score	-.25	.27	-.42	.41	-1.09***	.15	1.00	.63	-1.71	2.57
Mass National Party Average Score	.75*	.27	.67*	.24	.65**	.16	.74	.31	1.53	1.78
Economic Elite National Average Score	.56***	.09	.68***	.13	.62***	.11	2.03***	.37	4.30*	2.05
Left–right Ideology	.02	.05	-.05*	.02	.03	.04	.05	.03	-.34***	.09
Perceived EU Benefits	2.75***	.50	.70**	.20	2.22***	.37	1.95***	.49	-.60*	.31
Perceived Political Inefficacy	-.24**	.08	-.06	.03	-.27**	.06	-.24**	.07	-.07	.06
R ² /Pseudo R ²	.31		.39		.26		.11		.15	
N	950		1003		993		995		978	

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Strengthen EU, EU Policy Scope and EU Institutional Trust Models estimated by OLS; Attachment to Europe by Ordered Logit; Social Europe by Logistic Regression. All estimates clustered by country, robust standard errors reported. Full models estimated include controls for Demographics (Age cohort, Sex, Religion (Catholic/not, Orthodox/not, Protestant/not) and Graduate/Not), Quality of Governance (average World Bank score, 2004–6) and Net EU Budgetary Contributions (average 2004–6). Coefficients on these control variables not reported here – full results available on request. Constants and cutpoints for ordered logit not reported.

For all of the EU support equations in Table 4, the economic elite term produces large, positive and highly significant coefficients. Even in the Social Europe model the effect is significant at $p = .05$. These findings imply that elite attitudes towards the EU are cued more by the discourse among national economic elites than by the opinions of their respective mass publics. This is not to suggest, however, that political elites fail to respond entirely to the cues provided by mass opinion. Mass National Party cues produce three significant positive effects (on Strengthen EU, EU Policy Scope and EU Institutional Trust). Average National mass opinion also produces one significant effect – the significant *negative* coefficient of the Mass National Average term in the EU Institutional Trust equation – which implies that elites are less likely to trust EU institutions if their respective mass publics are relatively sanguine about them.

Overall, the results in Table 4 tell a fascinating story about the cues that seem to affect European political elite opinion towards the EU. First, elites do not pay much attention to average national opinion within their own countries in framing their own attitudes – and, when they do pay any attention, they do so in an inconsistent and even contradictory manner. Second, political elites do respond to the opinions offered by their respective mass constituencies – in terms of their own party supporters (see the Mass National Party effects in the table). In short, elites demonstrate some degree of responsiveness to mass opinion – but this focuses primarily on the cues offered by political supporters rather than on the views of the electorate in general. Finally, political elites' primary sources of opinion cues are not their respective mass publics but their respective national economic elites. In sum, in determining their own stances towards the EU, political elites appear to place more weight on the views of the economically rich and powerful than they do on the views of their own constituents. They respond to mass opinion, but not as much as they respond to other national elites.

Our final set of findings is reported in Table 5, which shows the results of robustness checks on our two core equations. The left-hand column in each model specification corresponds to the results shown in Tables 3 and 4. A plus sign (+) indicates a significant positive effect in Table 3

or 4; a minus sign (–) indicates a significant negative effect; a zero indicates no effect.¹⁶ The middle column of each model involves substituting the relevant *median* score in place of the *average* score. Finally, the right-hand column of each model reports the consequences of adding terms for the standard deviations of the relevant cueing variables, as well as their respective average scores.

The overall pattern of results suggests strong support for the robustness of the conclusions that were drawn from Tables 3 and 4. Although there are some minor variations in the Mass opinion models, regardless of the model specifications the Political Elite National Party Average score consistently produces a significant positive effect (see the + signs in the highlighted row in the top half of Table 5). The same kind of consistency of outcome also applies to the Elite opinion models in the bottom half of Table 5. Here, with only three (highlighted) exceptions, the mass National Party Average variables and Economic Elite National Average variables consistently produce identical effects regardless of model specification. Taken together, these results indicate that using median scores on key attitudinal variables or controlling for the 'spread' of (as appropriate) elite or mass opinion makes no difference to our substantive results. Across all of our EU attitude dimensions, mass opinions are cued by the views of national party elites, while elite opinions are affected both by the views of national economic elites and by the opinions of their 'own' national party supporters.¹⁷

¹⁶ Thus, for example, in the (Mass) Strengthen EU model in Table 3 the Political Elite National Average and Political Elite National Party Average variables both had significant positive coefficients – so these effects are both indicated by + signs in the left-hand column of the Strengthen EU model in Mass subsection of Table 5. The Economic Elite National Average score for the Strengthen EU model in Table 3 was non-significant, so this registers a 0 effect in the Mass subsection of Table 5.

¹⁷ All this said, it is, of course, possible to argue that the value of the results we have reported here is limited by the fact that our models are 'underspecified'. To be sure, the r^2 values for our models in Tables 3 and 4 are modest. Nonetheless, the models do make appropriate controls for the key explanatory variables reported in earlier studies. Moreover, the fact that our elite and mass cueing variables have clear, consistent and robust effects over and above those cited in earlier studies suggests to us that the cueing effects we identify are real rather than artefactual – and not the result of model underspecification.

Table 5
Five cueing models of EU attitudes, political elite respondents.

	EU support												EU main aim		
	Strengthen EU (0–10)			EU Policy Scope (1–5)			EU Institutional Trust (0–10)			Attachment to Europe (1–4)			Social Europe (0/1)		
	Av	Md	Add Std	Av	Md	Add Std	Av	Md	Add Std	Av	Md	Add Std	Av	Md	Add Std
Mass respondents															
Political Elite National Average Score	+	0	+	0	0	0	0	–	0	+	0	+	0	0	0
Political Elite National Party Average Score	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Economic Elite National Average Score	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	+	+	0	0	+	0	0	0
Political Elite National Std Dev			0			0				0		–			0
Political Elite National Party Std Dev			0			+				0		0			–
Economic Elite National Std Dev			0			0				–		+			0
Elite respondents															
Mass National Average Score	0	0	0	0	0	0	–	–	–	0	+	0	0	–	0
Mass National Party Average Score	+	+	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	0	0	0
Economic Elite National Average Score	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	0	+	+	+	+	+	+	0
Mass National Std Dev			0			0				0		–			0
Mass National Party Std Dev			0			0				0		0			0
Economic Elite National Std Dev			0			0				0		0			0

0 means no significant effect; + significant positive effect; – significant negative effect.

Av columns correspond to core specifications in (1) and (2); Md columns substitute medians in for averages in (1) and (2); Add Std columns add standard deviation measures to average measures in (1) and (2).

3.1. Summary and conclusions

Social–psychological theories of attitude formation tell us that mass publics frequently use cognitive shortcuts or information cues in order to determine their views on relatively unfamiliar objects. One source of such cues is the opinions proffered by ‘trusted sources’ such as leaders or political parties. Theories of democratic representation tell us that elites should not always ‘lead’ their mass followers; that, on the contrary, elites’ views and decisions should at least partially reflect the opinions and beliefs of the mass publics that they represent. We have sought to explore these two issues by considering the extent to which elite cues condition mass opinion and the extent to which mass cues affect elite opinion. We have applied these ideas to mass and elite opinion in the EU because this has frequently been characterised as an area where elite opinion has been ‘ahead of’ mass opinion.

The core methodological assumption about mass attitude formation that underpins our approach is that some of the key cues that mass publics receive from political elites can be represented by the average positions on certain issues that are adopted by a representative sample of members of those elites. The official party position may to some extent diverge from the personal opinions among the party elite. Yet, if the latter are ready to declare in a survey attitudes in conflict with the party line, they presumably voice these opinions in public as well. Hence the de facto signal that the party elite send to its supporters may be more complicated than the official line and is better captured by elite interview data than, say, party manifestos. We cannot demonstrate that mass publics ‘know’ precisely what these signals are (though we assume that they know about them through the mass media and various forms of campaigning), but we can examine if public opinion may be affected by them. By the same token, our core methodological assumption about

elite attitude formation is that the cues received by elites can be represented by (various forms of) average mass opinion. Again, we cannot show that elites are aware of these mass cues but we can test for any empirical effects that they might (or might not) have.

What we find here is that, across a *range* of EU attitudes, political elites and mass publics appear to take notice of one another. The conversation between them is by no means the sort of ‘dialogue of the deaf’ that some might fear. As previous work has suggested, mass opinion is affected by elite cues, particularly when they are provided by political parties. The strongest cueing influences on mass opinion derive from the summary views expressed by members of the national political party that the individual citizen supports. And, on occasion, elite opinion also seems to be influenced by average national public opinion, independent of party.

What seems not to matter at all for mass publics are the views articulated by economic elites. This is in stark contrast to the sources of political elite opinion. Here, the views of economic elites constitute a powerful cue to individual political elite attitudes. This strong finding is complemented by the evidence that political elites also take note of mass opinion – but for the most part only when it is articulated by their own national party supporters.¹⁸

We offer two final thoughts on the implications of our findings for future research. The first is obviously to explore the possible transmission mechanisms through

¹⁸ The normative evaluation of business influence on political elite opinion requires caution. Coupled with evidence of party elites’ influence on mass opinion, it suggests that economic elite preferences influence public opinion only indirectly – through the opinion leadership exercised by political parties. Whether this is something that should be evaluated against the democratic-egalitarian standards of Dahl (1961) or regarded merely as the failure of informed elites to educate the public (cf. Page and Barabas, 2000) remains to be seen.

which (a) elites learn about mass opinion and (b) mass publics learn about the cues provided by elites. We suspect that traditional survey instruments may be inadequate for this task (see Gabel and Scheve, 2007a), and that such investigation may ultimately require a combination of in-depth interviews and experiments. The second implication relates more to the non-monolithic nature of people's attitudes towards the EU. We showed in Table 1 that the correlations among the five EU attitudes explored here are relatively low – with the implication that they represent rather different phenomena. The distinction between people's preferences for 'Social Europe' and the other measures of EU attitudes that we explored – which all in some general sense reflect 'EU support' – is fairly clear. However, the variegated pattern of influences on these different aspects of support that is reported in Tables 3 and 4 suggests that scholars should take great care in choosing their dependent variable measures of EU support. The various aspects of support clearly respond differently to the same stimuli, including information cues. Elites and mass publics in Europe undoubtedly use heuristics in forming their attitudes towards the EU. However, the effects of those heuristics vary from one attitude domain to another.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

Annex 1

Numbers of interviews, by country, in the mass, political elite and economic elite surveys.

	Mass survey	Political elite survey	Economic elite survey
Austria	1002	81	35
Belgium	1004	80	44
Bulgaria	1005	83	45
Denmark	1000	60	40
Estonia	1000	72	40
France	1007	81	40
Germany	1000	80	43
Britain	1000	46	16
Greece	1010	90	35
Hungary	1002	80	42
Italy	1012	84	42
Poland	999	80	42
Portugal	1000	80	40
Serbia	1005	80	40
Slovenia	1082	80	40
Spain	1002	94	40

Annex 2

Means and standard deviations for five key cueing variables.

	Strengthen EU		EU Policy Scope		EU Institutional Trust		Attachment to Europe		Social Europe	
	Av	Std	Av	Std	Av	Std	Av	Std	Av	Std
Mass National Average	6.61	.88	3.78	.54	5.77	.57	3.20	.28	.50	.14
Mass National Party Average	6.61	1.65	3.70	.73	5.86	1.20	3.19	.43	.52	.25
Political Elite National Average	5.64	.79	3.75	.27	4.70	.78	2.76	.23	.67	.09
Political Elite National Party Average	5.78	1.13	3.82	.50	5.12	.81	2.86	.30	.66	.16
Economic Elite National Average	6.71	.96	3.77	.54	5.54	.70	3.18	.25	.20	.09

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