

**APATHETIC PUBLICS AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION:
MEDIA USE AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT IN EUROPEAN UNION POLITICS**

by

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ABSTRACT

The European Union is determined to succeed. European integration continues to move forward and the European Union has grown into a unified political entity representing over 500 million people. Reforms brought about by the Treaty of Lisbon have allowed it to strengthen its influence on its member states and citizens. Furthermore, the 2004 and 2007 enlargement process has brought citizens of western and post-communist Europe together under a common institutional framework. Citizen engagement becomes more crucial under such circumstances. Political engagement is vital for a democratic system to function well, however, European integration has raised significant concerns regarding Europeans' apathy towards the project. The media are important for democratic systems and serve a number of important functions, as they are the main source from which people can learn about the society they live in, and can inform, mobilize and encourage feelings of community. They are particularly important for the European Union, which brings together people of different nationalities. The media have the ability to bridge the divide between EU institutions and citizens, and assist in the formation of a European political community. For this reason, the dissertation examines the role of the media in fostering engagement in EU politics. It takes a broad perspective and focuses on various indicators of engagement in EU politics. This research utilizes multiple data sources and methods and combines secondary data analysis of *Eurobarometer* and *European Election Studies* data with original survey and experimental data from a subset of EU member states. This research concludes that traditional media are able to engage people in EU politics under certain circumstances. However, while social networking sites could lower barriers for engagement in EU politics by bringing citizens from different countries together, it appears that this potential is not being taken advantage of fully. Finally, processes through which engagement develops are quite similar between citizens of established and post-communist member states. Differences in political behavior between the two groups of countries are declining.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The ongoing integration of the European Union (EU) raises significant concerns regarding citizen apathy towards the project. The EU has grown into a unified political structure representing over 500 million people and continually strengthens its authority and influence on the lives of Europeans. A paradox regarding the EU's relationship with its citizens is of particular concern. While its legislative, political and fiscal powers have steadily increased, Europeans' involvement in EU affairs has remained low - far lower than EU leaders would desire. Turnout at EP elections has decreased every year since they were first held, from 62% in 1979 to 43% in 2009, and Eurobarometer surveys conducted during the past decade consistently indicate that less than one half of Europeans express an interest in EU affairs.

However, people's engagement in politics is vital for a democratic system to function well (Dahl, 1971, 1989; Huntington, 1991), and engagement in EU political processes becomes more crucial under these circumstances. In addition to elections, which occur periodically, democracy offers numerous means through which citizens can regularly express themselves and voice their interests. Political elites are not indifferent to social movements and tend to act in response to pressure from constituents. Therefore, engagement in political processes is necessary because apathy towards social issues is not conducive to democracy and can diminish government responsiveness (Almond & Verba,

1965; Schmitter & Karl, 1991). For this reason, democratic governance requires an involved citizenry that has opinions, discusses social issues and participates in politics (Habermas, 1962; Barber, 1984; Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1999). An involved citizenry should therefore also be necessary for a supranational governmental structure such as the EU, itself founded on strong democratic principles. Ultimately, EU laws and regulations directly affect people's lives and their voices must be heard if European leaders are to work in their best interests.

Scholars have remarked on the various European 'crises' that occur as people remain detached from EU politics: 'crises' of representation (Hayward, 1995; Blondel, Sinnott & Svensson, 1998), legitimacy (Thomassen, 2009) and democracy (Follesdal & Hix, 2006). They become more pertinent given the significant legal and structural changes brought about by the *Lisbon Treaty*, which has expanded the EU's authority and competencies, and the recent eastward enlargements, where many of Europe's post-communist nations joined the EU. Citizen interest and engagement is crucial for these changes and the pan-European project to be successful.

In fact, Karl Deutsch (1953) argues that a number of integrative processes must occur for international political communities to be successful. Intergovernmental agreements first direct the formation of such communities, and in the EU its supranational arrangement was guided through political amalgamation and assimilation of its institutions and legal structures. Amalgamation refers to the merging of several national units, and assimilation refers to the process where governmental entities and laws in member states become as similar as possible.

Furthermore, this framework argues that, at least in theory, for the political community to function as designed then a sense of community and psychological identification among its members must complement the development of institutions. Institutional and legal integration has occurred continuously since the EU's foundations were laid in the 1950s. However, it is apparent that the growth of EU institutions has surpassed the growth in feelings of Europeaness among its citizens. Europeans need to feel part of a European social or political community if they are expected to become more involved in EU affairs.

The media are central to both democratic governance and integrative processes, and have the ability to bridge the divide between EU institutions and citizens. They serve a number of important functions in democratic systems, as they are the main source from which people can learn about the society they live in, and can inform, mobilize and encourage feelings of community (Norris, 2000; Eveland & Scheufele, 2000; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006a). By providing information and a forum where ideas on government, policies and elections are exchanged, the media can encourage citizens to form opinions and participate in politics.

Furthermore, the media are essential for the formation of a European political community. The processes that Benedict Anderson (1983) describes in his account of the formation of Europe's first nation-states are applicable to today's EU context. He argues that since most people will never interact with each other in person, commonalities such as a sense of community or nationhood are necessary to bind people together virtually and to maintain a nation state. Therefore, if the media in Europe today are able to help people understand how the EU functions, convey the commonalities that Europeans have

among themselves and invoke a shared sense of Europeaness, then perhaps they can contribute to greater engagement in EU affairs.

The dissertation will examine the role of the media in fostering political engagement in EU politics. Political engagement is a multi-faceted phenomenon that encompasses various degrees of psychological attachment and commitment to politics. It can range from mere curiosity to an array of participatory behaviors such as trying to persuade others to adopt a position, turning out to vote on election day and active involvement in a campaign.

Studies of apathy in the EU often focus on EP election turnout (e.g. Inglehart & Rabier, 1979; Reif & Schmitt, 1980; Niedermayer, 1990; Franklin, 2001). In many respects turnout in European Parliament (EP) elections is the most visible indicator of apathy. It has continually declined and is considerably lower than turnout at national elections. Few empirical studies have looked beyond election turnout and considered additional ways that Europeans can engage in EU politics. For this reason the dissertation will examine several forms of engagement in EU politics and for each, the conditions under which the media can encourage more engagement in European affairs.

The three forms of political engagement that will be studied are opinionation towards European issues, non-electoral participation in EU politics, and voting at European Parliament elections. The dissertation will consist of three separate chapters, one dedicated to each form of political engagement. All three chapters are tied together under a common framework in that the studies will focus on the role of communication in these processes. These forms of engagement were chosen because they represent a range

of behaviors, two of which, opinionation and non-electoral political participation, have not received much scholarly attention in the European integration literature.

The Enlarged EU and Post-Communist Legacy

Emphasis will also be placed on the eastward enlargement of the EU, where post-communist countries make up the majority of new member states. Two reasons merit consideration of the most recent enlargement when studying engagement in EU politics. First, it brought Western and post-communist Europeans closer together under a common institutional framework and the significance of this cannot be understated. In fact, some have gone as far as to proclaim the 2004 EP elections to be the ‘founding elections’ of modern Europe (Wessels & Franklin 2010, p.83), as they were the first EP elections to include citizens of both Western and post-communist Europe.

Furthermore, the impact of post-communist legacy on political behavior has yet to be fully determined, as studies show that citizens of post-communist and established member states differ in some respects but are similar in others. Citizens of post-communist nations tend to feel a lesser sense of European identity (Scheuer & Schmitt, 2009) and are more distrustful of national institutions such as government and political parties than citizens of established EU states (Rose, 1995; Rose 2004a). These differences have been cited as reasons for why post-communist countries have lower turnout and lower support for the EU (Scheuer & Schmitt, 2009). Research has also found that in some respects determinants of EU attitudes differ between citizens of post-communist and established member states, whereas in others they are similar across countries. For instance, economic evaluations are a stronger determinant of support for European

integration among post-communist citizens. However, there are no discernible differences in satisfaction with the state of EU democracy as a predictor of support for EU integration between established and post-communist states (Garry & Tilley, 2009). Therefore, potential differences in how citizens of established and post-communist countries engage with EU politics will be considered in relevant sections of the dissertation.

Conceptualizing Political Apathy and Political Engagement

When studying political apathy and its related concepts, such as political engagement and interest, it is important to first discuss how they are conceptualized and what terms will be used. There has been some disagreement as to what apathy represents and how it should be defined, and numerous terms are used in the literature to discuss what apathy is not. Terms such as political engagement, motivation, involvement, interest, activity and participation have all been used to describe non-apathy, often interchangeably. Meanings of apathy range from simple one-dimensional to more complex multidimensional conceptualizations. Research in this area has characterized it in three main ways: as a purely cognitive attribute, consisting of cognitive and affective dimensions, and consisting of cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions.

A two-dimensional conceptualization argues that apathy encompasses dimensions of cognition and affect. The lack of motivation to contemplate over politics and lack of affect towards politics and social issues is characterized as an apathetic political disposition (Riesman & Glazer, 1950; DeLuca, 1954). The cognitive dimension refers to political awareness and understanding of one's social environment. This includes

knowledge of the political system and how it works, as well as knowledge of public affairs. Political competence is closely tied to democratic theory, as it assumes that citizens should base their judgments, decisions and behavior on information about, and an understanding of, public affairs and government (Almond & Verba, 1965; Dahl, 1971). The affective dimension refers to if and how politics may excite someone and whether they experience similar emotions about politics as they do when thinking about other facets of life. It also refers to how a person feels about the political system, whether it is loyalty, affection, distrust or ambivalence (Gilmour & Lamb, 1975; Bennett, 1986).

However, conceptualizations of apathy can also include a behavioral dimension. Research that includes behavioral dimensions describes apathy as a state of political commitment with no interest and no action (Rosenberg, 1954; DiPalma, 1970; Barnes & Kaase, 1979; van Deth, 1991; Topf, 1995), where action refers to participatory behaviors such as discussing politics, trying to convince others to vote and attending political meetings.

Political leaders tend to be more responsive when faced with the observable reality of a participatory public, as it becomes harder to ignore protests, petitions and other influence-exerting behavior (Schmitter & Karl, 1991). Situations can certainly exist where persons might be interested in politics or expose themselves to political information, but at the same time choose to not engage in participatory ways. However, it is hard to argue that such individuals have an equal amount of engagement in politics as those who also participate in some way. In fact, due to their unwillingness to behaviorally express their political beliefs such individuals are often referred to as politically detached (Barnes & Kaase, 1979, p. 527).

The term ‘political engagement’ is used throughout this text to refer to non-apathy, as it signifies political commitment at many levels and is particularly appropriate for EU politics. EU leaders support and encourage the notion of European citizens acting together, both within nations and within the Union as a group, to influence the social policies and environments that affect their lives.

Indicators of Engagement in EU Politics

Three indicators of political engagement are examined. The first is the extent to which Europeans have opinions towards EU matters. Public opinion research from the US often considers a lack of opinions to reflect disinterest in politics (Neuman, 1986), but this phenomenon has not been studied in European contexts. Opinionation is a rather crude but useful way of examining the extent to which people think about EU issues. The ability to express an opinion towards an issue represents the least amount of effort one can devote to politics. For this reason, it can function as a broad indicator of how apathetic the members of a society may be.

Voting at EP elections is perhaps the most important EU political process that EU citizens can collectively participate in. Elections are held every five years in all EU member states, on or around the same day, and in 2009 over 385 million people were eligible to vote (“European Elections 1979-2009”, 2009). Voter turnout in EP elections is of concern to both scholars and politicians. It has continually decreased since they were first held in 1979 and tends to be significantly lower than in national elections. A considerable literature examining individual-level differences in the likelihood of voting in these elections has developed.

While voting is often touted as a cornerstone of democracy, participating in politics regularly and placing direct pressure on officials through non-electoral means is also necessary for a democracy to function well. It is crucial to investigate this at present, since with the recent ratification of the *Lisbon Treaty* the EU has evolved into an institution with functions increasingly similar to those of national governments. It has brought about more ways for the EU and its citizens to interact and therefore more opportunities for non-electoral participation in its affairs.

Organizational Structure

The dissertation examines the role of the media in fostering engagement in EU politics. Chapter Two explores the relationships between news exposure and opinionation towards two important issues of European integration, Enlargement and the Lisbon (Constitutional) Treaty. Previous research finds that political knowledge and political efficacy are the strongest predictors of opinionation. However, many citizens are not particularly knowledgeable about the EU and feel that EU institutions are not responsive to them. This study therefore examines how Europeans come to form opinions and make political decisions about European integration by testing whether these predictors are moderated by news exposure.

Chapter Three investigates voting in EP elections. Turnout is particularly low among post-communist member states and one of the reasons given for this low turnout is the lack of trust in national institutions that pervades post-communist countries (Rose, 2004a). However, others have criticized this position by arguing that institutional trust does not influence EP election turnout (Wessels & Franklin, 2010). This chapter

challenges both these positions by arguing that trust can explain voting at EP elections, and that trust in EU institutions is more relevant than trust in national institutions. News coverage plays an essential role in this process because it contains more coverage of EP elections and the EU in post-communist member states and tends to also be more positive than in established member states. Using existing survey data and original experimental data, the chapter tests the hypothesis that the difference in news coverage partially explains higher trust in EU institutions among citizens of post-communist member states, which in turn is a significant predictor of voting in EP elections.

Chapter Four turns to non-electoral participation in EU politics. The EU requires citizen participation in its affairs to resemble a democratic governmental structure. While opinionation and trust in the EU are important, it is through participation that voices are heard and action taken. This chapter examines the extent to which opinionation and trust translate into broader participation. Particular focus is placed on the role of social networking sites (SNS), and the extent to which they make participation in international affairs more feasible.

Finally, Chapter Five concludes the dissertation by summarizing the findings and evaluating its contribution to comparative perspectives on political communication and the field of European integration and. The limitations of the studies and future research avenues are also discussed.

Research Methods and Data

This section discusses the research design and data sources used throughout the dissertation. Given the complexity of studying social processes in an economic and

political union of twenty-eight member states, the dissertation uses multiple methods and data sets to understand the role of the media in political engagement in the EU.

Secondary analysis of existing data is used extensively in the dissertation. The European Union funds public opinion surveys conducted regularly throughout all member states. These surveys deal with current issues relating to the EU and citizens' lives and are designed to determine trends across countries. The cross-national nature of these surveys is particularly useful for the dissertation, as it allows comparisons over time and among established and post-communist member states to be made. Data from the *Eurobarometer* are used in chapter two to investigate opinionation towards European integration. The *European Election Studies (EES)* series is used in chapter three to examine voting among established and post-communist member states.

Original data are used in two chapters to complement the analyses of existing data. They are used in chapter three to address limitations associated with causal inferences from cross-sectional data. An online experiment examines the mechanisms underlying the relationship between news coverage, institutional trust and voting in EP elections, which cannot be tested using *EES* data.

Furthermore, original data collection is necessary to investigate the extent to which European citizens use SNS to get involved and participate in EU affairs. Existing European-wide data sources (*Eurobarometer*, *European Social Survey*, *European Election Study*) tend to disproportionately focus on traditional news consumption (newspapers, television, radio) and do not adequately measure Internet use, typically asking respondents general questions on overall use of the Internet and social networking sites (SNS). While traditional media are important, it is necessary to incorporate more

specific Internet and SNS uses into research on European political behavior. Chapter four relies entirely on these original data.

Surveys were conducted in four member states representing different geographical regions of the EU: Germany, UK, Poland and Greece. Germany is a western democracy and a founding member state, and as the largest member, often bears a significant amount of the costs associated with many of the EU's undertakings. The UK, is also western democracy but unlike Germany, tends to be skeptical of further European integration and often advocates for special relationships where it can be excluded from adopting EU rules and regulations. Poland is the largest post-communist state in the bloc. It is part of the European Monetary Union and even though it is not currently using the Euro currency, it is slated to adopt it in the near future. Greece, as most Mediterranean states, is currently in considerable financial trouble and this provides an opportunity to examine how citizens under such conditions participate in supranational politics. These four countries provide a good cross-section of the variations in geography, economic development and democratic traditions that can be found in the EU today.

Having discussed the methodology and data, the following chapters explore different dimensions in understanding the role of the media in fostering engagement in EU politics. The first study examines opinionation.

CHAPTER 2

Rising Sophistication, Stable Opinionation:

News Use and Opinion Holding on European Union Politics

Democratic governance requires citizens to have political opinions, a phenomenon known as *opinionation*. Having opinions is important as it allows people to discuss social issues and participate in political processes (Habermas, 1962; Barber, 1984; Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1999). Opinions towards EU affairs are therefore needed for one to also meaningfully participate in European politics. However, scholars have yet to examine the extent to which Europeans hold opinions towards European integration and how they come to form them.

Neuman (1986) discusses the “paradox of mass politics” in the US, that is, the disparity between a well-informed and involved populace that democratic theory expects, and the reality of high levels of apathy revealed by public opinion research, where many citizens have very few or even no political opinions. Given that the EU has continually expanded its powers and plays an increasingly larger role in national politics and people’s lives, democratic theory assumes an increasingly involved European public. However, a similar disparity might exist among Europeans. Awareness of EU politics tends to be lower than that of national politics and consequently many Europeans may remain uninvolved in European affairs and have few political opinions regarding European integration. Opinions are needed for one to meaningfully participate in European civic

life and it is therefore important to determine the extent to which Europeans hold opinions towards EU issues and how they come to form them, regardless of what their actual opinions may be.

Past research on opinionation has focused primarily on its psychological and demographic determinants (Francis & Busch, 1975; Krosnick & Milburn, 1990; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996) while the role of news has been largely overlooked. However, news exposure is an important element to consider, as work from both American (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) and European contexts (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003; de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006a) shows that it can shape political opinions. Given that the inner workings of the EU and its institutions are quite complex and can appear distant from citizens' daily lives, news exposure is expected to be particularly relevant for opinion formation of EU affairs.

Eurobarometer data are used to examine if news exposure is associated with supranational opinionation and how it relates to the known sources of opinionation. Opinionation towards two of the most important European issues of the past decade will be examined: European enlargement and the European Constitution (referred to now as the Lisbon Treaty). The chapter proceeds by discussing psychological theory of opinionation and the role of news exposure in opinion formation.

Determinants of Opinionation

To examine European opinionation, this study builds upon Krosnick and Milburn's (1990) psychological theory of opinionation. It explains people's inclinations for developing attitudes towards government policies and posits that four causal factors

are responsible for opinion formation: *objective political competence*, *subjective political knowledge*, *perceived system demand for opinions* and *general cognitive sophistication*.

Objective political competence is defined as the amount of factual political knowledge a person has. The more objective political competence one accumulates, the more she is expected to have opinions on political issues. People that are not knowledgeable might not be aware of existing political rules and procedures, making it harder for them to cultivate opinions on political matters. This is particularly relevant for the EU's political structure, which is abstract and not directly visible in people's everyday lives. Political sophistication is often also measured with factual civics questions about how government and institutions work (e.g., Zaller 1992; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Luskin 1987; Neuman 1986) and so in essence, this measure of objective political competence corresponds to sophistication.

Similarly, a higher level of *subjective political competence*, that is individuals' assessments of how knowledgeable and politically astute they are, also leads to greater opinionation. The *perceived system demand for opinions* refers to the belief that government is responsive to the demands and needs of the citizenry. Those that believe that their voices matter and that government listens to its citizens are more likely to feel that it is worth forming and expressing opinions. These two factors represent internal and external political efficacy, respectively. Subjective political competence is a component of internal efficacy and the perceived system demand for opinions is a component of external efficacy (Balch, 1974; Niemi, Craig & Mattei, 1991).

Political efficacy is particularly relevant when examining opinionation towards European integration. EU institutions can appear abstract and complex, and as a result

some Europeans may feel uninformed about the EU and its activities (Inglehart, 1970; Lindberg & Scheingold, 1970). In fact, studies indicate that Europeans often do question the EU's responsiveness to their demands and the extent to which it takes their opinions into account during decision-making processes (Rohrschneider, 2002; Karp, Banducci & Bowler, 2003). In such cases, people that feel unable to understand how the EU works are likely to be less motivated to form opinions on EU policies.

The fourth factor, *general cognitive sophistication*, measured by education, is defined as a person's capacity to store and thoughtfully analyze information. Citizens with more cognitive sophistication probably find it easier to understand the information and rhetoric surrounding a political issue, therefore making it easier for them to form opinions. Early work that examined predictors of opinionation towards European integration among French, German and British publics showed that opinionation increased as a person's education rose (Inglehart, 1970). This was attributed to the more educated being more aware of European-level politics and therefore more likely to express opinions on issues of European integration.

Using National Election Study (NES) data from 1956 to 1984, Krosnick and Milburn (1990) found that while all four factors predict opinionation, *objective political competence* is the most influential. This finding is substantiated in a study of 1988 NES data, where out of nine demographic and political variables, a measure of factual knowledge was again the greatest predictor of opinionation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996).

Krosnick and Milburn's (1990) study assumes that knowledge is gained from exposure to political information through the news media or conversations. In eight

analyses of NES data, media exposure was reported to be a significant predictor of opinionation. Similarly, in a study of attitudes towards energy policy, those who used less mass media were more likely to offer don't know or no opinion responses (Faulkenberry & Mason, 1978).

Political Sophistication and Opinionation on EU Issues

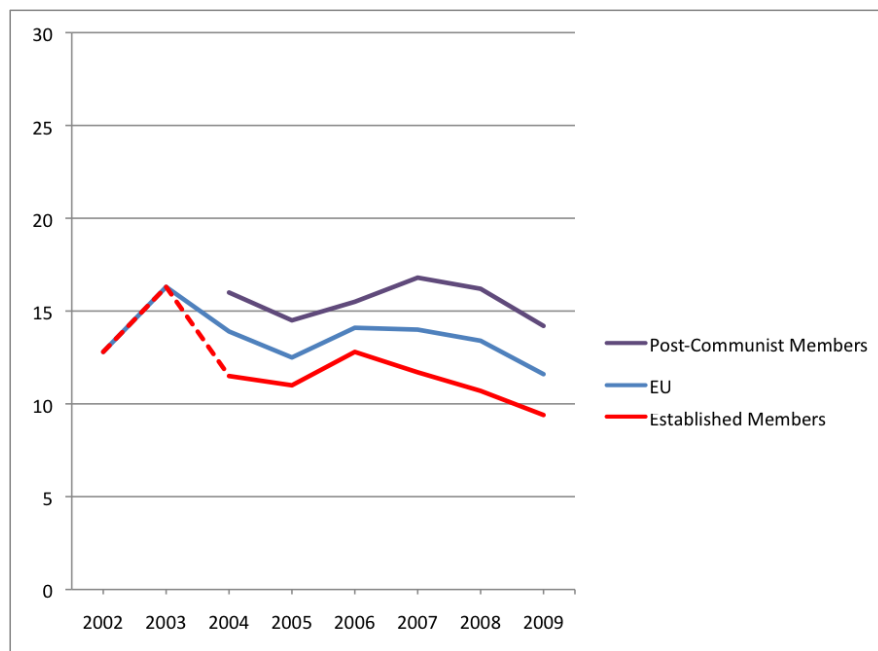
Political sophistication is defined as the quantity and organization of a person's political cognitions (Luskin 1987) and the extent to which she understands political environments and public affairs (Zaller, 1992). Given that sophistication strongly predicts opinionation, the two should exhibit similar patterns over time. The debates surrounding European enlargement and the European Constitution are particularly good cases to examine this, as they are two of the most important European issues of the past decade. Several observations become apparent by looking at trends in opinionation towards enlargement (Figure 2-1) and the European Constitution (Figure 2-2) from Eurobarometer surveys.

First, opinionation levels remain relatively stable over time, even though they do fluctuate slightly from year to year. Opinionation towards European enlargement tends to be more stable than opinionation towards the Constitution. The number of people in established members unable to express an opinion towards the Constitution drops by around 9% from 2003 to 2004 and then remains quite stable until 2006. Among post-communist states though, it increased by around 6% between 2004 and 2006.

Europeans also tend to have considerably fewer opinions on EU than national issues. The same Eurobarometer surveys indicate that the percentage of citizens unable to

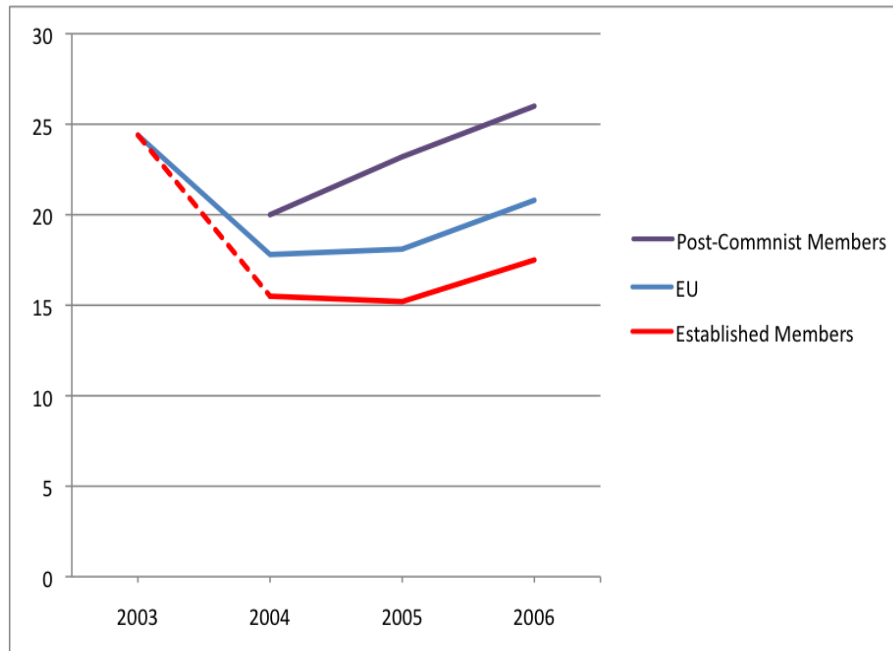
express opinions on five national issues (the economy, employment, environment, social welfare and democracy) ranged from 2.5% to 4%. However, the percentage of citizens unable to express opinions on enlargement ranged from 11.6% to 16.3%, and on the European Constitution from 18.1% to 24.4% over the same time period.

Figure 2-1. “Don’t know” Responses for EU Enlargement Preference



Y-axis represents percentage of “don’t know” responses to question asking whether for or against European enlargement. The ‘EU’ category represents all the nations in the EU at a given point in time. EB surveys: 56.3, 59.1, 61, 64.2, 65.2, 68.1, 70.1, 71.3.

Figure 2-2. “Don’t know” Responses for EU Constitution Preference



Y-axis represents percentage of “don’t know” responses to question asking whether for or against a constitution for Europe. The ‘EU’ category represents all the nations in the EU at a given point in time. Questions on the Constitution were only asked in Eurobarometer surveys between 2003-2006. EB surveys: 59.1, 61, 64.2, 65.2.

Moreover, the changing nature of EU membership brought about by the 2004 enlargement calls for an examination of trends between two important groupings of countries, established and post-communist member states. Citizens of established member states tend to be more opinionated than citizens of post-communist member states. While there are considerable disparities in socioeconomic status between these two groups of states, the difference in opinionation cannot be attributed to such factors alone, as comparative studies of political participation often show that in the US, those inclined to participate come disproportionately from the higher educated and more affluent sections of society (Verba & Orren, 1985; Piven & Cloward, 1989). In fact, the

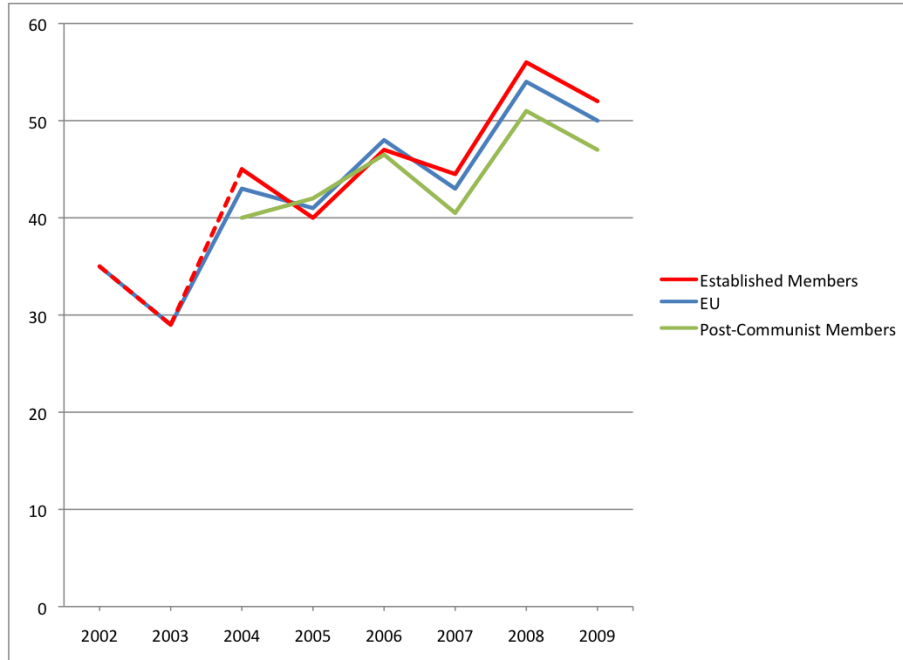
correlation between socioeconomic status and political participation was found to be considerably higher in the US, in some cases about three times as high, than in Germany, Britain, Italy, Austria or the Netherlands (Verba, Nie & Kim, 1978).

Lastly, there are also substantial differences in opinionation levels between nations. Table 2-1, which contains country-level data used to construct these figures, reveals that sizeable differences persist across time. Some countries consistently have high opinionation towards EU issues, with less than 15% of citizens unable to form opinions (e.g. Denmark, Greece and the Netherlands), whereas others often have lower opinionation, with more than one third of citizens unable to form opinions (e.g. Spain and Portugal).

European Union political sophistication, the most important predictor of opinionation, however, increases over time. Figure 2-3 plots EU sophistication across the three different groupings of countries: the EU as a whole, established members and post-communist members. Sophistication is measured from knowledge questions in Eurobarometer surveys about EU civics and institutions. EU sophistication tends to increase over time among all country groupings and tends to be slightly higher among established member states.

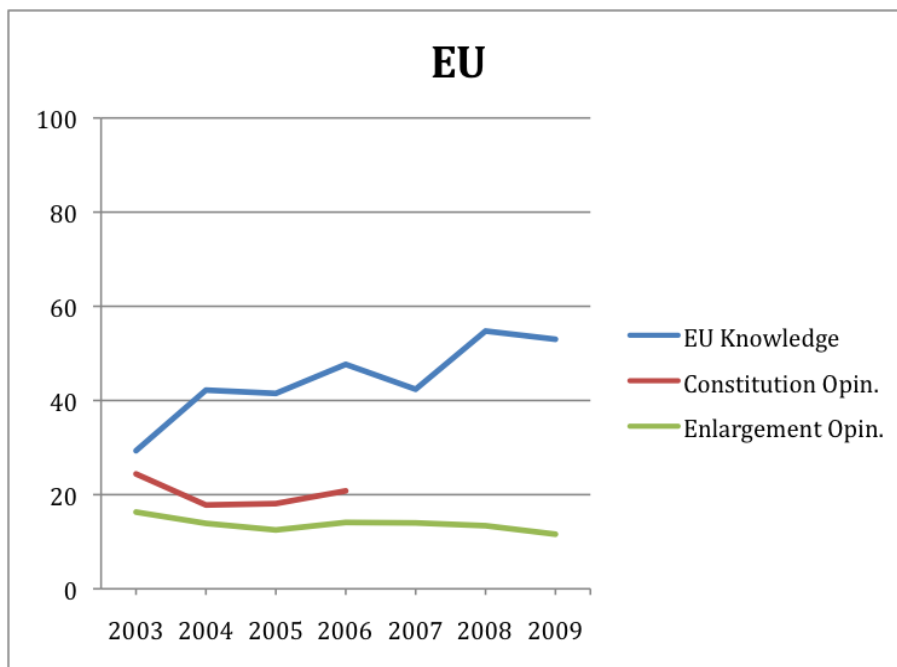
Taken together, one can see that opinionation remains quite stable as EU sophistication increases over time (Figure 2-4). While individual-level interpretations of aggregate data should be taken with caution, it is nonetheless important to examine if the capacity of sophistication as a predictor of opinionation is more limited in the EU context.

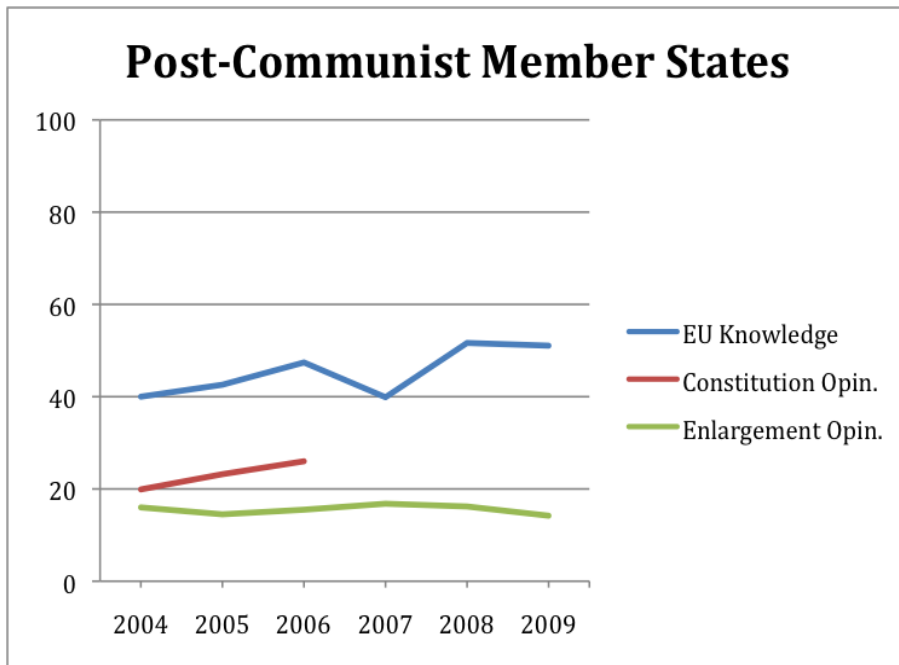
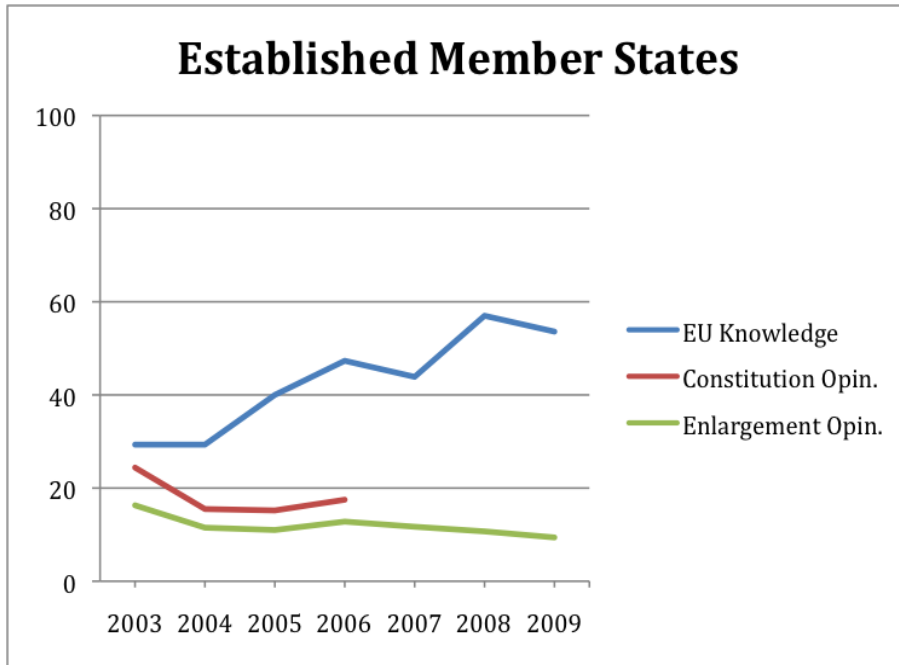
Figure 2-3. Trends in European Union Political Knowledge



Y-axis represents percentage of correct responses to questions about the European Union. The 'EU' category represents all the nations in the EU at a given point in time. EB surveys: 56.3, 59.1, 61, 64.2, 65.2, 68.1, 70.1, 71.3.

Figure 2-4: EU knowledge Levels and “don’t know” Responses for EU Integration Preferences





Y-axes represent percentage of correct responses to questions about the European Union, and percentage of “don’t know” responses to questions asking on preferences about issues of European integration. EB surveys: 56.3, 59.1, 61, 64.2, 65.2, 68.1, 70.1, 71.3.

Table 2-1: “Don’t know” Responses for European Integration Preferences by Member State

	EU Enlargement								EU Constitution			
	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2003	2004	2005	2006
<i>Established Members:</i>												
Belgium	9	17	12	3	2	4	2	4	21	16	5	4
Denmark	4	12	10	7	6	8	6	6	19	21	14	15
Germany	13	17	16	5	5	6	8	5	25	17	7	8
Greece	9	10	15	2	2	1	1	1	12	14	4	3
Spain	18	23	23	26	30	25	21	17	27	19	25	26
France	10	14	15	8	8	9	6	6	30	21	11	12
Ireland	22	20	17	22	26	20	22	17	37	28	29	29
Italy	14	18	20	13	19	19	17	11	18	12	11	15
Lux.	2	6	11	5	6	8	4	7	23	8	9	11
Netherl.	9	13	11	6	7	5	5	6	12	8	3	5
Portugal	22	18	20	23	32	25	25	24	31	26	27	41
UK	20	27	28	16	14	14	13	12	36	33	23	23
Austria	7	13	13	11	11	8	8	7	29	25	22	19
Sweden	7	9	9	6	11	11	7	6	18	15	20	27
Finland	10	10	8	4	6	5	4	4	16	13	10	15
<i>Post-Communist Members:</i>												
Czech	-	-	-	9	10	10	11	8	-	-	19	21
Estonia	-	-	-	22	21	13	15	12	-	-	39	41
Hungary	-	-	-	16	16	10	13	13	-	-	16	17
Latvia	-	-	-	13	17	18	13	14	-	-	29	34
Lithuania	-	-	-	18	21	16	17	19	-	-	23	28
Poland	-	-	-	15	12	13	17	14	-	-	22	23
Slovakia	-	-	-	13	17	15	12	10	-	-	19	25
Slovenia	-	-	-	6	6	7	6	6	-	-	14	15
Bulgaria	-	-	-	22	30	35	32	23	-	-	28	35
Romania	-	-	-	22	26	25	23	19	-	-	23	28
EU	12	16	16	13	15	14	13	11	24	19	19	21
Established Members	12	16	16	11	12	11	10	9	24	19	16	18
Post-Communist Members	-	-	-	16	16	17	16	14	-	-	24	27

Cells contain percentage of “don’t know” responses to question regarding preferences towards European enlargement and Constitution.

EB surveys: 56.3, 59.1, 61, 64.2, 65.2, 68.1, 70.1, 71.3.

News Exposure and Opinion Formation

Knowledge of EU civics however, might not be the most relevant type of knowledge one needs to make decisions on EU policies. European Union sophistication may have increased due to greater educational efforts on the part of the EU, or because with time people become more accustomed and comfortable with the EU environment and therefore better understand how it works. Issue information is likely to be more pertinent to opinionation, and ground-level political discussions that the news media report on is what helps people form opinions on issues of European integration.

News exposure is therefore an important factor to consider in this process. People tend to rely on the media for information and to form opinions about complex and abstract issues with which they do not have direct experience (Page & Shapiro, 1992). Matters concerning European integration tend to be both complex and abstract, and in fact, much of what citizens learn about European integration comes from the media, as surveys indicate that respondents repeatedly cite traditional news to be their main source of EU information (Vliegenthart, Schuck, Boomgarden & de Vreese, 2008).

Zaller's theory of public opinion dynamics provides a framework through which to understand EU opinionation. Zaller (1992; 1996) offered a model of how people form opinions in response to information. Obtaining and accepting new information depends on one's level of political sophistication (what he refers to as 'awareness'). The higher an individual's level of political sophistication, the more likely she is to receive new messages, for example from the media.

The model suggests that media effects are moderated by political sophistication, with effects being weakest on the most sophisticated (Zaller, 1992), a finding also

reported in agenda-setting (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987), priming (Krosnick & Kinder, 1990) and framing (Kinder & Sanders, 1990; Valentino, Beckman, & Buhr, 2001; (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006b) research. News exposure may therefore have the greatest potential in helping those with low EU sophistication to hold opinions on European integration. In fact, an experimental study of the impact of news coverage on support for European enlargement finds that news effects were most influential for participants with low factual and civics knowledge about the EU (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Support for EU enlargement among participants exposed to negative news was lower for those with little political knowledge. Among participants exposed to positive news, support for EU enlargement was higher for those with little political knowledge.

Taken together, this work suggests that news use and sophistication are likely to predict opinionation on European integration. However, the issue information one may acquire from the news media may be more useful for those with low EU sophistication, and therefore news use is expected to have a stronger relationship for those with low sophistication.

Predicting Opinionation Towards EU Politics

The current study examines how opinionation towards European integration is developed and focuses on the conditions under which news exposure can predict opinionation towards EU issues. While past research examined processes leading to the formation of specific opinions towards the EU (Anderson, 1998; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006), the goal here is to predict opinion-holding and not support levels.

It proceeds by first examining the extent to which the psychological determinants and news exposure predict opinionation towards European integration. Research from American contexts (Faulkenberry & Mason, 1978; Reese & Miller, 1981) suggests that the relationship with news exposure will be positive.

H1: News exposure will be positively related to opinionation.

H2: EU sophistication will be positively related to opinionation.

The relationships between news exposure and opinionation are expected to be stronger for those with low EU political sophistication. Those with high sophistication are likely to already hold opinions and so additional news exposure will not increase their likelihood of holding opinions. Based on this reasoning, EU sophistication is expected to moderate the relationship between news use and opinionation.

H3: The positive relationship between news exposure and opinionation will be stronger among those with low EU sophistication.

Opinionation is also examined in light of the EU's eastward expansion. Citizens of post-communist member states tend to be less opinionated than citizens of established member states and given that post-communist legacy has the ability to influence political behavior (Rose, 2004a; Scheuer & Schmitt, 2009; Gary & Tilley, 2009), predictors of opinionation may differ between established and post-communist member states. The

relationships between news exposure and opinionation might be stronger among citizens of post-communist member states who have had less experience with the EU and might rely on the media more to form opinions.

H4: The relationships between news exposure and opinionation will be stronger among citizens of post-communist than established member states.

Method

The debates surrounding European enlargement and the Constitution are particularly good cases to examine opinionation and its national differences, as they are two of the most important European issues of the past decade. Enlargement is of notable significance as the EU experienced its largest wave of expansion with the accession of eight post-communist nations in 2004 and two in 2007. The second issue, the European Constitution, was conceived in the early part of the previous decade to replace the treaties that created the EU and its institutions.

Data. The analyses were carried out using two Eurobarometer data sources (EB 64.2, 2005; EB 65.2, 2006) that ask respondents about their news habits and attitudes towards European enlargement and the Constitution. The two data sets contain questions on attitudes for both enlargement and the Constitution (2005 and 2006).

Measures

Opinionation. Opinionation is typically gauged by comparing those who choose the

“don’t know” or “no opinion” response category with those that choose a response on the intended attitude dimension. All the items in this study offered a ‘don’t know’ response option. Two dependent variables were created based on answers to two questions asking if respondents were for or against “further enlargement of the European Union to include other countries in future years” and “a constitution for the European Union”. Responses were recoded dichotomously (0=no opinion, 1=opinion).

News exposure. Television news and newspaper consumption was measured on 5-point scales (every day, several times a week, once or twice a week, less often, never).

EU sophistication. Sophistication is tapped using knowledge items. In these two versions of the Eurobarometer survey, knowledge items are in ‘true or false’ form and ask factual questions about EU civics and institutions. Amongst others, topics include the number of member states in the EU, whether members of the European Parliament (EP) are directly elected by citizens, and the date of the most recent EP elections. An index representing the total number of correct responses was created. Four questions tapped political knowledge about the EU in the 2005 survey (K-R 20 = .38), and three questions in 2006 (K-R 20 = .30). The reliability statistic is low, suggesting that these items may be of differing levels of difficulty and do not tap sophistication equally.

Internal efficacy. This was measured on a 10-point scale by asking respondents if they felt they understood how the EU works.

External efficacy. This was measured on a 4-point scale by asking respondents if they felt their voice counts in the EU.

Education. Due to national differences in education systems, Eurobarometer surveys ask respondents for the age they stopped formal education. This was then recoded into a variable ranging from one to eight representing education. Those who stopped formal education below eighteen years of age were coded as '1' and those who stopped after twenty-five years of age were coded as '8'. The remaining numbers represent the respective ages that formal education ended (e.g. 19=2, 20=3).

Interaction Terms. To investigate whether the role of news exposure depended on the psychological determinants of opinionation (H2-H4), a multiplicative term between the two news exposure variables and three determinants were created. The interaction terms were formed from centered scores of the variables.

Country Level Variables. At the country level, a dummy variable representing the eight post-communist states is created. The fifteen established EU member states comprise the reference group.

Analysis. The objective of the study is to understand the role that news exposure plays in supranational opinionation and if it differs between established and post-communist member states. A hierarchical logistic regression will be used to examine the hypotheses. In logistic regression analysis linear models are created for the log-odds. The

corresponding hierarchical analysis, random coefficient logistic regression, is derived from linear models for the log-odds that contain random effects for the higher-level units, in this case the member state groupings (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). The slope is then modeled in separate analyses to determine if belonging to a post-communist member state influences the relationship between news exposure and opinionation. The intercept and slope are both random coefficients in this model. Separate models are created where news exposure is allowed to vary across country groupings.

Results

Descriptive information on the variables used in the model is provided in Table 2-2. A fully unconditional model is first run for each of the four models. This is a model with no predictors specified at each level and therefore determines whether there is significant variance in the individual-level outcome between groups at the second level, that is, if opinionation varies significantly between countries. The intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC) and reliability estimates of the outcomes are presented in Table 2-3. The ICC is the proportion of variance in the outcome variables that is between groups. Between 14-21% of the total variance in the four models is between countries.

The predictors are then added into the models without any of the interaction terms (Table 2-4). These are between-group models with the intercept as outcome and allow differences in opinionation on the basis of membership status as established or post-communist states to be examined. Post-communist status is negatively related to opinionation in all four instances, even though it is only statistically significant for opinionation towards the Constitution.

The results indicate that H1 regarding news exposure is mostly supported. Television news use is significantly related to opinionation towards Enlargement but not the Constitution, whereas newspaper readership is significant in all four cases. EU political sophistication positively predicts the dependent variables in all four cases (H2). The first two hypotheses are therefore mostly supported.

Moreover, internal and external efficacy are also strongly related to opinionation, whereas education is related to opinionation for the Constitution but not for enlargement. Men are also found to be more likely to hold opinions on European issues than women.

Table 2-2: Descriptive Statistics

	2005			2006		
	All EU Member States	Established Member States	Post-Communist Member States	All EU Member States	Established Member States	Post-Communist Member States
Opinionation: Enlargement ^a	87.9 (32.61)	89 (31.27)	85.8 (34.9)	86.3 (34.4)	87.2 (33.5)	82.6 (40)
Opinionation: Constitution ^a	82.1 (38.37)	85.7 (36)	76.2 (41.98)	79.7 (40)	82.5 (38)	73.2 (44.3)
Knowledge	1.64 (1.14)	1.6 (1.1)	1.71 (1.19)	1.42 (.94)	1.42 (.94)	1.43 (.94)
Internal efficacy	6.53 (2.28)	6.58 (2.29)	6.45 (2.27)	6.87 (2.34)	6.92 (2.35)	6.62 (2.4)
External efficacy	2.26 (.57)	2.3 (.57)	2.18 (.55)	2.26 (.62)	2.3 (.61)	2.2 (.65)
Education	2.57 (2.39)	2.69 (2.51)	2.34 (2.13)	2.57 (2.39)	2.72 (2.52)	2.15 (2)
TV news viewing	3.49 (.9)	3.51 (.89)	3.43 (.92)	3.49 (.9)	3.5 (.9)	3.46 (.92)
Newspaper readership	2.57 (1.45)	2.66 (1.47)	2.4 (1.39)	2.5 (1.49)	2.58 (1.5)	2.2 (1.49)

Means and standard deviations in parenthesis

^a Percentage of respondents who hold opinions

Table 2-3: Fully Unconditional Hierarchical Linear Models

	European Enlargement		European Constitution	
	2005	2006	2005	2006
Reliability Estimate	.86	.88	.88	.89
ICC	.14	.21	.14	.16

Note: ICC = Variance component / (Variance component + $\pi^2/3$) (Snijders & Bosker, 1999). A reliability estimate greater than .7 indicates that differences in outcomes between nations are reliable (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2001).

Hypothesis three examines if the relationships between news exposure and opinionation towards European integration are moderated by EU political sophistication (Table 2-5). The interactions between knowledge and newspaper use are significant in all four cases. However, when it comes to television news use, only the interactions predicting opinionation towards enlargement are statistically significant. Moreover, the statistically significant interaction terms had negative coefficients, indicating that role of news exposure in facilitating supranational opinionation was significantly greater for those with low scores on the EU sophistication.

Log odds coefficients are not easily interpretable and are therefore converted into a first difference, the likelihood of having an opinion for a one-unit change in the value of a predictor. The interactions between knowledge and newspaper use are focused on, as they are the most consistent finding and have the strongest relationships with opinionation. Table 2-6 shows the percentage changes in the probability of having an opinion for an increase of one standard deviation in newspaper readership, when knowledge is one standard deviation above, and then one standard deviation below the mean. Opinionation among people one standard deviation below the mean on EU

knowledge increases by 8.1% to 16%, as their newspaper readership increases by one standard deviation. However, among those one standard deviation above the mean on EU knowledge, opinionation tends to remain relatively stable in three cases, fluctuating between 1.3% and 3.2% as newspaper readership increases by one standard deviation. A slightly more sizeable change in opinionation occurs for Enlargement in 2005, where the likelihood of having an opinion decreases by 5.6% as newspaper use increases.

Separate analyses are then performed to test if the relationship between news use and opinionation varies according to post-communist status (H3). Models where level-1 predictors are fixed and the slope is allowed to vary indicate that post-communist legacy does not influence the relationship between news exposure and opinionation or on any of the interaction terms with opinionation. The eighth hypothesis is therefore not supported.

Table 2-4: Hierarchical Logistic Regression Models
Predicting Opinionation Towards European Affairs

	European Enlargement		European Constitution	
	2005	2006	2005	2006
	Log odds (s.e)	Log odds (s.e)	Log odds (s.e)	Log odds (s.e)
<i>Country level:</i>				
Post-Communist	-.29 (.21)	-.3 (.29)	-.55* (.23)	-.59* (.27)
<i>Individual level:</i>				
Knowledge	.36*** (.03)	.41*** (.04)	.29*** (.03)	.38*** (.04)
Internal efficacy	.19*** (.02)	.18*** (.01)	.22*** (.01)	.22*** (.01)
External efficacy	.49*** (.06)	.4*** (.04)	.46*** (.02)	.49*** (.05)
Education	.02~ (.01)	.02~ (.01)	.04*** (.01)	.04*** (.01)
Gender (male)	.22*** (.05)	.17*** (.04)	.3*** (.05)	.23*** (.04)
TV news use	.05* (.03)	.05* (.02)	.03 (.03)	.03 (.03)
Newspaper use	.07** (.02)	.14*** (.02)	.05** (.02)	.07*** (.02)
Constant	2.34*** (.17)	2.24*** (.23)	1.92** (.18)	.23*** (.04)
Country-level R^2	.15	.17	.21	.25
Individual-level Nagelkerke R^2	.21	.18	.24	.21
N (individuals/countries)	24,924/23	24,693/23	24,924/23	24,693/23

Two-level random intercept model with variables group-mean centered at their means.

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

Model fit statistics calculated using the following equations:

$$\text{Country-level } R^2 = \frac{\text{Var(const) null model} - \text{Var(const) specified model}}{\text{Var(const) null model}}$$

$$\text{Individual-level Nagelkerke } \tilde{R}^2 = \frac{R^2}{R^2_{\max}}$$

$$R^2 = 1 - \left\{ \frac{L(0)}{L(\hat{\beta})} \right\}^{\frac{2}{n}}$$

$L(0)$ is the likelihood of the intercept-only model; $L(\hat{\beta})$ is the likelihood of the specified model.

R^2 achieves a maximum of less than one for discrete models, where the maximum is given by:

$$R^2_{\max} = 1 - \{L(0)\}^{\frac{2}{n}}$$

Table 2-5: Analysis of the Relationships Between Psychological Predictors of Opinionation and News Use

	European Enlargement		European Constitution	
	2005	2006	2005	2006
Prior block individual-level Nagelkerke R^2	.21	.18	.24	.21
Interaction terms				
Knowledge x TV news	-.05* (.02)	-.06* (.02)	-.02 (.02)	-.04 (.02)
Knowledge x newspapers	-.13*** (.03)	-.09*** (.01)	-.08** (.03)	-.06*** (.01)

Two-level random intercept model with variables group-mean centered at their means.

Interactions entered into the model one at a time. Prior blocks include post-communist status (level-2) and internal efficacy, external efficacy, education, gender (male), TV news use and newspaper use (level-1).

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

Table 2-6: Percentage Change in Opinionation for Increases in Newspaper Readership

Opinionation	High EU knowledge	Low EU knowledge
<i>Enlargement</i>		
2005	-5.6%	15.4%
2006	-3.2%	16%
<i>Constitution</i>		
2005	2.6%	8.1%
2006	-1.3%	12%

The table presents the results of the *knowledge x newspapers* interaction term. Log odds were converted to the percentage change in opinion holding. The first column indicates the percentage change in opinion holding for an increase of one standard deviation in newspaper readership, when EU knowledge is one standard deviation *above* the mean. The second column indicates the percentage change in opinion holding for an increase of one standard deviation in newspaper readership, when EU knowledge is one standard deviation *below* the mean.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Krosnick and Milburn's (1990) psychological determinants are strong predictors of opinionation at the supranational level as well. Under certain circumstances increased media exposure can aid opinion-holding, particularly for those with low EU political sophistication. Overall, newspaper readership has a stronger relationship to opinionation than television news use.

The direct relationships between news use and opinionation, as well as the conditional relationships according to EU sophistication, differed with regard to opinionation towards enlargement and the Constitution. Television news viewing was related to enlargement, but not Constitution opinionation. This likely reflects differences in complexities of the two issues. The Constitution is a legal issue that brings together many intricate and multi-faceted aspects of the European Union. As such, it probably

cannot be analyzed in considerable depth on television news. Television news appears to be more conducive to opinion formation for enlargement, a much simpler issue. Moreover, education was weakly related to opinionation towards enlargement but strongly related to the Constitution, again reflecting the cognitive abilities one must have to understand the issues surrounding the Constitution.

This might have also occurred because newspaper and television coverage of European affairs differs both quantitatively and qualitatively from each other. Content analyses indicate that newspapers cover EU news more consistently, whereas television news about the EU tends to fluctuate considerably, peaking during key conventions and EP elections (Norris, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Research also shows that considerable differences in coverage exist among the types of outlets. Commercial television tends to have less coverage of the EU than public broadcasters (Peter & de Vreese, 2004; de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko & Boomgarden, 2006), and also place different emphases on events, often covering European affairs in terms of their human-interest components (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Therefore, a person relying on television news is likely to consume less and slightly different news about the EU.

The analyses show that the relationships post-communist nations have with news use do not differ from those in the established EU nations. However, the multi-level models indicate that even though people in post-communist nations tend to have lower opinionation than those in established members, they actually have more opinions towards enlargement than the Constitution. This is not surprising given that they directly experienced enlargement as their countries entered the EU, and so are more likely to develop opinions towards the issue. The greatest differences in opinionation between

established and post-communist states concern the Constitution. Possibly because it requires considerable experience with the actual workings of the EU to understand, which people in post-communist countries did not have at the time.

An unexpected finding concerns how increased newspaper readership is related to considerably lower opinionation for persons with high EU knowledge, particularly enlargement in 2005. While one would not expect increased media use to be particularly helpful for someone who has high EU knowledge and is likely to already hold an opinion, the finding is counterintuitive. It might occur if persons with high knowledge also happen to consume a lot of conflicting information from their news media diet, and therefore find it harder to form an opinion. Alternatively, it might have occurred due to a contextual peculiarity at the time of data collection.

Some limitations must be acknowledged. The study relied on cross-sectional survey data and therefore causality could not be determined. Although many of the studies cited explicitly examined the causal role of news exposure in European opinion formation, it is plausible that those more likely to read newspapers are more interested in politics to begin with, even if their political knowledge happens to be low. In addition, the important role of the Internet and social media was not examined in this study. Even though the analyses were carried out on recent data, Eurobarometer surveys did not include appropriate questions on the use of Internet and social media until more recently.

Using survey data, this chapter tried to understand how Europeans come to hold opinions towards EU integration. The next chapter further pursues this investigation into European political engagement and examines institutional trust and its relationship to news coverage. It also considers how trust may lead to electoral participation, and uses

multiple methods and data sources to try and untangle the possible causal processes at work.

CHAPTER 3

News Exposure, Trust in the European Parliament and EP Election Turnout: A Moderated-Mediation Model Investigating Voting in Established and New Member States

Elections to the European Parliament (EP) are perhaps the most important European Union (EU) political process that EU citizens can participate in. However, voter turnout for these elections tends to be significantly lower than in national elections, with abstention exceeding 70% in some member states. Apathy towards these elections is problematic for the EU. Electoral participation would offer at least tacit evidence of citizen engagement in European integration, at a crucial time when substantial changes brought about by the *Lisbon Treaty* and eastward enlargement are taking place. Turnout is also important for democratic governance, which expects citizens to express their preferences through electoral choices and for leaders to consider them when governing (Dahl, 1971).

Turnout was particularly low for the post-communist member states of the latest enlargement wave. In 2004, 45% of eligible voters across the EU went to the polls – 26% in post-communist states and 49% in established states. Turnout was quite similar in 2009, as 44% of voters went to the polls – 28% in post-communist states and 47% in established states. This abstention was disappointing given the expectations surrounding the post-communist nations' entry into the EU.

One of the reasons given for low turnout in post-communist member states is the lack of trust in *national* institutions that pervades post-communist countries (Rose, 2004a). The reasoning behind this is that due to the legacy of authoritarianism and one-party rule, people in post-communist nations tend to distrust their national institutions and this deters them from voting at EP elections. However, others have criticized this position by arguing that past research has not found political trust to be a predictor of EP election turnout (Wessels & Franklin, 2010).

This chapter challenges these positions by investigating whether trust in *EU* institutions is more relevant than trust in *national* institutions when explaining voting at EP elections. Research has shown that citizens often differentiate between political entities and institutions when evaluating a political system (Warren 1999; Norris, 1999), and deciding whether to vote in national elections (Grönlund & Setälä, 2007). It is therefore possible for Europeans to also differentiate between national and EU political entities when voting in EP elections.

News coverage is expected to play an essential role in this process as it has the ability to foster trust in European institutions (Norris, 2000). Given that most people do not have direct contact with the EU, and since it is an abstract and complex institution, one expects them to rely on the media for relevant information. This is likely to be more pertinent for citizens of post-communist member states, which have had less experience and interaction with the EU. In fact, content analyses indicate that there is more news coverage of EP elections in post-communist member states and it tends to be more favorable towards the EU (de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko & Boomgarden, 2006). This

difference in coverage may play a role in how European institutions in established and post-communist states are trusted and ultimately, in election participation.

The chapter proceeds by defining political trust and discussing the three literatures involved: the role of the news media in fostering trust in government and EU institutions, how the EP elections are covered in the news, and the relationship between institutional trust and EP turnout. It then considers how these relationships may differ among established and post-communist states.

Political Trust

Trust refers to a sense of ‘confidence or faith that some other, upon who we must depend, will not act in ways that occasion us painful consequences’ (Boon, 1995, p. 656). It is the belief that one can rely on another party, as it has good intentions and will act with one’s best interests in mind. Political trust therefore is thought of as an individual relationship dealing with system support that influences approval of political leaders and government (Norris, 1999). Miller and Listhaug define it as ‘a summary judgment that the system is responsive and will do what is right even in the absence of constant scrutiny’ (1990, p.381). Trust in government then, is a fairly well-reasoned evaluation of government based on normative beliefs of how it should and will perform (Stokes, 1962; Miller 1974).

Trust is important for democratic governance. Even though some distrust can serve a constructive purpose by reminding politicians that they can be held accountable, the relationship between constituents and representatives must be built on trust if it is to work well. If constituents are generally trusting of their representatives, then they can be

expected to work in the best interests of the public

Scholars have stressed the need to distinguish the various components of political trust, as there is evidence that the public often differentiates between political entities when determining system support (Warren 1999; Norris, 1999; Grönlund & Setälä, 2007). Trust in political institutions refers to government and its various branches, such as parliament and court system, whereas trust in political actors entails presidents, politicians, parties and incumbent administrations.

News Exposure and Political Trust

For the majority of the public, trust in politics is not based on personal familiarity and experience with government. People typically learn about and evaluate government through the media, and news coverage makes trust a likely heuristic through which to evaluate the political system (Hetherington, 1999; Newton, 1999). By determining the information available to the public, the media are able to make certain issues appear more salient and important. Trends of trustful responses in surveys have in fact been shown to reflect changes in the information environment (Hetherington, 2006). Therefore, as the factors on which the public may be expected to evaluate the government change, so does the level of trust in government.

The potential for the news media to foster trust in European institutions comes from the increased awareness associated with coverage of its affairs. In her study of the role of news exposure on political engagement throughout the EU, Norris (2000) found that people who consume the most news demonstrated the most positive attitudes towards the EU political system. Using survey data collected during both EP campaign and non-

campaign periods, the study finds that regular users of the news are more trusting of European institutions. It examined the extent to which people can rely on the EU as a whole, as well as three specific EU institutions: the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the Council of Ministers (known today as the Council of the European Union). In all cases, consuming more news, whether through newspapers, television, or radio, was associated with more institutional confidence.

Even though Norris' work points to a positive relationship between the news media and institutional trust, this argument has been fiercely debated. Past studies claimed that news coverage actually decreases institutional confidence (Robinson, 1976; Miller, Goldenberg & Erbring, 1979; Patterson, 1996), and evidence of no association has also been put forth (Bennett, Rhine, Flickinger & Bennett, 1999). Early studies from the US argued that the media were responsible for civic disillusionment that increased from the 1960s onwards. The 'videomalaise' thesis, claims that negative news coverage and a focus on problems with government lead to a populace less trusting and more cynical of government, and less willing to participate in civic and political activities (Robinson, 1976; Miller, Goldenberg & Erbring, 1979). Empirical evidence from these studies provided partial support for the thesis, however, more recent work from both American and European contexts comes to contradictory conclusions.

In a series of studies, Norris and colleagues significantly challenged the videomalaise thesis on methodological and theoretical grounds, arguing that past research used inadequate measures of media use and political trust, and often did not distinguish between entertainment and news-related media use (Norris, 1996; Norris, 2000; Norris et al., 1999). Her systematic examination of the role of political communication in Europe

and the US finds that attention to newspapers and television news is positively related to political engagement (Norris, 2000). Multiple individual-level analyses did not find any evidence of a negative impact on an array of engagement outcomes, including trust in government, voter turnout, campaign participation, political discussion and political knowledge. The relationships between news exposure and these political indicators were consistently positive, and in a few cases neutral, but no negative relationships were found in both European and American contexts. Similar conclusions were reached in studies from German and British contexts (Holtz-Bacha, 1990; Newton, 1997).

News Coverage of EP Elections

In addition to the quantity of news consumption, it is necessary to also consider news content in drawing conclusions about the role of the media in fostering support towards the EU. Coverage of European affairs becomes particularly pertinent during EP election campaign periods where its visibility in national news coverage increases substantially (Siune, 1983; Boomgaarden, Vliegenhart, de Vreese & Schuck, 2010). Content analyses show that while coverage exhibits some cross-national variation, general trends can be discerned. First, the amount of coverage devoted to EP elections has increased over time in nearly all countries (Schuck, Xezonakis, Elenbaas, Banducci & de Vreese, 2011). Second, and more important for this study, news coverage of the EU tends to differ among established and post-communist member states and does so in two ways: in terms of the amount and tone of coverage.

News in post-communist member states contains more coverage of EP elections and the EU, and tends to also be more positive than in established member states (de

Vreese, et al., 2006; Schuck et al., 2011). During the 2004 EP campaign, the majority of television news and newspaper coverage of the EU was neutral, but when evaluative, the news in nine of the ten established member states was generally negative (de Vreese et al., 2006). On the other hand, news coverage in seven of the ten new member states had the most positive orientations towards the EU. These trends hold up across all media outlets examined but one. The average tone of news coverage in broadsheet newspapers, tabloid newspapers and public television was more positive in post-communist member states. The only exception was commercial television, where coverage was slightly more positive in established member states.

On average, news coverage tends to differ both quantitatively and qualitatively among established and post-communist member states. Therefore, citizens of established and post-communist member states receive different news about the EU. Equal amounts of news consumption are likely to include more EU news and contain more positive evaluations in post-communist member states. Citizens of post-communist member states have been in the EU for less time and participated in fewer EP elections than their counterparts in established member states, and might therefore rely on information from the news media more when it comes to forming opinions about the EU and the EP elections. Given these differences, one can expect different individual-level relationships between news exposure, institutional trust and voting for established and post-communist member states. In line with the findings of Norris's (2000) study, the relationship between news use and trust in EU institutions is expected to be stronger in post-communist member states.

A link between news exposure and institutional trust becomes more important given that the latter is related to turnout. Distrust is believed to make people abstain from politics and can account for individual and national-level differences in turnout; if people have low confidence in political institutions, then they are less likely to vote on election day (Matilla, 2003; Rose, 2004b). If a person consumes European news with a predominantly positive orientation, as is more likely to happen in post-communist member states, then her trust in EU institutions and ultimately her likelihood of turning out to vote at EP elections are likely to increase.

Structural Explanations of EP Election Turnout

Before discussing this theoretical reasoning further, previous explanations of EP turnout need to be addressed. Scholars have argued that the decision to vote at EP elections is based primarily on structural conditions and that attitudes towards the EU do not matter (Franklin 2001; Franklin, 2007). Structural explanations are at the country level and can be institutional or contextual. Institutional explanations pertain to characteristics of electoral systems. These are compulsory voting and having EP elections concurrently with national elections. Characteristics of electoral systems can be conducive to turnout and countries with compulsory voting laws obviously see higher turnout than countries without such laws. EP election turnout also tends to increase if domestic elections are held on the same day. This ensures a higher turnout for EP elections than if the two were separate, since people voting for national or local elections are more likely to also vote in the concurrent EP election (Reif & Schmitt, 1980;

Franklin, van der Eijk & Oppenhuis, 1996; Blondel, Sinnott & Svensson, 1997; Matilla, 2003).

Contextual explanations deal with peculiarities of a country's electoral environment, such as if a country is experiencing its first EP election. A turnout boost is associated with a country's first time participating in an EP election, as a first election usually has higher turnout than subsequent ones (Franklin, 2001; Franklin & Hobolt, 2011). This is often the result of the new election's high visibility and widespread enthusiasm related to participating in a new political process. This phenomenon also occurs in countries experiencing their first national election after transitioning to democracy (Franklin, 2007).

However, these explanations of turnout are less applicable today. Electoral systems and environments have changed and explanations of turnout based on structural contexts are not as relevant in recent EP elections. Where at one time, five out of fifteen member states required compulsory voting, today only two out of twenty-seven do: Belgium and Luxembourg (Cyprus and Greece stipulate compulsory voting for national elections only).

The turnout boost usually experienced during a country's first EP election is also not as relevant (Franklin, 2007). Past EP elections often saw such turnout boosts but it appears that this phenomenon was mostly relevant for the established member states, as it was considerably less pronounced among post-communist countries of the 2004 and 2007 enlargement wave. Established member states experienced first-election boosts during three enlargement processes: ten countries voted for the second time in 1984, two countries in 1989, and three in 1999. Among countries without compulsory voting, all

saw a decline in turnout in their second EP elections with Britain and Denmark being the only exceptions in 1984 (Table 3-1).

Regarding post-communist states, Table 3-1 indicates that a significant drop-off occurred in only one of the eight post-communist states (Lithuania) of the 2004 enlargement and a slight drop-off also occurred in one (Hungary). Turnout actually increased in four (Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia) and remained stable in two (Czech Rep., Slovenia). In fact, Lithuania's EP elections in 2004 were held concurrently with presidential elections and this is the most likely reason for the turnout decline experienced during the 2009 EP elections. Romanian and Bulgarian citizens first voted for EP representatives in special elections held in 2007 when they joined the EU. Two years later they voted again with the rest of the EU; Bulgaria experienced an increase in turnout and Romania a slight decrease.

Thus the first-election turnout boost was more evident among established member states, as it occurred eleven out of a possible thirteen times among countries without compulsory voting. Among post-communist states however, it occurred three (or two, depending on how Lithuania is made sense of) out of a possible ten times. Furthermore, it would not be a factor in examining determinants of voting between citizens of established and post-communist member states, since in 2004 all new member states at the time were experiencing their first EP election. In 2009, the two newest members (Bulgaria, Romania) had already experienced their first election in 2007.

Therefore, under less restricted structural conditions, it is more likely for individual-level factors to play a role in the decision to vote. Trust and attitudes towards the EU may matter for EP voting, since with time, people are likely to become more

accustomed to the EU and its institutions and judge them independently from national institutions.

Table 3-1. First Election Boosts in EP Election Turnout

Member State	Difference in Turnout between first two EP elections	First Election Turnout Boost
<i>Established</i>		
Belgium (1979-1984)	+0.7	No
Denmark (1979-1984)	+4.6	No
Germany (1979-1984)	-9.0	Yes
France (1979-1984)	-4.0	Yes
Ireland (1979-1984)	-16.1	Yes
Italy (1979-1984)	-3.2	Yes
Luxembourg (1979-1984)	-0.1	No
Netherlands (1979-1984)	-7.2	Yes
UK (1979-1984)	+0.2	No
Greece (1981-1984)	-0.9	Yes
Spain (1987-1989)	-13.8	Yes
Portugal (1987-1989)	-21.3	Yes
Sweden (1995-1999)	-2.8	Yes
Austria (1996-1999)	-18.3	Yes
Finland (1996-1999)	-27.5	Yes
<i>Post-Communist</i>		
Czech Rep. (2004-2009)	- 0.1	No
Estonia (2004-2009)	+17.1	No
Hungary (2004-2009)	-2.2	Yes
Latvia (2004-2009)	+12.4	No
Lithuania (2004-2009)	-27.4	Yes
Poland (2004-2009)	+3.7	No
Slovakia (2004-2009)	+2.7	No
Slovenia (2004-2009)	-0.02	No
Bulgaria (2007-2009)	+9.8	No
Romania (2007-2009)	-1.8	Yes

Lithuania held concurrent national elections in 2004. Belgium and Luxembourg have compulsory and concurrent national elections. A decline in turnout of 0.5% or more between elections is considered a first election boost.

Political Trust and Voting

Insights on the relationship between political trust and turnout can be garnered from national and supranational contexts. Findings from both contexts demonstrate that trust in EU institutions is likely to have a positive association with turning out to vote at EP elections.

National Contexts

A scholarly dispute concerns the extent to which political trust influences turnout in national elections. Most early work from US contexts reported a weak relationship between trust in political institutions and turnout. Miller (1974) first argued that political distrust could be related to turnout, since the trusting were more likely to turn out and vote in the 1972 presidential election than the distrusting. Conversely, Citrin (1974) maintained that there actually was not enough evidence to conclude that disillusionment with politics could explain turnout at elections. When divided into three groups, it appeared that people with high trust in government were only slightly more likely than those with low trust to report that they voted in US elections. Those most likely to vote in fact belonged to the middle trust group. A subsequent analysis of four presidential elections divided respondents into five trust groups and reported that in three of the four years the most trustful were more likely to turn out, even though in a multivariate framework the relationship was weak (Shaffer, 1981). Later work maintained that there was in fact no link between trust and turnout because trust had no significant effect after socio-demographic factors and partisanship were controlled for (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993).

However, studies from non-US contexts increasingly show that it matters for turnout. A study of Belgian voters, where compulsory voting keeps abstention low, found that those with little political trust tend to make greater use of blank or invalid votes (Hooghe, Marien & Pauwels, 2011). Given that voters have to go to the polls in Belgium, casting a blank or deliberately invalidating a ballot can represent a way of not participating in the election process. The least trusting respondents were also more likely to state that they would not vote if compulsory voting laws were abolished. Evidence from Canadian elections also indicates that distrust of government is linked to the decision to abstain (Bèlanger & Nadeau, 2005).

Furthermore, recent research also challenges the American conclusions on a methodological basis, arguing that past studies were too broad in their operationalization of political trust and grouped together too many variables and argues for additional conceptual distinctions. In fact, surveys show that the public discriminates between various political institutions and actors, and tends to judge them separately (Mishler & Rose, 1997; Dalton, 2004). By distinguishing between trust towards various institutions in analyses of voting behavior, differential effects emerge.

An examination of individual-level data on national parliamentary elections from 20 European nations illustrates the value of differentiating between institutions (Grönlund & Setälä, 2007). It distinguishes between trust towards the national parliament and trust towards politicians and finds that the former was positively related to voting in national parliamentary elections, whereas the latter had no relationship. The study argues that features of democratic systems prompt the distinction. Citizens can hold incumbent governments or politicians responsible and replace them through elections. A person may

not trust a certain elected representative but trusts the parliament as an institution and would therefore want to vote to have that representative replaced.

Supranational Context

Given that trust in national institutions can impact turnout in national elections, it is likely that trust towards the EU and its institutions can impact EP election turnout. Individual-level research on the supranational context is complemented by findings from aggregate-level work on turnout differences between countries.

Individual-level studies that inform our knowledge on the role of trust in citizens' propensity to vote in EP elections are descriptive in nature. Open-ended responses from a 1994 EP post-election survey indicate that voluntary abstention was related to political trust. Distrust of politics, and dissatisfaction with the EP electoral system and candidates were two of the main reasons given for electoral abstention from citizens of non-compulsory voting countries (Blondel, Sinnott & Svensson, 1997; Sinnott, 2000). Similarly, an analysis of 2004 Eurobarometer data found that around half of non-voters abstained due to a lack of trust in European institutions and their representatives (Muxel, 2005). Aggregate level studies corroborate these results. A study of the 1999 EP elections among established EU member states found trust in the EP to be positively correlated with EP turnout (Cox, 2003). Similar findings were reported for the 2004 EP elections (Flickinger & Studlar, 2007).

Political Trust in Post-Communist Member States

Distrust of national institutions is prevalent among citizens of post-communist

countries. Surveys indicate that trust in both political and social (e.g. churches, corporations) institutions is low in post-communist countries (Mishler & Rose, 2001) and tends to be notably higher among Western Europeans (Rose, 2004a). For some political institutions, such as the national parliament, trust levels in Western Europe were at one time twice those in post-communist nations (Mishler & Rose, 1997).

Trust in parliament and political parties is particularly low in post-communist nations and this is attributed to the legacy of authoritarianism and one-party rule. Coercive systems designed to ensure that citizens adhered to official policy gave rise to distrust and detachment from politics (Rose, 2004b). Even though the communist polities are now firmly gone, and younger generations never directly experienced their rule, the systems that replaced them have yet to become full democracies capable of fostering institutional confidence. Distrust in political institutions increases when people feel that politicians do not care about their views (Craig, 1979). Post-communist EU member states tend to have less transparent electoral processes and less competent, more corrupt governments than established member states (“Democracy Index 2012”, 2013), and therefore encourage feelings of distrust among their citizens.

Furthermore, distrust might also be fueled by the manner in which political parties and coalitions behave (Schmitt, 2005). In many post-communist countries, a stable and established party structure has not taken form yet. Parties and coalitions often develop, disband or change names, sometimes during the same election periods. Trusting transient political entities is particularly hard and is likely to further feelings that politicians are more interested in getting elected than caring about constituents. Such a political environment can discourage electoral participation and account for why trust and turnout

in national elections is lower than in Western Europe.

The relationship between trust and turnout in post-communist states is highlighted in Rose's (2004a) study of the 2004 EP elections. The study argues that the low trust in national institutions explains why post-communist countries had the lowest turnout in those elections. By presenting bivariate correlations between aggregate-level indicators of trust in national institutions and turnout, he contends that the low turnout in post-communist states was primarily due to low levels of trust in national parties and the national government.

However, the study makes no mention of trust towards the EU, and there are reasons to challenge its conclusion. The data from Rose's (2004a) study can actually be used to show that European-level considerations can be distinguished from national-level considerations for voting at EP elections.

The study analyzes one election and arguments based on such a small sample ($N=25$) should be interpreted with caution. Conclusions based on these bivariate correlations might be due to spurious findings that disappear in multivariate models or when other factors are controlled for. A reanalysis of the data Rose uses in his study can be used to show that EU-level considerations can play a role in EP election turnout. Table 3-2 indicates that the relationships between trust in national institutions and turnout become considerably weaker and lose significance after support for the EU is controlled for. While this indicates that national-level considerations might still account for some of the variance in turnout, they cannot be a substitute for EU-level considerations.

Rose's (2004a) study also uses dichotomous measures of institutional trust (i.e. tend to trust or tend to distrust) from Eurobarometer surveys, which do not capture the various degrees of trust one may feel. *European Election Studies* voter surveys measure trust with more suitable 5- or 10-point scales and as a result also lead to lower non-response. Surveys indicate that trust towards national and European institutions consistently differ between established and post-communist member states. Even though trust in national institutions among citizens of post-communist countries is low, trust towards EU institutions is actually higher. Evidence from the 2004 EP elections indicated that post-communist nations tended to trust the European Parliament more than their national parliament (Grönlund & Setälä, 2007). In fact, recent Eurobarometer surveys indicate that trust towards EU institutions is slightly higher among post-communist than established states (Table 3-3). Furthermore, among post-communist countries, the discrepancy between trust in national and European institutions is quite substantial (Figure 3-1).

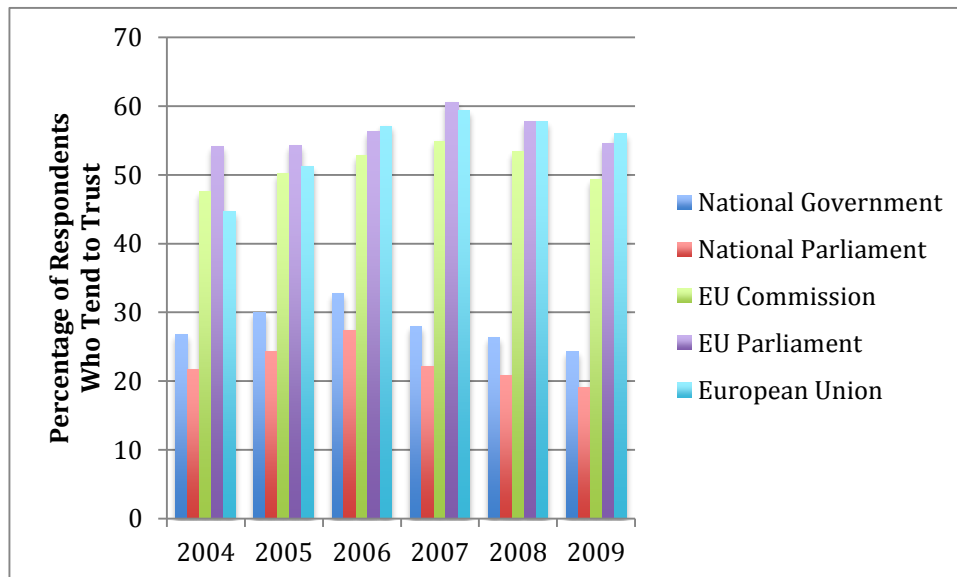
Table 3-2. Aggregate-Level Correlations Between Trust in National Institutions and Turnout in 2004 EP Elections

	Turnout	
	Bivariate correlation	Partial correlation after controlling for EU support level
Trust in national political parties	.62**	.39
Trust in national government	.54**	.38
<i>N</i>	25	25

Support for the EU is the difference in percentages between respondents who believe that their country's membership in the EU is 'a good thing' and those that believe it is 'a bad thing' (Mattila, 2003; Stockemer, 2011). *p < .05, **p < .01

News exposure may contribute to the high EU trust among post-communist member states. News consumption is positively related to confidence in EU institutions (Norris, 2000) and coverage of EU affairs tends to be more visible and more positive in post-communist member states (de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko & Boomgarden, 2006). Evidence from the 2004 EP elections suggests that newspaper readership was associated with voting among citizens of most post-communist member states but not for Europeans of most established members (Schmitt, 2005). This might be explained by the difference in news coverage among established and post-communist members. The more positive coverage in post-communist member states might foster greater trust in the EU and might explain why citizens of these countries trust the EU substantially more than their national institutions, and slightly more than citizens of established member states.

Figure 3-1. Institutional Trust in Post-Communist Member States



Eurobarometer surveys 62, 64.2, 65.2, 68.1, 70.1, 71.3.

Table 3-3. Trust in the EU

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Established Member States	50.2	44.8	47.7	48.5	48.3	47.8
Post-Communist Member States	55.9	51.2	57.1	59.4	57.7	56

Cells represent percentage of respondents who tend to trust the EU. Eurobarometer surveys 62, 64.2, 65.2, 68.1, 70.1, 71.3.

News, Trust in the EP and Voting in EP Elections

The study is concerned with the individual-level determinants of voting at EP elections. It elaborates on previous research by including the role of the news media and by also exploring how determinants of voting may differ between citizens of established and post-communist member states. It is necessary to explore whether trust in the EP is related to voting at the individual level, as studies have suggested this through bivariate correlations of aggregate level data. Examining trust towards the EU as an individual-level determinant of EP voting can determine if it remains predictive in a multivariate framework. Moreover, it is necessary to examine whether trust in national institutions is also related to voting in EP elections, given that past research has also made this claim with aggregate-level evidence (Rose, 2004a).

Figure 3-2 represents the moderated mediation model to be tested. A process through which favorable news exposure is positively associated with voting in EP elections by first encouraging trust in the EP will be examined. Given that news in post-communist states contains more coverage about the EU and has a more positive tone, it is

more likely that news exposure helps foster greater trust in EU institutions among these citizens.

The following hypotheses speak to a set of relationships between news exposure, institutional trust, and the likelihood of voting in EP elections:

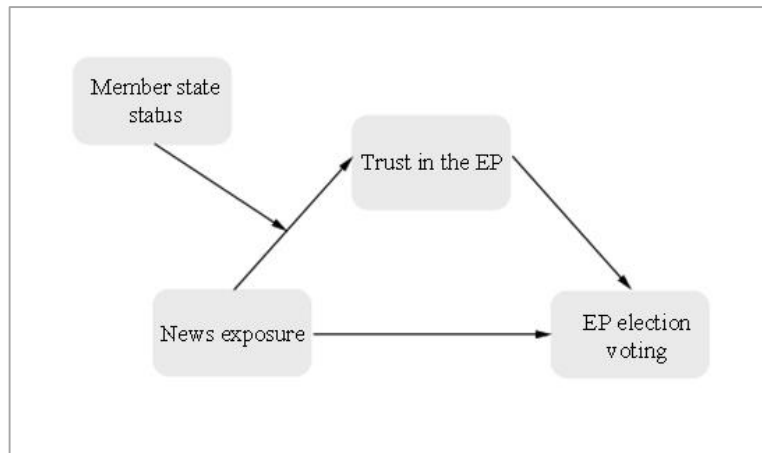
H1: Trust in the EP will mediate the relationship between news exposure and voting in EP elections.

H2: The relationship between news exposure and trust in the EP will be stronger among citizens of post member states.

The current study expects trust in EU institutions to be associated with voting in EP elections. However, due to prior research (Rose, 2004a), it also investigates the extent to which trust in national institutions is associated with voting.

RQ: Is trust in national institutions related to the likelihood of voting in EP elections?

Figure 3-2. Moderated Mediation Model Predicting EP Election Voting



Method

Two studies are conducted to investigate the relationships between news exposure, trust in the EP and voting in EP elections. An experimental design that manipulates the tone of EP news coverage examines if trust in the EP mediates the relationship between news exposure and intention to vote. This process is then replicated using *European Election Studies* survey data to establish if the relationships hold when using EU-wide data. By using data from all EU states the study can also determine if the relationship between news exposure and trust is indeed moderated by member state status.

Study 1: Survey Experiment

Design and procedure. To test the mediating role of trust in the EP, a between-subjects experimental design with random assignment to one of five conditions is used. Participants were recruited from an online panel maintained by the survey firm *Qualtrics*. The experiment was embedded in an online survey conducted in four countries

representing different geographical regions of the EU, and established and post-communist states: UK ($n=359$), Germany ($n=358$), Greece ($n=358$) and Poland ($n=359$). In the last section of the survey, participants were randomly assigned to one of five conditions (Table 3-4). In four of the conditions, they were asked to read one news article about the role of the EP in an EU policy decision. Participants in the fifth condition did not read an article and served as a control group. All subsequently answered several post-test questions, which included filler questions, trust in various national and European political institutions, and their likelihood of voting in upcoming national and European elections. The survey and stimulus material were translated professionally into German and Polish. The author, a native speaker of Greek, translated the material into Greek.

Table 3-4. Trust in EP and Likelihood of Voting in EP Election, by Experimental Condition

Experimental Condition	Trust in EP	Likelihood of Voting in EP Election
1. EP hinders functioning of EU (N=284)	3.1 (1.5)	4.8 (1.1)
2. EP facilitates functioning of EU (N=282)	3.7 (1.6)	5.3 (1.8)
3. EP is not responsive to citizens (N=287)	3.2 (1.2)	4.8 (1.2)
4. EP is responsive to citizens (N=280)	3.3 (1.9)	5.0 (1.2)
5. Control - no news exposure (N=301)	3.2 (1.5)	4.9 (2.0)

Means and standard deviations in parentheses.

Stimulus material. The stimulus material consisted of two pairs of news articles about the role of the EP in an EU decision-making process. The articles were based on prominent themes that emerge from content analyses of EP news coverage (de Vreese et al., 2006; Schuck et al., 2011). To appear realistic and to increase the generalizability of the experiment, the two most common topics of news coverage about the EU during times of

EP elections were used. With such an experimental design, the way in which different aspects of news coverage, and ultimately the EP itself, shape public attitudes can be determined.

The first theme deals with the extent to which the EP facilitates the functioning of the EU. That is, whether the EP works efficiently and effectively with other EU institutions in dealing with common goals. The second theme is about the responsiveness of the EP to the concerns and needs of its citizens. This relates to whether it reaches out to citizens and has their best interests in mind when forming policies.

Each pair of articles focuses on one of the two themes and contains an alternate negative and positive version. The material was based on a *Euronews* article edited for the purposes of the study. The article is about the role of the EP in dealing with proposed amendments to the existing Agreement on the free movement of persons. The Agreement abolished internal border controls and allows persons to move and reside freely within the EU. The proposed legislation was designed to allow member states to reinstate their own border controls in certain circumstances and the article discusses the potential effects of such changes on travel for EU citizens. The topic was chosen because it is not as salient as other EU issues such as the economic crisis, where people might already have formed strong attitudes. Europeans are likely to have a basic awareness of the Agreement's existence and have experienced its benefits while travelling.

The first set of articles deals with the extent to which the EP facilitates the functioning of the EU. The positively worded version portrays the EP as assisting EU institutions in dealing with the proposed legislation and the negatively worded version as hindering the EU. The second set of articles deals with EP responsiveness. The positively

worded version states that the EP takes peoples' concerns into account when debating the proposed legislation, while the negatively worded version states that it disregards peoples' concerns. All four articles contain the same number of sentence-level manipulations to enhance the ability to compare experimental conditions. The text of the news articles is presented in Appendix A.

Measures. Respondents were asked to indicate how much they trust the EP and their likelihood of voting in the upcoming 2014 EP elections on a 7-point scale.

Results. To ascertain how news coverage can impact trust in the EP and the likelihood of voting, the impact of negative and positive news is first examined separately. Participants exposed to the two negative news coverage conditions were combined and compared to the control group. The combined negative news group (Mtrust = 3.2; SD = 1.4; Mvote = 4.8; SD = 1.2) does not differ significantly from the control group in terms of trust in the EP (Mtrust = 3.2; SD = 1.6; $t = -.46$, $p > .1$) and likelihood of voting (Mvote = 4.9; SD = 2.0; $t = .93$, $p > .1$).

Conversely, the combined group consisting of positive news conditions (Mtrust = 3.5; SD = 1.8; Mvote = 5.2; SD = 1.5) does differ in a marginally significant way from the control group for both trust in the EP (Mtrust = 3.2; SD = 1.5; $t = 1.6$, $p < .1$) and intention to vote (Mvote = 4.9; SD = 2.0; $t = 1.54$, $p < .1$). These results imply that negative news coverage does not impact trust and voting, while positive news coverage in general has a slight positive effect.

However, the topic of coverage may play a role in perceptions of the EP and consequently voting behavior. It's feasible that even though positive news coverage in general has a slight positive effect, this may be driven by one topic of coverage more than the other. Therefore, this process is further investigated by considering the differential impact of each news exposure condition on the outcomes. The results indicate that the second experimental condition is most powerful in impacting trust in the EP and ultimately intentions to vote. Participants in the condition where the EP facilitates the functioning of the EU have significantly higher trust in the EP ($M_{\text{trust}} = 3.7$; $SD = 1.6$) than those in the control condition ($M_{\text{trust}} = 3.2$; $SD = 1.5$; $t = 3.17$, $p < .01$). They also express higher intention to vote ($M_{\text{vote}} = 5.3$; $SD = 1.8$) than participants in the control group ($M_{\text{vote}} = 4.9$; $SD = 2.0$; $t = 1.69$, $p < .1$). Trust levels and intentions to vote in the other three experimental conditions did not differ significantly from the control group (Table 3-4).

A mediation analysis is then conducted to investigate if news coverage in this condition, where the EP facilitates the EU, impacts intentions to vote by first fostering trust in the EP. Table 3-5 presents the unstandardized coefficients and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for a mediation test using 5000 bootstrapped samples. Participants in this experimental condition, compared to those in the control condition, report a greater likelihood of voting due to higher trust in the EP. In fact, without the mediator in the model, favorable news coverage has a marginally significant relationship to vote intention, which loses statistical significance when trust is added as a mediator.

Next, to investigate the unique impact of valence, the two EP facilitation conditions are compared to each other (condition 2/positive vs. condition 1/negative).

When comparing news exposure conditions to each other as opposed to the control group, exposure itself is essentially controlled for and one can determine how trust is impacted as unfavorable news coverage becomes more favorable. This reveals that the relationships are weaker than the previous comparison to the control condition (Table 3-5). This is not surprising given that trust levels do not differ significantly between the condition where the EP hinders the EU (condition 1) and the control condition. However, even though positive news is marginally significant to trust, which in turn is strongly related to intentions to vote, the confidence interval indicates that mediation does not occur in this case.

Table 3-5. Mediation Analyses Predicting EP Election Voting

News exposure conditions	X -> M	M -> Y	X -> Y1	X -> Y2	CI
EP facilitates functioning of EU vs. Control	.2**	.28***	.08	.13~	.02 – .1
EP facilitates functioning of EU vs. EP hinders functioning of EU	.12~	.34***	-.09	-.06	-.004 – .09

Cells are unstandardized coefficients. CI is bias-corrected 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of news exposure on intention to vote with trust as mediator in the model.

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

X = News exposure condition (EP facilitates functioning of EU condition coded +1, control condition coded -1; EP facilitates functioning of EU condition coded +1, EP hinders functioning of EU condition coded -1)

M = Trust in the EP

Y = Intention to vote

Y1 = Direct effect of news exposure on intention to vote with mediator in the model

Y2 = Direct effect of news exposure on intention to vote without mediator in the model

The final analysis compares whether the magnitude of the relationship between news coverage of the EP facilitating the EU and trust varies across the four countries.

Two models are used to evaluate this relationship across countries. A path that does not vary across countries suggests that news content has similar effects in all four countries.

In the first model, the causal path from news coverage to trust is constrained to be equal across countries, $\chi^2(3) = 3.82$, $p > .1$. The second model allows the causal path to vary across the four countries, $\chi^2(0) = 0$, $p = 0$. The difference in the chi-square results of the two models tests whether the paths are equal or not. A non-significant chi-square difference in the fit of the two models, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 3.82$, $p > .1$, indicates that the path from news coverage to trust in the EP does not differ across the four countries.

Discussion. The results provide partial support for the mediation hypothesis (H1). They suggest that favorable news coverage of the EP can engage people and encourage them to want to vote, and it does so by demonstrating that the institution is effective and trustworthy.

However, in addition to valence, the topic of coverage is important and the experiment reveals how content matters. The two favorable news conditions have differential relationships with trust in the EP, indicating that not all favorable news coverage has a positive relationship to trust. When the EP is presented as facilitating the functioning of the EU, there is a strong relationship with trust, whereas when it is shown as being responsive to the needs of the European public, no relationship exists.

This implies that having a well-functioning system within the EU is more important to Europeans than what may be perceived as self-interest expectations regarding the EU's work. This is fairly similar to the sociotropic explanations of political attitudes and voting behavior found in US research (Kinder & Kiewiet, 1981) and for

support of the Euro currency among Europeans (Banducci & Semetko, 2003; Kaltenthaler & Anderson, 2001), where people base their judgments on the economic climate more than their personal finances. Europeans are more concerned with a supranational system that works efficiently and effectively, than with individualistic considerations of how the EP will affect them.

The experiment also shows that unfavorable news coverage is not related to trust. That unfavorable news does not lead to lower levels of trust might seem counterintuitive, but this finding in fact fits with existing explanations provided by past research. Pippa Norris' (2000) study on political engagement discussed earlier argues that news coverage of the EU has a positive to benign influence on civic life, including trust in EU institutions. Exposure to news, and in particular positive news, has the ability to foster trust in European institutions by increasing awareness of the EU and its work. The argument further posits that negative news about the EU does not have much of an effect on institutional trust, while implying that it still increases people's understanding of the EU and its activities.

It should be acknowledged though that the results of the positive news manipulations could not be replicated across the two conditions. Both conditions contained an equal number of positively worded manipulations at the sentence level and the results were similar across the four country samples. Nonetheless, additional experiments would allow us to see if the difference in content does indeed matter in this way.

The invariance of the path from news coverage to trust in the EP across the four countries suggests that that news content has similar effects on Europeans from different

countries. This provides reason to consider that differential relationships between news use and trust among established and post-communist member states can occur due to differences in news content. The fact that there tends to be more positive news coverage of the EP in post-communist countries indicates that this may impact their levels of trust towards the EP. The next section pursues this by analyzing EU-wide data.

Study 2: Survey

The relationships outlined in the mediation model are now replicated with existing survey data from the majority of EU member states. This allows the nature of the relationships between news consumption, institutional trust and voting, and the extent to which they differ between people in established and post-communist member states to be determined with data representing the entire EU.

Data. Data from the 2004 *European Election Study* (EES) are used. These data are part of a study series conducted in member states following EP elections and draw samples of about 1000 respondents per country. In smaller countries such as Luxembourg samples consist of about 500 respondents.

Measures

EP Election Voting. A dichotomous variable is created from a question asking respondents if they voted at the EP elections (0=did not vote, 1=voted).

News Use. Two questions ask respondents how frequently they came across news about the European elections through television, and newspapers, in the three of four weeks

before election day (1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often). These are combined to form one news use variable measured on a four-point scale.

Institutional Trust. Trust in the EP, European Commission, the national parliament and national government is measured on a ten-point scale.

Member State Status. A dummy variable represents established (coded '0') and post-communist (coded '1') member states.

Interaction terms. An interaction terms between the news use variable and post-communist member state status is created to carry out analyses corresponding to H2. To assist in interpretation of conditional effects, news use is centered prior to creating the interaction terms. The interaction term is used in the analysis of the entire EU to create a graphical representation of how the relationship differs between established and post-communist member states.

Analysis. The analysis is conducted in two stages. First, models are run separately for the EU as a whole, established and post-communist member states. A multiple regression model is used to examine if news exposure is related to trust in the EP after accounting for demographic indicators and predictors of institutional trust, such as evaluations of the economy (Catterberg & Moreno, 2005) and satisfaction with the EU (van der Eijk & Schmitt, 2009). Logistic regression models are then used to test if trust in the EP and, importantly, if trust in national institutions (RQ) are positively related to voting in EP

elections. Structural and individual-level factors known to impact turnout at EP elections are controlled for. The structural factors are compulsory voting¹ and concurrent elections² and individual-level factors include demographic and attitudinal predictors of voting (Blumler, 1984; Blumler & Fox, 1982; Schmitt & Mannheim, 1991; Schmitt & van der Eijk, 2008; van der Eijk & Schmitt, 2009; Wessels & Franklin, 2010).

To increase confidence in the causal process developed, the two models are then examined simultaneously in a single path analysis model using the *Mplus* statistical software. The strength of the indirect relationship between news use and trust in the EP will be compared among established and post-communist member states.

Data from four countries are not included in the analyses. Respondents from Malta were not surveyed at all in the 2004 *EES*. Moreover, the Swedish version of the survey did not include questions regarding European election media use and the Lithuanian version did not include questions on media use nor institutional trust. Lastly, Cyprus was excluded since the analysis focuses on established and post-communist member states. Descriptive statistics of the variables used in the analyses can be found in Table 3-6.

Results. Table 3-7 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis predicting trust in the EP. Consuming news about the European election is positively related to trust after controlling for alternative explanations, across all country groupings, supporting H1a. However, the relationship between news use and trust in the EP is stronger among

¹ Belgium and Luxembourg.

² In addition to Belgium and Luxembourg, which always have concurrent national elections, Ireland had a national referendum and Italy had regional elections in many parts of the country on the same day as the EP election.

citizens of post-communist member states. Furthermore, the model predicted 7% more of the variance in trust for post-communist member states than it did for established member states.

Table 3-6. Descriptive Statistics

	All EU Member States	Established Member States	Post-Communist Member States
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)
Voting (self-report)	63.3%	73.2%	43.3%
Trust in European Parliament	4.6 (2.4)	4.4 (2.3)	5.1 (2.5)
Trust in European Commission	4.9 (2.3)	4.8 (2.2)	5.2 (2.5)
Trust in National Parliament	5.3 (2.4)	5.8 (2.3)	4.3 (2.3)
Trust in National Government	5.1 (2.6)	5.4 (2.6)	4.4 (2.5)
Age	47.6 (17)	48.1 (16.9)	46.8 (17.3)
Sex (male)	47.9%	49.5%	44.5%
Education (age stopped)	19.6 (6.2)	29.7 (6.9)	19.2 (4.5)
Financial satisfaction	2.7 (1.0)	2.7 (1.0)	2.6 (1.0)
EU satisfaction	2.5 (.7)	2.5 (.7)	2.6 (.7)
News use	1.8 (1.2)	1.8 (1.2)	1.7 (1.1)
Party attachment	1.1 (1.0)	1.1 (1.0)	1 (.9)
Union membership	30.5%	36.7%	17.9%
Interest in elections	2.1 (.9)	2.2 (.9)	2.0 (.9)
National satisfaction	2.5 (.8)	2.7 (.8)	2.2 (.7)

Table 3-7. Determinants of Trust in the European Parliament

	All EU Member States	Established Member States	Post-Communist Member States
	<i>B (s.e.)</i>	<i>B (s.e.)</i>	<i>B (s.e.)</i>
Age	-.01*** (.00)	-.01*** (.001)	.00 (.00)
Sex (male)	-.24*** (.04)	-.2*** (.04)	-.31** (.07)
Education	.01** (.00)	.01** (.003)	-.01 (.01)
Financial satisfaction	.27*** (.02)	.21*** (.02)	.44*** (.04)
EU satisfaction	.89*** (.03)	.83*** (.03)	1.07*** (.05)
News use	.21*** (.03)	.19*** (.03)	.25*** (.06)
Constant	1.89*** (.03)	2.31*** (.03)	.95*** (.05)
<i>R</i> ²	.13	.11	.18
<i>N</i> (individuals / countries)	14,913 / 21	10,794 / 14	4119 / 7

Multiple regression with trust in the EP as dependent variable. Analysis does not include data from Sweden, Lithuania, Cyprus and Malta. News use refers to news about the EP elections. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

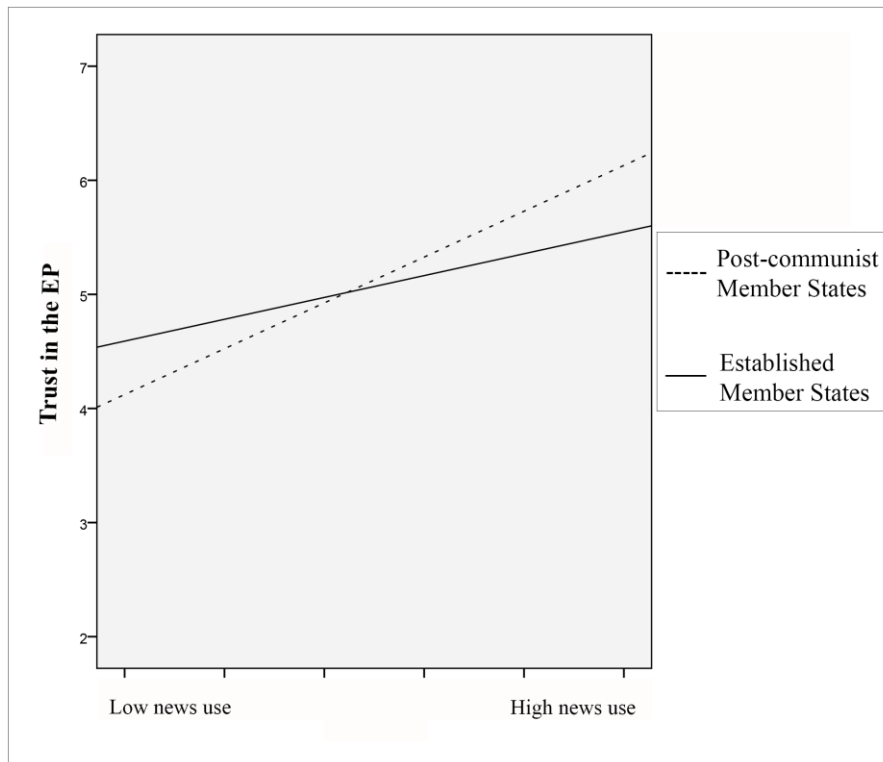
Table 3-8. Interactive Relationships Between Post-Communist Member State Status and EP Election News Use

	All EU Member States
	<i>B (s.e.)</i>
News use	.19*** (.04)
Post-communist member state	.04 (.04)
News use x Post-communist member state	.10** (.01)
Constant	1.57*** (.12)
<i>N</i> (individuals / countries)	14,913 / 21

Multiple regression with trust in the EP as dependent variable. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients. Results after accounting for age, sex, education, evaluation of economy & satisfaction with EU. Analysis does not include data from Sweden, Lithuania, Cyprus and Malta. Post-communist member state status is coded: 0= established member state, 1=post-communist member state.

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

Figure 3-3. Predicting Trust in the EP With News Use x Post-Communist Member State Status Interaction



The interaction term among news use and post-communist member state status is then added to the model analyzing the entire EU (Table 3-8). This allows the differences in the relationships between news use and trust across country groupings to be presented graphically. The interaction term between news use and post-communist member state status is statistically significant, indicating that the positive relationship between election-related news use and trust tends to be greater among citizens of post-communist member states (Figure 3-3). At the lowest levels of news use, trust in the EP is slightly higher in established member states and does not differ considerably as news consumption increases from the lowest to highest level. However, in post-communist states, news uses

increases by around 50% for a similar increase in news use. These results therefore provide support for the second hypothesis.

To now test how trust in political institutions is related to voting in EP elections we turn to the logistic regression analyses (Table 3-9). After taking structural and demographic factors into account, trust in the EP is positively related to voting in the 2004 EP elections, equally so for citizens of both established and post-communist member states, supporting H1b. The likelihood of voting increases by about 7% for a one-unit change in EP trust.

With regard to trust in other political institutions, particularly national institutions (RQ), the results indicate that trust in the national parliament is related to voting in EP elections when the entire sample is analyzed. However, in separate analyses of established and post-communist states, the coefficient does not reach statistical significance. Trust in the European Commission and trust in the national government are not related to voting in EP elections. Lastly, in terms of the direct relationships between news use and voting, both television news and newspaper use are positively related to voting and more so for post-communist states.

Table 3-9. Determinants of Voting in 2004 EP Elections

	All EU Member States	Established Member States	Post-Communist Member States
	<i>Log odds (s.e.)</i>	<i>Log odds (s.e.)</i>	<i>Log odds (s.e.)</i>
<i>Structural factors</i>			
Compulsory voting	1.57*** (.28)	1.69*** (.28)	-
Concurrent elections	1.76*** (.09)	1.46*** (.1)	-
Age	.02*** (.001)	.02*** (.002)	.02*** (.003)
Sex (male)	-.07 (.05)	-.07 (.06)	-.06 (.08)
Education	.02*** (.004)	.02*** (.01)	.02* (.01)
Party attachment	.28*** (.03)	.30*** (.03)	.27*** (.05)
Union membership	.12* (.05)	.04 (.06)	.18~ (.1)
Interest in EP elections	.63*** (.03)	.64*** (.04)	.63*** (.06)
National Satisfaction	.18*** (.03)	.04 (.04)	.24*** (.06)
News use	.21*** (.02)	.16*** (.03)	.37*** (.04)
Trust in EP	.07*** (.02)	.09*** (.02)	.06* (.03)
Trust in national parliament	.03* (.01)	.03 (.02)	.04 (.03)
Trust in European Commission	-.01 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.02 (.03)
Trust in national government	.00 (.01)	.01 (.02)	-.02 (.02)
Constant	.55*** (.04)	.82*** (.05)	.11~ (.07)
Nagelkerke R^2	.31	.28	.31
-2 log likelihood	12,096	8323	3584
Model χ^2	3009***	1884***	821***
N (individuals / countries)	12,065 / 21	8884 / 14	3181 / 7

Logistic regression with EP election voting as dependent variable. Entries are log odds with standard errors in parentheses. Analysis does not include data from Sweden, Lithuania, Cyprus and Malta. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Path analysis is then used to examine the predictive and mediational role of EP trust in voting when all variables are entered into a model simultaneously (Table 3-10). Trust in national institutions and the European Commission are excluded from the analysis given that they do not play as big a role as trust in the EP.

The model also tests if the indirect relationship between news use and trust in the EP varies in strength, conditional on the values of the moderator, i.e. member state status,

using the procedure outlined by Preacher, Rucker and Hayes (2007). Values of the indirect relationship when the moderator represents established (coded ‘0’) and post-communist (coded ‘1’) states are produced, and a test of equality between the two indirect paths is performed. A test of the difference between the two indirect paths using a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval from 5000 bootstrapped samples (Table 3-11) ranges from .01 to .02, indicating that the difference between the two indirect paths is unlikely to be zero. This suggests that the greater strength of the relationship between news use and trust among post-communist states holds up against more stringent testing.

Table 3-10. Results for Conditional Indirect Effect of News on Voting at Values of Member State Status

Member State Status	X -> M	M -> Y	X -> Y
	<i>B</i> (s.e.)	<i>B</i> (s.e.)	<i>B</i> (s.e.)
Established	.29 (.02)***	.02 (.00)***	.04 (.00)***
Post-communist	.38 (.03)***	.02 (.00)***	.06 (.01)***

Cells are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parenthesis. CI is bias corrected 95% confidence interval from 5000 bootstrapped samples. Results after accounting for additional predictors of news use, EP trust and voting: age, gender and education on X, M, and Y; financial satisfaction and satisfaction with the EU on M; party attachment, union membership and interest in elections on Y. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

X = News use

M = Trust in the EP

Y = EP election voting

Table 3-11. Test of Equality of Difference in Conditional Indirect Effect Between Established and Post-communist Member States

Mediator	<i>B</i>	Boot s.e.	CI
Trust in the EP	.1	.00	.01 - .02

Cells are unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors. CI is bias corrected 95% confidence interval from 5000 bootstrapped samples. Results after accounting for additional predictors of news use, EP trust and voting: age, gender and education on X, M, and Y; financial satisfaction and satisfaction with the EU on M; party attachment, union membership and interest in elections on Y.

Discussion. The goals of this second study were to replicate the mediation model outlined in the experiment with survey data from a wider range of countries, and to determine if the relationships differ between established and post-communist member states. The study shows that expectations were met.

The mediation process was replicated with survey data from 21 countries. Two analyses were performed, separate models predicting trust and voting, and a path analysis model with all variables entered simultaneously to increase confidence in the causal process outlined. News use is positively related to trust in the EP, which in turn is positively related to voting. The former part of the process was also found to be more relevant in post-communist member states due to the more favorable coverage of EP elections and the EU that is typically found in these countries.

Conclusion

This chapter aims to expand the literature on European integration by moving beyond examining effects of news content on public opinion, to linking content with

voting behavior. It examined how differences in news coverage of European elections across countries impact political trust and ultimately people's likelihood of voting. Combining experimental work with survey data was particularly useful in allowing the proposed causal process to be explicitly tested and also in increasing the generalizability of the results.

Taken together, the two studies suggest that trust in the EP mediates the relationship between news exposure and EP election voting. People become more trusting of the EP as news coverage becomes more favorable. High trust in the EU in post-communist nations might of course also be partially attributed to positive views related to the democratic stability of the EU and the economic superiority of its established members. News coverage though could reinforce or strengthen the trust associated with EU institutions and the results indicate that this may well be the case, as news exposure had stronger relationships with trust among people in post-communist member states.

The chapter also considered how institutional trust impacts voting and re-examined how arguments based on aggregate-level analysis fared when tested at the individual-level. Rose's (2004a) argument, that trust in national institutions accounts for turnout at EP elections, was re-examined with the same national-level data his study used and with additional data at the voter level. Trust in the EP was found to similarly predict voting in both established and post-communist member states, whereas trust in the national parliament only played a role for the latter group of countries. This suggests a complementary explanation to the one Rose (2004) gives, as trust in both national and European parliaments can impact voting for post-communist states.

Moreover, trust in the national government, the second most important reason Rose (2004a) gives for abstention in the 2004 EP elections is found to not be a factor at the individual-level after accounting for alternative explanations. Therefore, by examining each political entity separately, and in accordance with past work (Grönlund & Setälä, 2007), these findings underscore the importance of distinguishing between trust in different political entities when studying effects on political behavior.

The findings from both the experiment and survey data support Norris's belief that unfavorable news coverage does not negatively impact trust in EU institutions. However, the role of the media in fostering or discouraging institutional trust should be further examined as the EU and economic contexts between member states continue to change. Experiments can be used to further examine the specific effects of EP coverage by testing the impact of more themes outlined in content analyses on trust and other attitudinal indicators of support for the EU and its policies.

CHAPTER 4

Reducing Barriers to International Engagement?

Social Networking Sites and Participation in EU Politics

The dissertation thus far has looked at how media use is related to opinionation, trust and voting in EP elections. For the EU to resemble a democratic governmental structure, it requires citizen participation in its affairs. The previous chapter represents a first attempt at studying participation in the context of EP election voting, the most visible and widely studied form of political participation at the EU level.

While opinionation and voting are important, it is through broader participation and action that citizens' voices are heard. The current chapter pursues this by looking at a broad range of participatory behavior valuable for the functioning of the EU. Europeans tend to participate less in EU than domestic affairs, in part because the EU political system is complex and its work is not particularly noticeable in everyday life (Magnette, 2003).

However, the advent of social networking sites (SNS) is significant for such international contexts, as they diminish spatial and temporal constraints for political engagement, providing a means for people to participate regardless of national boundaries. In recent years, SNS have assumed significant political meaning and are used extensively in politics. This development is well suited for participation in EU affairs, as it may have the ability to bring people together and reduce the resources necessary to

participate in this supranational layer of government. This chapter explores the extent to which Europeans use SNS to participate in this international layer of politics and whether SNS can provide a forum through which barriers to participation in international affairs, such as the EU's.

Broader Political Participation

While voting is often touted as a cornerstone of democracy, participating in politics regularly and placing direct pressure on officials through other political processes is also necessary for a democracy to function well. A pluralistic civil society offers citizens numerous venues outside of the electoral arena to participate and express their concerns and views (Barnes & Kaase, 1979, Diamond, 2003). Having discussions, attending rallies, communicating with officials and joining interest groups are just some of the many ways in which citizens can participate in everyday politics.

Participation in political processes is important because it helps keep government responsive (Almond & Verba, 1965; Schmitter & Karl, 1991). An involved citizenry that has opinions, discusses social issues and ultimately participates in politics is key to democratic governance (Habermas, 1962; Barber, 1984; Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1999). Moreover, institutional success tends to be greater in political cultures that are participant and open to the community's ideas, rather than passive and insular (Putnam, Leonardi, Nanetti, & Pavoncello, 1983).

With the recent ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has evolved into an institution with functions increasingly similar to those of national governments. It has increased the relevance of the EP, the only directly elected body of the EU, in decision-

making processes, and created new channels for citizens and interest groups to communicate with EU institutions and officials. These new ways for the EU and citizens to interact bring about more opportunities for participation and influence. If people take advantage of these opportunities and participate, then the EU will further resemble a democratic governmental structure.

Political Participation Through SNS

Research also suggests that SNS are an important means through which people participate in political processes (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009; Vitak et al., 2011). That SNS convey important organizational information is beyond dispute, though how people use this information for political decision-making is still unclear. The potential impact of social media on political participation is explored in the literature in relation to how general SNS use and specific uses of SNS inform both offline and online participation. Scholarship examining how general SNS use is related to political participation presents conflicting evidence though. Some research argues that general Facebook use is not related to offline political participation, such as volunteering for political groups and trying to persuade others in an election (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012). However, a similar study conducted during the month before the 2008 US presidential election found that general Facebook use was negatively related to offline political participation (Vitak et al., 2011).

With regard to online political participation, general Facebook use is found to predict political activity on Facebook, such as posting a status update about the election, discussing politics or sharing Internet links about current affairs (Vitak et al., 2011).

Conversely, general SNS use (Facebook and MySpace), gauged by a single item, was also found to be unrelated to online political participation (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012).

It is apparent that the literature is in disagreement over this question. Differences in how SNS use and participation are measured across studies may potentially contribute to differing results. However, at the same time, a comparison of two similar studies with different results (i.e. Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009; Vitak et al., 2011) reveals that both uses the same ‘intensity’ scale of general Facebook use developed by Ellison and colleagues (2007), somewhat equivalent political participation measures and large samples consisting of college students. The main differences are that the data in the two studies were collected from different geographic areas and a year apart. The latter study found no relationship between general SNS use and participation, whereas the former study reported a negative relationship. Even though not implausible, it is not clear if these factors contributed to the different relationships found.

Turning to how specific uses of SNS are connected to political participation yields more consistent evidence. Participating through SNS, such as being active in Facebook groups (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009), political activity on Facebook (Vitak et al., 2011) and using SNS to get news (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012) predict higher levels of political participation. This echoes similar findings regarding general Internet use, where information exchange online is positively related to political engagement, and more so for online than offline forms of participation (Bakker & de Vreese, 2011).

Convincing evidence of the dynamics between SNS use and political participation

comes from a panel study conducted during the 2010 Swedish election campaign. It indicates that online political participation, in particular following politicians on SNS and contributing to blog discussions about current affairs has considerable effects on offline political participation (Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck & Nord, 2011). Political participation on SNS contributed to increases in offline political participation over the course of the campaign, even after alternative explanations were taken into account. This line of research therefore tends to agree that specific uses of SNS have a positive association with offline political participation.

Moreover, SNS have quickly evolved, both in terms of the actual platforms available and changes in features to individual sites since data we collected for many of these studies. Twitter was not created or not widely used when some of the earlier studies were conducted. Nor did political organizations fully embrace SNS and use them as a way to engage and inform the public when they initially emerged. Furthermore, features and applications used for political purposes were not available until more recently. For instance, the ability to ‘like’ a page on Facebook and the use of hashtags to identify topics on Twitter were both introduced in 2009 and have now become important ways to receive information and discuss politics. A number of the studies reviewed earlier were conducted before 2009. Also, the ability to share links through status updates and advertising on Facebook and Twitter were introduced after many of these studies were carried out and have since become ways with which we can engage with political content. More recent features and design improvements on SNS platforms make it easier to interact with other users. Additionally, such changes make political content easier to encounter and engage with.

How SNS Facilitate Participation in EU Politics

The Internet can act as a means of assisting and enabling contact among individuals, in particular those who otherwise would not have the opportunity to meet face-to-face (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna, 2006). The Internet, and more so SNS, have the ability to diminish spatial and temporal constraints for contact and interaction among users. This is particularly useful for international contexts, as online avenues for engagement may enhance the ability for communication and interaction among members of an international community, such as the EU, who were traditionally limited by their national borders.

European citizens are traditionally less willing to participate in EU than domestic political processes (Magnette, 2003). However, these findings suggest that SNS can play a role in how Europeans may communicate and participate in EU politics. SNS are suited for EU-wide political participation, as they can facilitate connections and interactions among international communities. Studies of diasporic communities online provide insights into how SNS and the Internet can facilitate international interactions. Internet forums of diasporic communities are often used for discussions about community issues that lead to offline civic and political action. Such forums have been found to help cultivate feelings of belongingness among participants, who then use these platforms to shape civil society in the home country by organizing community projects, funding causes and mobilizing publics to influence government (Parham, 2004; Bernal, 2006). It is likely then that feelings of belongingness act as a mediator between SNS use and participation. SNS may allow EU citizens to connect with each other and fosters feelings of belongingness to a common international public.

A second way in which SNS may facilitate EU political participation is by fulfilling relevant informational needs. A study of engagement with international affairs found that paying attention to international news online seems to motivate people to be more willing to participate in international events (Kwak, Poor & Skoric, 2006). Moreover, the results of Chapter Two suggest that information from the news media is important for helping people form opinions about the complex EU environment. SNS can therefore provide additional opportunities for people to express their views, which the opinionated could make use of. This therefore suggests that opinionation may mediate the relationship between consuming news about the EU on SNS and participation.

In summary, the challenges associated with participating in a complex political system such as the EU, which encompasses numerous institutions in various geographic locations, may be reduced by ease of access through SNS. Furthermore, the interactivity of SNS might encourage people to increase their involvement. The following hypotheses are therefore formulated:

H1: Feelings of belonging to an EU public will mediate the relationship between general SNS use and political participation offline and online.

H2: Opinionation on EU politics will mediate the relationship between using SNS for EU news and political participation offline and online.

Method

Data. Data were collected through online surveys conducted during the entire month of

May 2013. Respondents were recruited from an online panel maintained by the survey firm *Qualtrics* and received cash value rewards in return for participating in the study. Surveys were conducted among 1434 respondents in four member states representing different regions of the EU: UK ($n=359$), Germany ($n=358$), Greece ($n=358$) and Poland ($n=359$). The survey was translated professionally using a back-translation method into German and Polish. The author, a native speaker of Greek, translated the material into Greek. The samples are quite representative of each country's demographic characteristics. Table 4-1 presents age, gender, income and education figures for each country's sample and corresponding official national statistics. The main discrepancies between the sample and official national statistics are that income in the Greek sample is about €1000 a month higher than the national average, and that in the Greek and Polish samples about twice as many respondents have a university degree than their respective national averages.

Table 4-1. Country Samples and Corresponding Official National Statistics

	UK		Germany		Greece		Poland	
	Sample statistics (mean)	Official national statistics	Sample statistics (mean)	Official national statistics	Sample statistics (mean)	Official national statistics	Sample statistics (mean)	Official national statistics
Age	48	38	34	45	35	42	31	38
Gender	50	-	47	-	44	-	46	-
Income	2038	2618	2624	2814	2739	1703	2841	3394
Education	37	39	24	28	57	26	46	24

Gender: Percent female; Income: Monthly wage in national currency units; Education: Percent with university degree. Official national statistics from 2011 OECD statistics.

Measures

Offline political participation. Participatory behavior was assessed with questions adapted from the *Index of Civic and Political Engagement* (Andolina, Keeter, Zukin, & Jenkins, 2003). Respondents were asked about the extent to which they participated in several activities related specifically to domestic and then EU politics over the past year. Six activities were measured on an eight-point scale ranging from ‘never’ to ‘daily’. Specifically, how often they worked with political groups, signed petitions, attended public meetings, hearings or talks, attended political rallies, donated money, and discussed politics. These items were summed together to create scales indicating offline participation in domestic ($\alpha=.85$) and EU politics ($\alpha=.91$).

Online political participation. Using the same response scale, six items measured whether SNS are used to participate in politics, again separately for domestic and EU affairs. Three items pertained to Facebook use and three to Twitter use. Specifically, how often respondents used Facebook and Twitter to contact politicians, participate in political discussions, and post articles or videos about political matters. These items were summed to create scales measuring online participation in domestic ($\alpha=.88$) and EU politics ($\alpha=.92$).

General SNS use. Eight-point response scales were used to provide a general idea of relative daily Facebook and Twitter use. Two items asked participants to report how many times they checked Facebook and Twitter the day before (“none”, “once”, “two or three times”, “once an hour”, “once every 30 minutes”, “once every 10 minutes”, “more

than once”, every 10 minutes”). The two items were combined to form a measure of general SNS use.

EU news through SNS. Similarly, two items asked respondents how often they came across news about the EU through Facebook and Twitter in the past month on an eight-point scale (“never”, “about once a month”, “two or three times a month”, “once a week”, “two or three times a week”, “four or five times a week”, “daily”, “more than once a day”). The two items were combined to form a measure of consuming news about the EU through SNS.

EU belongingness. Four items tap feelings of belongingness to the EU community on a seven-point agreement scale (“strongly disagree” – “strongly agree”). The following items were combined to form a single EU belongingness scale ($\alpha=.89$): “I feel connected to people from other EU countries”, “I often feel that I belong to the EU community”, “I feel that people in other EU countries share many of the same values as me”, and “I feel attached to the EU”.

Opinionation. Respondents were asked about their opinions towards four EU issues (European enlargement, the financial crisis, European Constitution, & whether EU matters should be decided by referendum). A dichotomous variable representing whether opinions were given or not, was created for each of the four items. They were then summed together to create a scale indicating how many questions respondents were able to express opinions towards (K-R 20=.69).

Demographic variables. Education was measured on a six-point scale. Along with age and gender, these three variables are used as control variables.

Analysis. The samples from the four countries were pooled together. Two dependent variables represent EU political participation online and offline. The distributions of the participation variables were positively skewed (2.3 & 2.6) and kurtotic (5.3 & 6.6). Log transformations of the two variables created dependent variables with normal distributions. Path analysis models using the *Amos* software allow the mediating relationships between SNS use and political participation to be tested. Both mediating relationships, that is, general SNS use predicting belongingness and EU news use through SNS predicting opinionation are tested simultaneously. Age, gender and education are exogenous to all variables. Models predicting offline and online participation are examined separately.

Table 4-2. Descriptive Statistics

	Total Sample
EU participation offline	2.2 (1.3)
EU participation online	1.7 (1.3)
General SNS use	2.2 (1.2)
EU news through SNS	2.5 (2.0)
EU belongingness	3.2 (1.5)
Opinionation on EU matters	3.0 (1.1)
Gender (% female)	49%
Education	3.1 (1.4)
Gender (% female)	49%
<i>N</i>	1334

Means and standard deviations in parenthesis

Results

Table 4-2 presents descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analyses. Respondents reported participating in EU politics offline more than online. A considerable number of respondents stated that they did not take part in any EU-related political activities during the past year, as 89% of the sample participated in at least one offline activity during the past year and 48% in at least one online activity.

The most common forms of offline political participation were interpersonal discussions³ and signing petitions⁴. A similar pattern was observed for political participation through SNS, where the most common activities were having political discussions⁵ and sharing articles or video clips about politics through Facebook⁶. The least common activities were donating money to organizations or causes⁷ and contacting politicians through SNS⁸. Moreover, while most of the sample regularly uses Facebook (77.3%), considerably fewer respondents use Twitter (25.7%). In fact, 23.7% of respondents use both Facebook and Twitter, and 20.5% use neither.

Tables 4-3 and 4-4 present the results of path analysis models predicting participation in EU politics. The models include exogenous demographic variables of age, gender and education, and are run with and without mediators. To examine how relationships differ based on the inclusion of mediating variables, 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for a mediation test from 1000 bootstrapped samples are used.

The results indicate that general SNS use, without EU belongingness as a mediator

³ 11% discuss EU issues about once a week and 14% several times a week.

⁴ 17% signed a petition about an EU issue in the past year and 10% said several times in the past year.

⁵ 11% discussed EU issues several times in the past year and 4% about once a month.

⁶ 13% said shared material about EU issues several times in the past year and 6% about once a month.

⁷ 20% donated money in the past year to EU causes.

⁸ 20% contacted EU politicians through Facebook and 11% through Twitter;

in the model, strongly predicts political participation (Table 4-3). When EU belongingness is added as a mediator, the direct relationship between general SNS use and political participation becomes weaker. The confidence interval does not include zero, indicating that mediation occurs, thus confirming the first hypothesis. That is, general SNS has a significant relationship to EU belongingness, which in turn predicts political participation, both offline and online.

Similar patterns emerge with regard to using SNS for EU news, which also predicts political participation (Table 4-4). When opinionation towards EU issues is added as a mediator, the direct relationship between SNS or news and political participation becomes weaker. Using SNS use for EU news is related to opinionation, which in turn predicts participation. The second hypothesis is therefore also confirmed.

Turning to comparisons of online and offline forms of participation, the direct relationships between general and specific uses of SNS with political participation are stronger for online participation, both with and without mediators in the model. The mediating variables however, equally predict online and offline political participation.

Both mediating models are subsequently tested simultaneously to examine the predictive power of EU belongingness and opinionation when tested together. The coefficients do not change substantively and both processes remain predictive when modeled simultaneously. Figure 4-1 presents the path model predicting online participation and Figure 4-2 offline participation.

Table 4-3. Path Analysis Model Predicting Participation from General SNS Use

Dependent variable	X -> M	M -> Y	X -> Y1	X -> Y2	CI
Online EU political participation	.27***	.05***	.20**	.23***	.04 - .09
Offline EU political participation	.27***	.06***	.14*	.14***	.05 - .08

Cells are unstandardized coefficients after accounting for exogenous variables of age, gender and education. CI is bias-corrected 95% confidence interval for the indirect relationship between general SNS use and political participation with EU belongingness as mediator in the model.

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

X = General SNS use

M = EU belongingness

Y = Online political participation

Y1 = Direct relationship between general SNS use and online political participation with mediator in the model

Y2 = Direct relationship between general SNS use and online political participation without mediator in the model

Table 4-4. Path Analysis Model Predicting Online Participation from SNS Use for EU News

	X -> M	M -> Y	X -> Y1	X -> Y2	CI
Online EU political participation	.08***	.03**	.12**	.14***	.03 - .09
Offline EU political participation	.08***	.06***	.08**	.10***	.05 - .08

Cells are unstandardized coefficients after accounting for exogenous variables of age, gender and education. CI is bias-corrected 95% confidence interval for the indirect relationship between SNS use for EU news and political participation with EU opinionation as mediator in the model.

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

X = SNS use for EU news

M = EU opinionation

Y = Online political participation

Y1 = Direct relationship between SNS use for EU news and online political participation with mediator in the model

Y2 = Direct relationship between SNS use for EU news and online political participation without mediator in the model

Figure 4-1. Path Analysis Model Predicting Online Political Participation from General SNS Use and SNS Use for EU News

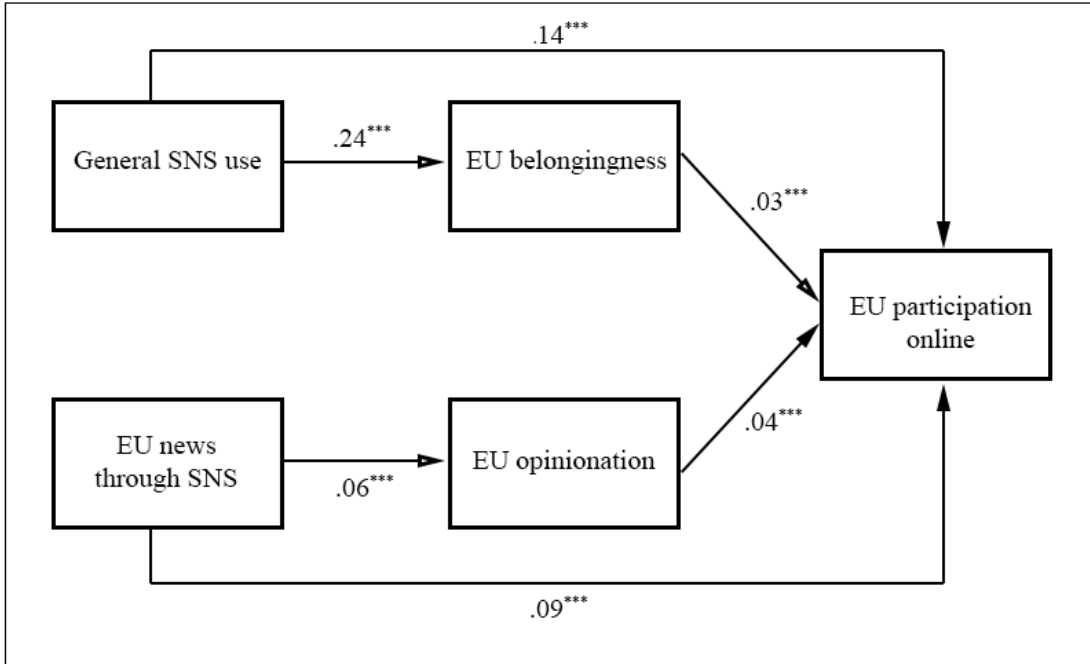
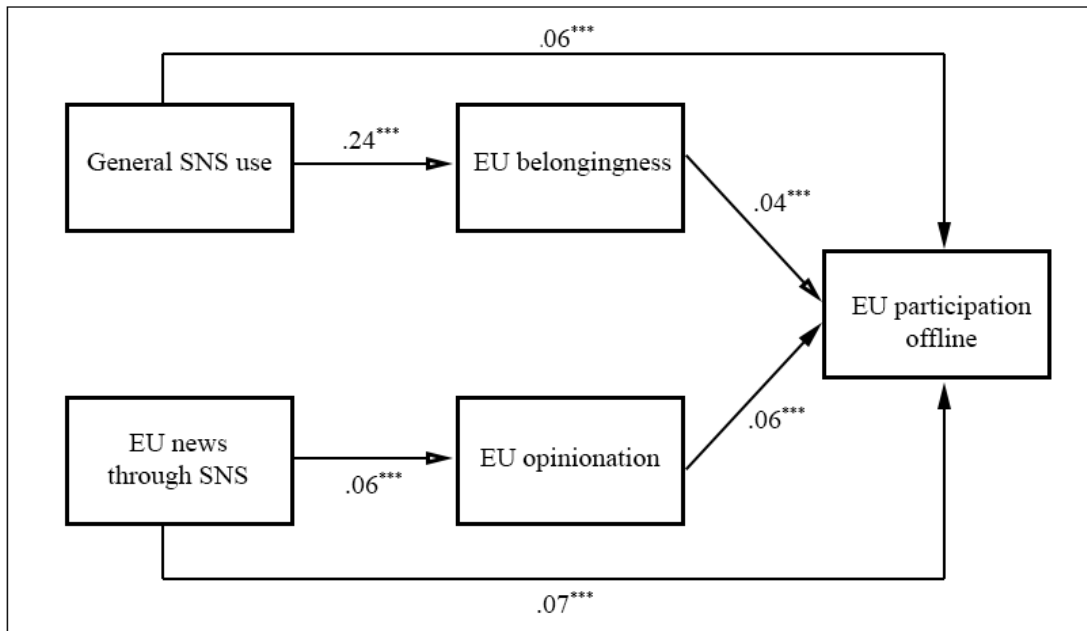


Figure 4-2. Path Analysis Model Predicting Offline Political Participation from General SNS Use and SNS Use for EU News



Discussion

This chapter focuses on whether SNS provide a forum through which barriers to participation in international affairs, such as the EU's, can be lowered. Citizen participation is particularly important because as EU integration continues to progress and its institutions become more powerful, the EU plays a more central role in people's lives. A democratic European Union therefore, requires an involved citizenry that has opinions, discusses social issues and participates in politics (Habermas, 1962; Barber, 1984; Kim, Wyatt & Katz, 1999).

The results underscore the importance of distinguishing between general and specific uses of SNS. The findings suggest that general SNS use is associated with political activity, both offline and online, contradicting some past research claiming that offline political participation is not positively related to general SNS use (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009; Vitak et al., 2011; Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012). This reflects how SNS increasingly offer users more ways to interact with each other and engage with civic life. Measures of general SNS use capture a broader range of uses and experiences today than they did when previous studies were conducted. Moreover, specific uses of SNS allow us to understand how particular behaviors on SNS lead to political activity.

The current chapter examined two processes through which general and specific uses of SNS can lead to political participation. The first postulates that the widespread adoption of SNS and the interactivity they afford have the ability to bring people from across Europe together and allow them to communicate in new and efficient ways. This agrees with theoretical work maintaining that the Internet can act as a means of

facilitating interaction and communication among individuals who typically would not have the opportunity to do so (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Amichai-Hamburger & McKenna, 2006). SNS have the ability to reduce constraints of time and space, and allow users from across Europe who were traditionally limited by their national borders to interact with each other more easily. This in turn fosters feelings of belongingness to an EU public, making citizens more likely to participate in EU politics.

The second process explored how particular uses of SNS, specifically EU news use, lead to political participation. Coming across news about the EU through SNS facilitates the formation of opinions towards EU matters, which makes people more likely to participate. The results suggest that opinionation is an important motivator for EU participation. The EU environment is complex, considerably more than national or local environments, and opinionation is required along with feelings of belongingness for people to feel comfortable participating.

An important next step in this line of research is to explore how offline and online political activities interact in more detail. The current chapter found that general SNS use, is strongly related to offline political participation, suggesting that processes exist through which offline and online behavior interact. Research has begun to examine how online and offline networks interact using cross-sectional data (Subrahmanyam, Reich, Waechter & Espinoza, 2008; Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe, 2011) and more importantly with longitudinal data (Steinfeld, Ellison & Lampe, 2008). Using longitudinal data to further understand how online and offline political environments inform each other would be particularly valuable.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The EU is advancing with its plans for further integration with unwavering willfulness. It is moving ahead on several important matters such as enlargement, finance and common foreign policy. It is also doing so irrespective of the unanticipated financial difficulties the EU has faced, and the inability of some member states to implement reform and develop at the same pace as others.

In fact, the EU often argues that further integration is the solution to its troubles and had it been more integrated, then many of the current difficulties it is experiencing could have been avoided. Chancellor Merkel publically stated that the solution to the financial crisis should be in the form of “more Europe”, saying that, “we don’t only need monetary union, we also need a so-called fiscal union. And most of all we need a political union - which means we need to gradually cede powers to Europe and give Europe control” (Wiesmann, 2012). This position was strongly reiterated by President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, during his 2013 State of the Union address, where he described the need to move towards a federation of nation states (Barroso, 2013).

Despite the financial crisis that has gripped Europe, countries continue to join the Eurozone, the economic and monetary union of EU member states that choose to adopt the Euro as their common currency. Estonia joined the Eurozone in 2011 and Latvia in 2014, bringing the GDP of the Eurozone area to €9 trillion (“An international currency”,

2013).

Enlargement also continued during this period, as Croatia became the latest EU member on July 1st, 2013. The EU almost doubled in membership between 2004 and 2013, growing from fifteen to twenty-eight member states, and adding 150 million citizens to reach a population of over 500 million. Future enlargement is still being discussed, with five candidate countries hoping for accession. The most significant change that could be brought about concerns the EU's eastward expansion to Turkey. While Turkey's accession negotiations have stalled considerably over the past decade, it is nonetheless still a candidate for entry into the bloc. Turkey's accession would stretch Europe's borders to the Middle East and the EU's eastern frontier would neighbor Iran and Iraq. Even though integration is promptly moving ahead, opposition to it from within the EU does exist. It is opposed primarily by the British government of David Cameron, which pending successful re-election, has promised to stage a referendum in 2017 asking citizens to decide if the UK should remain in the EU. If the UK does exit the EU system completely, this would be the first time an EU member state has chosen to do so.

Furthermore, elections to the European Parliament will be held in May 2014. They will be the eighth Europe-wide elections to the European Parliament since the first direct elections in 1979. Due to the continually declining turnout, the EU has sought to increase awareness and media coverage of these elections with the hopes of halting this trend. In light of the upcoming 2014 EP elections, the European Commission has made recommendations that aim to raise awareness by better informing citizens about the elections and the issues surrounding them, and by trying to encourage relevant discussions throughout the EU ("Commission recommendations", 2013). EU officials

hope that these elections will see higher turnout than the previous elections of 2009 and that citizen engagement in European integration will increase. José Manuel Barroso echoed this sentiment during his 2013 State of the Union address, where he made a spirited call to “all those that care about Europe, whatever their political or ideological position, wherever they come from, to speak up for Europe” (Barroso, 2013).

In summary, the EU has a lot at stake over the next few years. Citizen participation becomes even more crucial under such conditions. The dissertation examined engagement in EU politics and the conditions under which the media can encourage engagement. Three indicators of political engagement were studied: opinionation, voting and non-electoral participation. Emphasis was also placed on the eastward enlargement of the EU and the integration of post-communist countries into the EU. The 2004 and 2007 expansion of the EU brought Western and post-communist Europeans together under a common institutional framework. Moreover, research has not fully determined the impact of post-communist legacy on political behavior and thus the dissertation studied how engagement may vary between citizens of established and post-communist member states.

The media are important for democracy and particularly for the governmental structure of the EU, which brings together people of different nationalities. EU officials often maintain that Europeans have more similarities than differences and are bound together by shared values, culture and history. The media could be used to uphold this sense of community or Europeaness among people, which in turn is necessary to preserve a cohesive political entity. After all, the EU’s motto is “United in diversity”, and the success of the project hinges on public acceptance of this narrative.

To investigate engagement in EU politics, this research utilized multiple data sources and methods. It combined secondary data analysis of European-wide data with original survey and experimental data from a subset of EU member states. This allowed the role of the media in fostering engagement in EU politics to be examined. Based on the findings, it is concluded that traditional media are able to engage people in EU politics under certain circumstances. However, while SNS could lower barriers for engagement in EU politics by bringing citizens from different countries together, it appears that this potential is not being taken advantage of fully. In this concluding chapter, the dissertation reviews the main findings from the previous chapters, and discusses their theoretical and practical implications. Finally, limitations of the research are addressed and suggestions for future studies are put forth.

News and Opinionation Towards EU Politics

Engagement is first studied by looking at the extent to which Europeans have opinions on EU politics. Opinionation is a simple yet useful way of examining the extent to which people think about EU issues. The ability to express an opinion towards an issue represents a relatively effortless way of engaging with politics and social life.

Chapter Two explores the relationships between news exposure and opinionation towards the past decade's two most important issues of European integration, Enlargement and the Treaty of Lisbon. Previous research finds that political knowledge and political efficacy are the most important psychological predictors of opinionation (Krosnick & Milburn, 1990). This chapter examined how opinions towards European integration are developed and the conditions under which news use predicts opinionation

towards EU matters. It tested if the relationships between the psychological determinants of opinionation and opinionation towards European integration are moderated by news exposure. The results suggest that, in general, news use can help citizens with low EU knowledge, internal efficacy and external efficacy, to form opinions on EU matters.

The chapter tried to increase its generalizability and confidence in the findings by replicating these relationships across two time periods and for opinionation towards two separate issues. Even though European enlargement and the effects of the Treaty of Lisbon are part of the natural progression of the EU and its institutions, other important matters have since surfaced and more will certainly transpire in the future. Some of these more recent matters have been planned, such as the emergence of a common foreign policy and a President of the EU, and some have been unexpected, most notably the financial crisis, which has consumed a lot of time and resources. The relationships between psychological predictors, news use, and opinionation are likely to be relevant for other EU issues and not just the two studied in this chapter.

News, Trust and Voting

Chapter Three investigated a causal process linking news exposure to affective and behavioral engagement. Specifically, it tested a moderated mediation model positing that trust in the EP mediates the relationship between news exposure and voting in EP elections, and that the relationship between news exposure and trust is stronger among post-communist states. News exposure is a stronger predictor of trust in post-communist states because news coverage contains more coverage of the EU and EP elections in post-communist member states, and tends to also be more favorable than in established

member states (de Vreese, et al., 2006; Schuck et al., 2011). Using existing survey data and original experimental data, the study finds support for the hypothesis that the difference in news coverage explains higher trust in the EP among citizens of post-communist member states.

Turnout at EP elections are perhaps the most visible indicator of engagement with EU politics. One of the reasons direct elections were implemented was to increase citizens' engagement with the European project and to provide a means through which they could influence its actions. However, overall turnout has declined consistently since the first elections of 1979. Even so, this has occurred primarily for established member states. In the two elections that the ten post-communist countries have participated in, five countries have actually seen an increase in turnout, while two have remained stable. Only three have experienced a decline in turnout ("European Elections 1979-2009", 2009). The difference in news coverage may have played a role, as the results of Chapter Three suggest that more favorable coverage instills greater confidence in the institutions of the EU. In fact, the results also indicate that post-communist countries tend to trust EU institutions more than their domestic institutions and so this may encourage them to participate in EU political processes.

The positive coverage among post-communist states was quite consistent between the 2004 and 2009 EP election campaigns. Content analyses carried out by the *European Election Studies* program are planned for the upcoming 2014 EP election, and will allow us to see if trends in news coverage will again differ between established and post-communist countries. Time series data of news coverage will consist of three time periods after the 2014 election and will allow the study of how trends in news coverage

coincide with trends in EP election turnout to continue. Furthermore, it might also present an opportunity to replicate the moderated mediation model proposed in this chapter and instill greater confidence in its applicability.

SNS and Participation in EU Politics

While direct elections to the EP are an important means through which citizens can be represented at the EU level, elections nonetheless occur periodically. Effective pressure on government to work in the best interests of its citizens can be applied through frequent non-electoral political participation (Almond & Verba, 1965; Schmitter & Karl, 1991). Chapter Four therefore turned to non-electoral participation in EU politics as an indicator of engagement with the EU.

It focused on the role of social networking sites as a means of participating in EU politics. The advent of SNS is significant for international contexts such as the EU, as they have the ability to bring people together from different EU countries by reducing spatial and temporal barriers for political participation. This development is well suited for participation in EU affairs, as it may reduce the resources necessary to participate in this supranational layer of government. The extent to which Europeans use SNS to participate in this supranational layer of politics is explored and compared to traditional forms of participation, as international participation may be less demanding online than offline.

The results indicate that two processes through which SNS can encourage participation in EU politics are at play. First, the widespread adoption of SNS and the interactivity they afford have the ability to bring people from across Europe together and

allow them to communicate in new and efficient ways. This in turn fosters feelings of belongingness to an EU public, making citizens more likely to participate in EU politics. Second, coming across news about the EU through SNS facilitates the formation of opinions towards EU matters, which makes people more likely to participate.

The chapter suggests that the benefits that online forms of participation create are not taken advantage of fully, as the vast majority of survey respondents claimed that they did not participate in any activities related to EU politics over the past year. SNS are ideal ways through which people can participate and contribute to international political entities such as the EU, and while citizens themselves often taken initiative to participate by forming groups and initiating action, the cultivation of an environment of involvement is also the responsibility of political institutions and actors. It seems that EU institutions have not fully embraced SNS and their potential for engagement. The official Twitter and Facebook pages of EU institutions and politicians tend to have significantly fewer followers than their US counterparts, even though the population of the EU is significantly greater than the US. For example, President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, arguably the most high profile EU politician, has about 72,000 followers on Twitter and does not have a Facebook page. The European Commission has around 180,000 followers on Twitter and 236,000 ‘likes’ on Facebook. By contrast, the White House has about 4.5 million Twitter followers and 1.9 million Facebook ‘likes’, and President Obama has around 40 million followers on both SNS.

The EU also seems to post less regularly and less engaging content on SNS. Social media sites are used more to broadcast information, that is, they are used as venues for press releases and conveying politicians’ schedules, as opposed to posting content

aimed at engaging and interacting with people. EU institutions and politicians have not fully embraced the potential benefits that SNS afford. The EU is deeply concerned about apathetic publics, and so by being more active and creative through SNS they could assume more responsibilities in engaging people.

The need for citizen participation is likely to intensify over the next few years as the EU and its institutions evolve. As European integration progresses and the provisions outlined in the Treaty of Lisbon are adopted, the EU assumes more responsibilities, institutions increase in size and supranational bureaucracies become more complex. Legal frameworks continue to be adapted in order to accommodate and facilitate these changes. This creates a more intricate political and social environment, and relationships between member states become significantly more multifaceted. If integration moves forward at a rate faster than that which citizens can keep up with, which appears to be the case, then cognitive resources will probably continue to be a barrier to citizen participation in the long run. Moreover, the EU's actions and policies are increasingly impacting domestic laws and politics, and as a result, Europeans' lives.

The Role of News Content

The research in Chapters Two and Three underscore the importance of news content. Chapter Two, which focused on the relationship between news exposure and opinionation, found that newspaper use was a stronger predictor of opinionation than television use and was also more helpful in helping those with low EU knowledge and efficacy to form opinions. In general, newspapers tend to have more space to devote to political news and in-depth coverage, (Robinson & Davis, 1990; Neuman, Just & Crigler,

1992; Bennett, 2011). Likewise, content analyses of news coverage about the EU reveal that newspapers cover EU news more consistently, whereas television news about the EU tends to fluctuate considerably, peaking during key conventions and EP elections (Norris, 2000; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Furthermore, while newspaper readership in general has declined, its importance cannot be discounted in international contexts, where readership is not as low as in the US (Santhanam & Rosenstiel, 2012).

Similarly, by combining news exposure measures and research from previous content analyses of EP election coverage showing that content tends to differ across countries, Chapter Three showed how news exposure can influence orientations towards EU institutions. This was corroborated with an experiment conducted in four EU countries, and although it increased confidence in the Chapter's findings, it again highlights the importance of content. This is evident given that the experimental conditions with positive news coverage did not have the same effect on institutional trust. When news coverage presented the EP as facilitating the functioning of the EU, a strong positive relationship with trust was found, whereas when it was shown as being responsive to the needs of the European citizens, no relationship was found. This implies that a cohesive and efficient EU system is more important to Europeans and can ultimately increase their trust in the EU, as opposed to individualistic considerations of how the EP will affect them personally.

Post-Communist Legacy

The processes through which engagement develops have become more similar among citizens of established and post-communist states. Prior studies found that

established and post-communist states differ in some respects but are similar in others. Citizens of post-communist nations tend to feel a lesser sense of European identity (Scheuer & Schmitt, 2009) and are more distrustful of national institutions such as government and political parties than citizens of established EU states (Rose, 1995; Rose, 2004a). However, concerning determinants of attitudes on the EU, some differ between citizens of post-communist and established member states, while others do not. Prior research suggests that economic evaluations are a stronger determinant of support for European integration among post-communist citizens, whereas there are no discernible differences in comparisons of EU democracy relative to national democracy as predictors of support for EU integration (Gary & Tilley, 2009).

The research in this dissertation found that differences between the two groups of countries are dissipating. While opinionation was lower among post-communist states, the relationships between news exposure and opinionation did not differ between the two groups of countries. Even though differences between established and post-communist states were observed in Chapter Three, nonetheless, the experiment indicated that the process through which news exposure impacts trust and voting was the same among participants in the four nations studied. Analyses of secondary EU-wide data suggested that news had a stronger relationship with trust in post-communist countries due to their news coverage containing more coverage about the EU and being more favorable towards the EU.

More than two decades have passed since communist states transitioned to democracy and a free market economy. A decade has also passed since they joined the EU and began harmonization processes to align their political and legal systems with

criteria set by the EU. The gap between established and post-communist countries is clearly getting narrower.

Limitations and Future Research

The dissertation has three main limitations. First, the conclusions drawn from this research are perhaps best evaluated within recent environments. The EU is constantly evolving and the changes brought about by the 2009 ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon have yet to be fully implemented and their effects not fully experienced. Moreover, unexpected shocks to the system such as the financial crisis mean that the EU is not progressing as intended. Similarly, SNS and the features they offer change rather quickly. Political organizations will likely continue to embrace SNS and use them in different ways to engage and inform the public. Therefore, psychological processes that are relevant today may not be relevant in the future as contexts change.

Second, the dissertation focused primarily on opinionation and political trust but a wider range of attitudes can be studied to get a clearer picture of how they relate to engagement. Future work can also examine affect in more depth by considering the emotions Europeans feel towards the EU. Situations that cause these emotions and how they in turn impact political behavior have not been widely studied in EU contexts (for an exception, see Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas & de Vreese, 2011).

Lastly, comparisons between domestic and EU contexts are necessary to better understand political behavior at the EU level. Chapter Four attempted to do this by considering participation in both domestic and EU politics. However, the results of Chapter Two could be compared to opinionation towards domestic issues and the

processes outlined in Chapter Three could be compared to voting in national elections. Comparisons between domestic and EU contexts are quite challenging though, because the required data are not always available and can also be demanding given the amount of countries that belong to the EU. For example, domestic elections are held at different times, countries do not have the same electoral systems, and data on national elections are often not easily accessible or available. Nonetheless, when possible, comparisons of political behavior in domestic and EU contexts are particularly informative.

APPENDIX

Stimulus Material

Conditions 1 & 2: How the EP facilitates the functioning of the EU

News article in alternate forms (negative and positive [in parentheses] conditions)

European Parliament Delays European Union Action on Future of Agreement on Free Movement of Persons

(European Parliament Facilitates European Union Action on Future of Agreement on Free Movement of Persons)

13/03/2013 12:54 CET

European Union institutions have begun debating proposed amendments to the agreement on the free movement of persons, which outlines how Europe's borders function. The European Parliament has held up (moved) the process (forward) and as a result, the outcome is still uncertain (all but certain). The European Parliament is the institution often held responsible for instances when the European Union demonstrates inaction (effective action) or responds slowly (promptly) to an emergent issue.

The European Union represents a territory where the free movement of persons is guaranteed and member States have abolished all internal borders in lieu of a single external border. Sweden has backed France's bid for member states to overrule this agreement in special circumstances. France has called for changes to allow countries to reinstate temporary border controls when their frontiers come under external pressure, such as an influx of people seeking refuge due to natural disasters or fleeing war zones.

The European Parliament is also debating the proposal, as any decision made by European leaders must be ratified by the European Parliament to take effect. Even though the European Commission and member states are in full agreement regarding the proposed changes, (and) the process has been delayed (advanced) due to the European Parliament's inefficient (efficient) deliberative processes. The European Parliament often slows down (speeds up) EU decision-making due to its legislative procedures.

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, yesterday urged (thanked) the European Parliament to (for) not delay (delaying) the process further and vote (for agreeing to vote) on the proposed amendments before the legislature goes into recess at the end of this week. He accused (congratulated) the European Parliament of not heeding (for heeding) to calls by member states and the Commission to quickly resolve the issue.

The European Parliament has called for a fourth (final) special meeting to be held later this week and more (no more) talks are expected in the future.

Conditions 3 & 4: Responsiveness of the EP towards its citizens

News article in alternate forms (negative and positive [in parentheses] conditions)

European Parliament Delay on Future of Agreement on Free Movement of Persons to Inconvenience European Travelers

(European Parliament Action on Future of Agreement on Free Movement of Persons to Benefit European Travelers)

13/03/2013 12:54 CET

European Union institutions have begun debating proposed amendments to the agreement on the free movement of persons, which outlines how Europe's borders function. The European Parliament has held up (moved) the process (forward) and as a result, the outcome is still uncertain (all but certain). This will likely mean that Europeans may (will) (not) face some (any) inconveniences when traveling around Europe in the near future.

The European Union represents a territory where the free movement of persons is guaranteed and member States have abolished all internal borders in lieu of a single external border. Sweden has backed France's bid for member states to overrule this agreement in special circumstances. France has called for changes to allow countries to reinstate temporary border controls when their frontiers come under external pressure, such as an influx of people seeking refuge due to natural disasters or fleeing war zones.

A recent Eurobarometer survey also indicates that most European citizens support the idea as well.

The European Parliament is also debating the proposal, as any decision made by European leaders must be ratified by the European Parliament to take effect. Even though many European citizens are supportive of these proposed changes, and the European Commission and member states are in full agreement, (and) the process has been delayed (advanced) due to a particularly slow (fast)-moving European Parliament.

The inaction (effectiveness) on the part of the European Parliament might translate into an inconvenient (a convenient) development for Europeans citizens. Travelers wanting to move through Europe during periods of such external pressure could face longer (shorter) waiting times at ports of entry. Due to the European Parliament's legislative stalemate (progress), some countries have stated that they intend (backed down from earlier calls) to take unilateral action and enforce stricter border controls until the matter is resolved. As a result, European Union citizens might (will not) temporarily lose the privilege of being able to travel throughout Europe without their passport.

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, yesterday urged (thanked) the European Parliament to (for) not delay (delaying) the process further and to vote (for agreeing to vote) on the proposed amendments before the legislature goes into recess at the end of this week. He accused (congratulated) the European Parliament of not (for) tending to European citizens' best interests.

Example of News Article Shown to Respondents



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European Parliament Delays European Union Action on Future of Agreement on Free Movement of Persons

13/03/2013 12:54 CET



European Union institutions have begun debating proposed amendments to the agreement on the free movement of persons, which outlines how Europe's borders function. The European Parliament has held up the process and as a result the outcome is still uncertain. The European Parliament is often responsible for instances when the European Union demonstrates inaction or responds slowly to an emerging issue.

The European Union represents a territory where the free movement of persons is guaranteed and member states have abolished all internal borders in lieu of a single external border. Sweden has backed France's bid for member states to overrule this agreement in special circumstances. France has called for changes to allow countries to reinstate temporary border controls when their borders come under external pressure, such as an influx of people seeking refuge due to natural disasters or fleeing war zones.

The European Parliament is also debating the proposal, as any decision made by European leaders must be ratified by the European Parliament to take effect. However, a particularly slow-moving European Parliament has delayed the process, even though the European Commission and member states are in full agreement over the proposed changes. The European Parliament often slows down EU decision-making due to its inefficient legislative procedures.

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, yesterday urged the European Parliament to not delay the process further and to vote on the proposed amendments before the legislature goes into recess at the end of this week. He accused the European Parliament of not heeding to calls by member states and the Commission to quickly resolve the issue.

The European Parliament has called for a fourth special meeting to be held later this week and more talks are expected in the future.

More about [European Parliament](#), [European Union](#)

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