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## What underlies public attitudes towards the constitutionalization of the EU? Evidence from Britain

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## Abstract

This article analyses the factors underlying public attitudes in Britain towards recent attempts to provide the EU with a constitution. In the context of the incremental constitutionalization of the EU, this article represents a detailed assessment of attitudes in a traditionally Eurosceptic country. It builds upon insights from existing strands of work analysing public opinion on EU-related issues. The impact of economic interests, national identity, party cues and political sophistication are assessed using data from a single-country and a cross-national survey. The data are analysed using binary logistic regression estimation. The main findings are that both party 'cues' and national identity play an important role in underpinning public opinion. These findings hold up when general support for the EU is accounted for. There are mixed findings in relation to the socio-demographic factors. The findings provide important clues as to what structures public opposition towards further political integration.

## Keywords

Integration process; constitutionalization; public opinion; Britain; identity

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## INTRODUCTION

The recently-ratified Lisbon Treaty represents the latest stage in the constitutionalization of the European Union (EU), building upon previous treaties such as the Single European Act, Treaty of European Union, Nice and Amsterdam. This process has proceeded by way of "informal incrementalism and semi-permanent reform, rather than explicit public endorsement and a 'constitutional moment'" (Christiansen and Reh 2009: 2). After the popular rejection of the original Constitutional Treaty in two referendums in 2005 and its subsequent discarding by the EU, a revised treaty was finally agreed by the heads of government and state at Lisbon in October 2007 and the ratification process by each member state started afresh. Irrespective of referendums held in individual member states, the issue of the constitutionalization of the EU goes well beyond the document that is the Lisbon Treaty or its ill-fated predecessor, the Constitutional Treaty. It is an on-going and, therefore, a *dynamic* process that "is legal as well as political" (Shu 2008: 428). However, while it has been argued that "a European constitutional order exists at least in the legal sense", it is also "safe to claim a political constitutional vacuum" (Shu 2008: 443). Indeed, this process has suffered major setbacks in recent years, including the negative verdicts delivered via referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005, and earlier defeats visited on the Maastricht and Nice treaties in Denmark and Ireland, respectively.

Such negative verdicts delivered in this fashion are among the most prominent features of the current era of "constraining dissensus" which characterises citizens' attitudes towards the integration process, representing a clear shift from the preceding era of "permissive consensus" (Hooghe and Marks 2009: 5). While there are still variations in the nature and extent of party-based and popular Euroscepticism across member states, in this era of "constraining dissensus" citizens' opinions have arguably become more important as they play a significant part in legitimising major steps in the integration process (Shu 2008: 432). As Hooghe and Marks observe: "Elites, that is, party leaders in positions of authority, must look over their shoulders when negotiating European issues" (2009: 5). While the factors underlying popular verdicts on the constitutionalization process in countries that have held referendums on the Constitutional Treaty or Lisbon Treaty have been analysed in depth (Hainsworth 2006; Ivaldi 2006; Quinlan 2009;

O'Brennan 2009), there has been less focus on countries where no referendum was held even when there was strong evidence of public opposition.

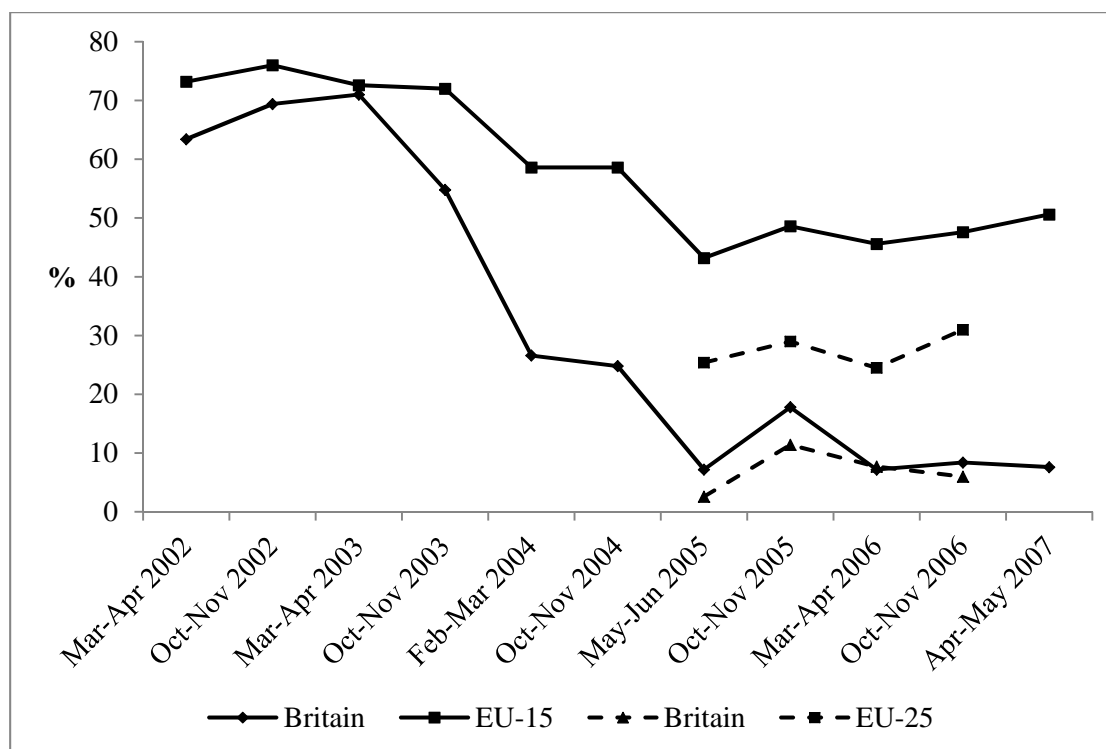
Britain was one such member state where there was no explicit public endorsement either of an EU constitution or the Lisbon Treaty. We therefore analyse, using survey data, public opinion towards the latest stage in this constitutionalization process in a Eurosceptic country traditionally wary of moves aimed at further political integration. Using multivariate analysis, the article assesses the relative impact of economic interests, group identities and political 'cues'. It uses data from two cross-sectional surveys. The article proceeds as follows. First, the domestic political context is reviewed and trends in public opinion discussed. Second, the relevance to this analysis of existing theoretical approaches and empirical insights is discussed and a series of hypotheses specified. Third, the data sources used - British Social Attitudes and Eurobarometer surveys - and measurement of variables are discussed. Fourthly, the results from the multivariate analysis are presented and discussed. Finally, conclusions are drawn and the advantages and limitations of the research acknowledged.

## PARTY POSITIONS AND PUBLIC OPINION IN BRITAIN

In Britain, traditionally one of the most Eurosceptic states, there has been stronger opposition to efforts at political integration - 'deepening' as opposed to 'widening' - compared to that found in other member states, with developments at the EU level having major ramifications for domestic politics (Forster 2002; Spiering 2004; Baker *et al.* 2008). However, opposition towards political integration is not just a feature of attitudes within the British electorate: mainstream political elites have taken up opposing positions on this question, which is not always a common occurrence in other member states. Similarly, the major parties have been divided over the merits of the EU having some form of constitutional document, with the Conservatives strongly opposed and Labour and the Liberal Democrats more in favour. To some extent, the issue of constitutionalizing the EU has also engendered disagreement within the major parties, a recurrent feature of the European issue in British politics before and since membership in 1973.

Opinion polls conducted up to 2006, which asked about the desirability of an EU constitution and then a Constitutional Treaty, tended to show "that a majority of British people intended to vote 'no' rather than 'yes'" in a future referendum on this question (Baines and Gill 2006: 463). While polling data shows that public opinion has on balance been opposed to voting 'yes' in a referendum, how does this compare with cross-national opinion towards an EU constitution? Aggregate-level data on public attitudes is available from the Eurobarometer surveys. Figure 1 provides a comparison of 'net' support (the percentage supporting an EU constitution *minus* the percentage opposing it; a positive 'net' score indicates that more people were in favour than were against) for an EU constitution. First, we provide an average for the EU-15 members prior to the 2004 enlargement. Second, we give the average for the post-enlargement EU-25 countries. The first question was asked between 2002 and 2007 (represented by the *continuous* black lines), while the second question was asked between 2005 and 2006 (represented by the *dashed* black lines).

Figure 1: Public opinion towards an EU Constitution, 2002-2007



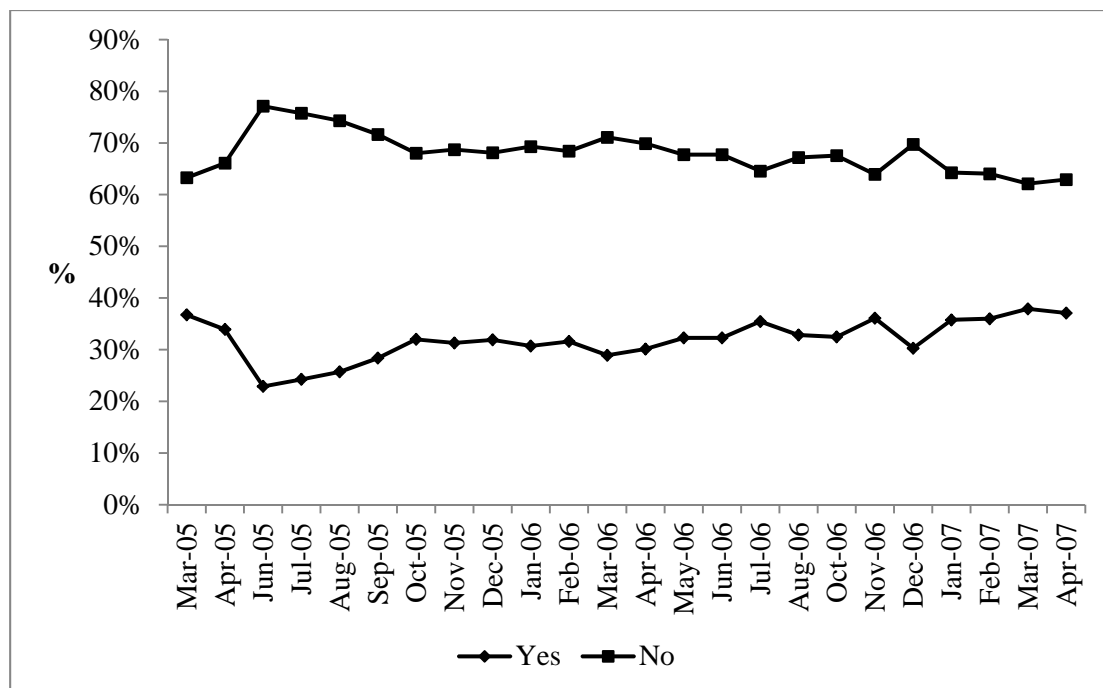
Source: Eurobarometer surveys. 'Don't know' responses excluded. Weighted data.

After initially high levels of support during 2002, from late 2003 onwards Figure 1 shows a steep decline in the proportion favouring an EU Constitution, which occurred both in Britain and across the EU-15 countries, although the drop in support was more precipitous in Britain. Moreover, from spring 2004 the difference in levels of support between the two time series widened and persisted for the remainder of the period. Similarly, there is a clear differential in net support between Britain and the EU-25 countries for the second question, though the gap is narrower than before. More specifically, during 2002 and in spring 2003 there was overwhelming net support for an EU constitution in Britain and across the EU, with net scores of around 65-75 per cent in both cases. In Britain, net support dropped sharply to around 55 per cent in autumn 2003 and then to around 30 per cent in spring 2004; subsequently, it fell further to net scores of 20 per cent and under. This considerable decline in support for a European constitution clearly reflected the growing politicisation of the 'Constitutional Treaty' issue in domestic politics, particularly in 2004, the year of European Parliament elections, as Eurosceptic MPs and sections of the popular press became increasingly strident in their demands for a referendum (Baker and Sherrington 2005). Across the EU-15 countries, net scores fell but not as sharply as with British public opinion; net support never fell below the 40 per cent mark and even recovered slightly in 2006 and 2007.

As well as the evidence from Eurobarometer surveys, Figures 2 and 3 chart over-time data for a question on an EU constitution referendum asked in the British Election Study's (BES) Continuous Monitoring Surveys (CMS). The CMS collected attitudinal data from monthly cross-sections of samples of the British electorate from April 2004 onwards through internet polling. Data relating to a question on a treaty establishing a constitution for the EU is available from early 2005 through to early 2007. First, the data in Figure 2 chart the overall proportions who would respond 'yes' or 'no' in a referendum on a treaty establishing a constitution for the EU (excluding those who were unsure or said they would not vote in a referendum). Second, taking into account the party political divisions noted already, Figure 3 charts the proportions responding 'yes' for

supporters of each of the three main parties. Figure 2 shows that, across the surveys from 2005 to 2007, a majority of public opinion would have voted 'no' in a referendum held on an EU constitution. There is some minor fluctuation in scores, particularly during 2005. The average scores across the CMS surveys are as follows: 'yes' – 31.9 per cent; 'no' – 68.1 per cent.

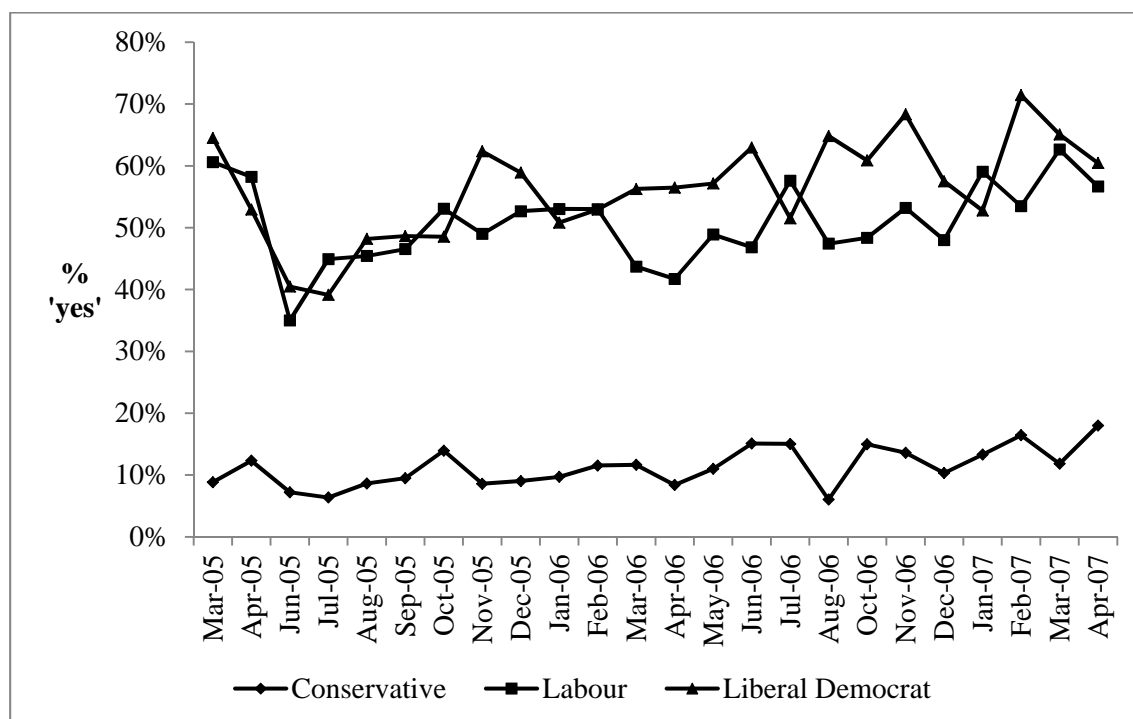
Figure 2: Public opinion towards a referendum on a constitution for the EU, 2005-2007



Source: BES Continuous Monitoring Survey. Excluding those who responded 'undecided' or 'will not vote'. Weighted data. Question: "When a referendum is held, will you vote 'Yes' or 'No' on the question 'Should the UK approve the treaty establishing a constitution for the European Union?'"

In Figure 3, there is a stark difference in levels of support between, on the one hand, supporters of the Conservative Party and, on the other, supporters of Labour and the Liberal Democrats. While support amongst Conservative Party supporters stays in the 10-20 per cent range, much higher proportions say 'yes' amongst Labour and Liberal Democrat supporters (consistently in the 40-60 per cent range). Averaged across the CMS surveys, the average proportions responding 'yes' are as follows: Conservative supporters: 11.3 per cent; Labour supporters: 50.8 per cent; Liberal Democrat supporters: 56.4 per cent. Clearly, the divisions between the major parties on this question were replicated amongst their supporters within the wider public.

Figure 3: Public opinion towards a referendum on a constitution for the EU by political party supported, 2005-2007



Source: BES Continuous Monitoring Survey. Weighted data. Question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat or what?"

## EXISTING STUDIES OF PUBLIC OPINION AND THE EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS

Existing studies examining public opinion towards these different aspects of the integration process have demonstrated the influence of three groups of explanatory factors - economic interests, group identities and political 'cues' (MacLaren 2006; Hooghe and Marks 2005, 2004; Carey 2002; Gabel 1998; Anderson 1998). In this section we discuss: first, findings from existing studies examining which factors influence public attitudes on the specific issue of the constitutionalization of the EU in other member states; and, secondly, insights from analyses of public opinion in Britain concerning membership or specific EU-related questions. We use these findings to specify a set of hypotheses. Some hypotheses can be tested using both surveys while some are only testable using one or other of the surveys (shown in parentheses).

### Economic interests

One of the earliest areas of attention for studies investigating the sources of public opinion towards the EU was the material interests and economic wellbeing of its citizens. Those studies examining the impact of economic interests often used aggregate-level analysis to assess the relationship between fluctuations in national economic performance and support for the EU. Better national economic performance corresponds to higher levels of support for the integration process (Ciftci 2005; Eichenberg and Dalton 1993; Dalton and Duval 1986). More recently, studies have investigated the determinants of opinions towards the EU using individual-level factors relating to citizens' relative position in the labour market, such as their educational attainment and occupational status. It is believed that the integration process creates valuable

opportunities for those citizens with higher levels of human capital. Consequently, those who could materially benefit from the integration project would be supportive of the EU, while those who perceive that their economic security could be adversely affected would be opposed (Gabel 1998; Anderson and Kaltenthaler 1996).

Evidence from studies of voters' choices at recent referendums on the Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands and on the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland shows the role played by economic factors. Key factors affecting voter choice in the Irish referendum in June 2008 included social class and level of education (Sinnott 2008). Specifically, those with lower socio-economic status tended to be less favourable in their attitudes. In an analysis of voting patterns in the French referendum of May 2005, Hainsworth observed that education "proved to be a dividing line with those voters having the lowest educational qualifications opting strongly ... for a No vote and vice versa" (2006: 108). Furthermore, wider socio-economic fault-lines, based upon occupational classification and level of income, also underpinned voting behaviour (Hainsworth 2006: 108). As Schmidt observed in relation to France, the referendum on the Constitutional Treaty "became the opportunity to question the free market basis of the EU ... in which the EU was portrayed as the Trojan Horse bringing in the forces of globalisation, destroying French *services publics*, and undermining the welfare state" (emphasis in original) (2006: 187). Conversely, in Britain the thrust of the opposing arguments regarding the economic impact of the Constitutional Treaty was that its ratification would bring about greater social protectionism and further outside interference, in the form of regulations emanating from Brussels, in Britain's economic affairs (Schmidt 2006: 199). This implies that the issue of the constitutionalization of the EU is closely related to both concerns about the content of existing legislation and those regarding "the future of the integration process and its impact on individuals' lives" (Shu 2008: 434).

However, analyses of public opinion in Britain concerning the impact of economic considerations on attitudes towards membership or other EU-related questions has provided mixed evidence. Existing research into attitudes towards the single currency in Britain has shown that "economic calculations are not important factors in shaping support for a single currency" except when socio-economic status is measured by level of qualification attained (Gabel and Hix 2005: 74). In contrast, Scheve (1999) showed that both income and educational attainment are associated with support for the single currency in Britain. Moreover, in relation to membership of the EU, Clements (2009) showed that level of education has a powerful impact on support for British membership over time and Evans (1995) found that those of a lower socio-economic status were less favourable towards the integration process in Britain.

Based on the weight of evidence from existing findings in relation to economic interests we specify two hypotheses. To the extent that the issue of the constitutionalization of the EU is perceived as consolidating and advancing the existing market-orientated basis of the integration process, then we expect that those who have benefited the most already – those with higher socio-economic status – will be more supportive: *Hypothesis 1*: Those with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to support the constitutionalization of the EU (BSA and Eurobarometer); *Hypothesis 2*: Those in a non-manual occupation are more likely to support the constitutionalization of the EU (BSA and Eurobarometer).

### **National identity**

Increasingly, studies have emphasised the role of identity in structuring attitudes towards the integration process (Garry and Tilley 2009; Carey 2002). Identities connect individuals to social groups and the wider world, shaping social interactions and perceptions of threat from 'out groups'. Those with strong loyalties towards their nation are expected to be more opposed to the integration process. These attitudes may be

framed by perceptions that significant aspects of national culture and heritage are under threat from the EU (McLaren 2002;). As McLaren has observed, opposition towards the integration process involves "fear of, or hostility towards, other cultures" (2002: 553). In particular, recent studies have found that having an exclusive national identity (i.e. feeling exclusively British or French) underpins opposition towards the EU (Hooghe and Marks 2004, 2005). Research has suggested that identity affected how Irish citizens voted in the Lisbon Treaty referendum of 2008 (Sinnott 2008). O'Brennan observed that "the identity dimension emerges as crucial in explaining the outcome of the Lisbon Treaty referendum (2009: 270). What is a common feature amongst Irish and British citizens is their greater propensity for having an exclusivist conception of national identity compared to those in other member states (O'Brennan 2009: 269).

The importance of identity in shaping public attitudes in Britain with regards to EU questions has been demonstrated in existing research. Banducci *et al.* found that identity was more important for explaining attitudes towards the single currency in those countries *outside* of the Eurozone (including Britain) compared to those within (2009: 576). Further, Gabel and Hix found that individuals with an exclusive identity (i.e. British, Welsh or Scottish) were less supportive of membership of the single currency than those with a European identity (2005: 75). In relation to support for British membership of the EU, Clements (2009) found that those individuals with higher levels of British national sentiment were less likely to be favourable.

Although we expect economic interests to inform citizens' attitudes towards the 'constitutionalization' of the EU, this process involves crucial questions about further *political* integration. As a result, we expect this question to place concerns about national sovereignty at the centre of debate, as compared to membership or policy-specific issues where the prospect of economic benefits may offset worries about further powers being transferred to the EU at the expense of the member states. As Shu argues, while "voters' attitudes towards the membership are economically oriented, their opinions on the treaties tend to focus more on political and cultural concerns" (2008: 435). In Britain particularly, concerns over political sovereignty have often been central to debates over British relations with the EU both prior to and since membership. As a result, we expect that national identities and political cues will be particularly important to understanding public attitudes on this question.

Specifically, we expect that citizens with a non-European identity (British, English, Scottish, Welsh, etc) are more likely to oppose the constitutionalization of the EU because they perceive this as threatening their nation's political autonomy and culture heritage. Also, we expect that, when offered the choice of expressing a multiple identity, those who profess an exclusive national identity will be opposed for similar reasons. In Britain, the political elite has traditionally been divided over their country's role in the integration process and divided too over the constitutionalization of the EU. Following Hooghe and Marks (2005), we expect that in such circumstances exclusive national identities may be more powerful factors in shaping public attitudes. In relation to these two aspects of national identity, we expect that: *Hypothesis 3*: Those who do not have a European identity are more likely to oppose Britain signing up to an EU constitution (BSA); *Hypothesis 4*: Those who have an exclusively national identity are more likely to oppose Britain signing up to an EU constitution (Eurobarometer).

### Political cues

The third set of factors shaping public attitudes towards the integration process concerns 'cues' and 'proxies', involving public opinion being mediated by domestic political factors (Sanchez-Cuenca 2000; Anderson 1998). Research into the underlying sources of opinion towards the EU has increasingly given "attention to cognitive short-cuts, contextual factors, and elite cues, each of which helps a person respond to a survey



question about an issue that is seldom on his or her mind" (Hooghe and Marks 2005: 426). On a relatively complex matter like relations with the EU, citizens can 'read-off' their opinion from existing considerations, such as the political party they support (Carrubba, 2001). Additionally, where levels of information on a particular issue are low, party cues may assume greater prominence in informing public attitudes (Gabel and Hix 2005: 69). Partisan identifiers can use their party's declared position on an EU-related issue as a 'proxy' for their own opinion. On complex issues relating to the EU, political parties and their elites are thought to have a strategic ability to 'lead' their partisans towards a particular position (Flickinger 1994; Evans and Butt 2007). Of course, it should be noted that existing research has also examined the reverse pattern, whereby partisans 'lead' their party towards a position on the integration process (Steenbergen *et al.* 2007).

Studies of voting behaviour in the referendums in France and the Netherlands in 2005 and Ireland in 2008 on the issue of the EU's constitutionalization have provided mixed evidence concerning the role of partisanship in shaping political choice (Hainsworth 2006; Ivaldi 2006; Quinlan 2009; O'Brennan 2009). In the Irish referendum there was no clear relationship between party preference and support for or opposition to the Lisbon Treaty (O'Brennan 2009: 271). This was largely because the majority of political elites were in favour of the Lisbon Treaty whereas those opposing it "were not established political parties but rather activist groups and movements" (O'Brennan 2009: 262). Moreover, on this issue there was a "disconnect" between party leaders and their grassroots members (O'Brennan 2009: 271).

In relation to EU membership, Clements (2009) shows that the relationship between partisan alignments and attitudes in Britain changed over time as the parties changed their approaches to the integration process. With respect to the single currency, the Conservative Party has been strongly opposed to losing the Pound while Labour and the Liberal Democrats have been broadly in favour of Britain joining. Gabel and Hix (2005) found that being a Labour Party identifier was positively related to support for British membership of the single currency while identifying with the Conservative Party was negatively related. We expect that political 'cues' will be key explanatory factors because there is a clear split on the European constitution issue between mainstream parties. Additionally, we expect elite cues to be important since this is a relatively complex issue for citizens, as was the single currency, who may rely on the views of trusted opinion leaders (Whiteley 2001). We expect that Conservative supporters will be opposed to the constitutionalization of the EU in response to their party's robust opposition to Britain's signing up to both the Constitutional Treaty and its replacement, the Lisbon Treaty. *Hypothesis 5:* Conservative Party supporters are more likely to oppose Britain signing up to an EU constitution than those who support Labour or the Liberal Democrats (BSA).

### Political engagement

Scholars of public opinion on EU-related issues have also emphasised other factors such as knowledge of and interest in EU or domestic politics (Gabel and Hix 2005; Karp *et al.* 2003), assessments of incumbent governments (Ray 2003) and satisfaction with democracy and political institutions (Karp *et al.* 2003; Anderson 1998). Public attitudes towards the EU have often been associated with a lack of knowledge and understanding about the workings and aims of the EU in general as well as on particular policies or institutions. Britain has often been cited as a country where the electorate is, on the whole, particularly ill-informed about EU matters and what membership entails for Britain (Geddes 2003: 214).

Beyond the existence of an 'information deficit' in more Eurosceptic states such as Britain, this lack of knowledge and awareness about the EU has been associated more widely with negative attitudes towards the EU. Previous studies have shown that when

citizens lack knowledge of the potential benefits and costs of a decision relating to the EU they are more likely to take a position *against* the proposed change (Gabel and Hix 2005: 68; see also Karp *et al.* 2003). With regards to the 'constitutionalization' of the EU, there is evidence that political knowledge was a key factor influencing voting behaviour in the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. Those citizens with higher levels of knowledge were more likely to be in favour of the Lisbon Treaty (Sinnott 2008). We expect that those who have less knowledge about EU affairs are more likely to be opposed to an EU constitution, as has been argued in relation to other issues, such as attitudes towards the Euro (Huhne 2001: 65-73). We expect that: *Hypothesis 6*: Those who are less objectively knowledgeable about the EU will oppose the constitutionalization of the EU (BSA and Eurobarometer); *Hypothesis 7*: Those who perceive themselves to have less understanding of how the EU works will oppose the process of constitutionalization (BSA and Eurobarometer); *Hypothesis 8*: Those who perceive themselves to have less involvement in EU-related matters will be opposed to the constitutionalization of the EU (Eurobarometer).

### **Domestic political evaluations**

Views towards EU-related issues can also be 'mediated' by other attitudes and perceptions pertaining to issues and institutions within domestic politics. Since member state governments are primarily responsible for negotiating treaty documents and play an important role in negotiating the issue of constitutionalization of the EU on behalf of their country, we expect citizens' appraisal of their government to have an impact in shaping their attitudes on this issue. Accordingly, the British government has negotiated and supported the two recent documents – Constitutional Treaty and Lisbon Treaty – associated with the constitutionalization process. We expect that citizens who tend not to trust the national government and those who feel they have little or no say in their democratic system will oppose the process of EU constitutionalization. We expect that: *Hypothesis 9*: Those who feel they have less say over what government does in their country are more likely to oppose the constitutionalization of the EU (BSA); *Hypothesis 10*: Those who do not trust their national government are more likely to oppose the constitutionalization of the EU (Eurobarometer).

### **General support for the integration process**

As already discussed, the ongoing constitutionalization of the EU raises profound questions and debates over the present and future direction of the integration process. Accordingly, we expect that public attitudes regarding the constitutionalization process are likely to be linked to attitudes regarding the future relationship between Britain and the EU, i.e. general or 'diffuse' support for the EU. Again, this is based on findings from existing studies (Gabel and Hix 2005; Banducci *et al.* 2009). We expect that: *Hypothesis 11*: Those who have negative assessments of Britain's membership of the EU, or want to reduce the EU's powers or withdraw from it, are more likely to oppose the constitutionalization of the EU (BSA and Eurobarometer); *Hypothesis 12*: Those who tend not to trust the EU are more likely to oppose the constitutionalization of the EU (Eurobarometer).

### Control variables

Finally, we employ controls for gender and age group. Banducci *et al.* observe that: "Past studies have shown that age and gender affect diffuse support for the EU. These factors may also directly influence support for specific EU integration policy even when controlling for diffuse support" (2003: 695). Including these socio-demographic controls may help to reduce the likelihood of the estimates being affected by omitted variable bias. Details on how the independent variables are measured are provided in the Appendix.

### DATA AND METHOD

In order to examine the impact these factors have on public opinion towards the constitutionalization of the EU we use data from two surveys, the British Social Attitudes survey 2005 (BSA) (National Centre for Social Research 2007), and one measuring cross-national attitudes, Eurobarometer (Eurobarometer 64.2 2005). The BSA series represents a nationally-representative cross-sectional survey of the adult population undertaken annually since 1983 (total  $n=4,268$ ), which asks an extensive range of core questions about political choice, attitudes and values. It also collects information on a wide range of classification variables on individual and household circumstances (see Park, 2007). The BSA 2005 Survey - the fieldwork was undertaken between June-September 2005 using face-to-face interviews - carried several items on Britain's relations with the EU. We use the second edition of the dataset released for general usage in October 2007.

To provide a more detailed and robust analysis, we use data from the Eurobarometer surveys. Using the Eurobarometer survey enables the analysis to be more robust and builds existing research into public attitudes in Britain towards EU-related issues which used evidence from national and cross-national surveys (Gabel and Hix 2005). It also allows us to examine the impact of explanatory variables of theoretical interest not available in the BSA survey. Standard Eurobarometer surveys are conducted twice-yearly in the member states (and in official candidate countries) and have been running since 1973. The surveys target the adult (aged 15 years and over) populations of the member states and the interviews are carried out face-to-face. Specifically, we use data from 'Eurobarometer 64.2: The European Constitution, Globalization, Energy Resources, and Agricultural Policy', the data for which were collected during October-November 2005. We use the second edition released on 28 March 2008. The standard Eurobarometer sample size for Britain is considerably smaller than that for the BSA surveys. The usual number of respondents for Britain in each Eurobarometer comprises around 1,000 cases (in this case  $n=1,021$ ; as well as interviewing a separate sample of around 300 cases in Northern Ireland - not used in this analysis).

### DEPENDENT VARIABLES

The first dependent variable is a question asked in the BSA 2005 survey referring to vote intention in a referendum on a proposed 'European constitution'. It was asked of a sub-sample of respondents ( $n=2,096$ ) (the BSA surveys take the form of a split-sample format, with several versions of the standard questionnaire) and is worded as follows:

How do you think you would vote in a referendum on the proposed new European constitution? Would you vote in favour of Britain adopting the new constitution or against? IF 'would not vote', PROBE: If you did vote, how would you vote?

For the second dependent variable we use a question from Eurobarometer 64.2 (2005), which asks respondents whether they are for or against the EU having a constitution but not in the context of voting in a referendum. The question is worded as: "What is your opinion on each of the following statements? Please tell me for each statement, whether you are for it or against it. For; against; don't know. A European Constitution". Since we are interested in examining attitudes towards the constitutionalization of the EU, we argue that the use of the two questions referring to an EU constitution captures the essence of the debate.

It is worth examining the distribution of responses to the dependent variables. For the BSA question, Table 1 shows that opinion was divided. Over half of the respondents did not want Britain to adopt the constitution (55 per cent) and around one fifth were in favour (19 per cent). What is also interesting is that a sizeable minority – 26 per cent – had no opinion or were undecided on the issue. When those responding 'don't know' are excluded, 75 per cent are against and 24 per cent are in favour. The same question was asked in the BSA 2004 survey and the (weighted) distribution of responses is very similar: in favour – 20 per cent; against – 56 per cent; don't know – 24 per cent (National Centre for Social Research 2006). Similarly, the breakdown of responses (weighted percentages) to a question about the EU constitution in the British Election Study 2005 post-election survey was as follows: yes – 21 per cent; no – 47 per cent; undecided – 27 per cent; will not vote – 5 per cent (question wording: "There will be a referendum next year on the new European Union constitution. Will you vote 'Yes' or 'No' on the question, 'Should the United Kingdom approve the treaty establishing a constitution for the European Union?'").

Table 1: Whether Britain should adopt an EU constitution or not, BSA Survey 2005

	(%)	(%)	<i>Unweighted base</i>
Adopt the constitution	19.0	24.0	382
Not to adopt the constitution	55.0	75.0	1,161
Don't know	26.0	-	554
Total	100.0	100.0	2,097

Source: British Social Attitudes Survey 2005; weighted (rounded) percentages.

Table 2 shows responses to the question from the Eurobarometer survey (we employ the longer-running item used in Figure 1) We can see that a greater proportion (40 per cent) is in favour of an EU constitution, with 32 per cent against and more than a fifth of respondents unsure (22 per cent). When the 'don't knows' are excluded, 59 per cent support an EU constitution and 41 per cent are against. When posed in more general terms, and outside the context of expressing a political choice in a national contest, there is higher support for an EU constitution. The dependent variables take the values of 1 and 0, whereby the category of 1 represents support for an EU constitution. 'Don't know' responses are excluded from the analysis. As the dependent variables are dichotomous measures, binary logistic regression analysis is used.

Table 2: Attitudes towards an EU constitution in Britain, Eurobarometer 64.2 2005

	(%)	(%)	<i>Unweighted base</i>
For	46.0	59.0	463
Against	32.0	41.0	333
Don't know	22.0	-	225
Total	100.0	100.0	1021

Source: Eurobarometer 64.2, 2005; weighted (rounded) percentages.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section we present the logistic regression estimates from the two sets of models based upon the BSA and Eurobarometer surveys and discuss the main findings. Table 3 reports the results from Models 1 and 2 using data from the BSA 2005 while Table 4 shows the results for Models 3 and 4 based upon data from the Eurobarometer study. For clarity of presentation, we report the parameter coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses). A full set of estimates (including model fit information) is available on request. Models 1 and 3 are estimated with the EU attitudes variables omitted and Models 2 and 4 are estimated with it included.

Table 3: Binomial logistic regression of vote choice in a referendum on Britain adopting an EU constitution

	Model 1	Model 2
	B (SE)	B (SE)
Gender	.09 (.14)	.02 (.15)
Aged 30-49 years	-.08 (.18)	.02 (.20)
Aged 50-64 years	-.54* (.21)	-.27 (.24)
Aged 65 and over	-.19 (.24)	.22 (.27)
A-Level or equivalent	-.62*** (.19)	-.48* (.21)
CSE or equivalent	-.86*** (.20)	-.73*** (.23)
No qualifications	-.83*** (.25)	-.51 (.28)
Manual occupation	-.07 (.15)	.03 (.17)
Economic activity - other	-.77 (.41)	-1.17** (.44)
Supports Conservative Party	-1.49*** (.19)	-1.02*** (.20)
Supports Liberal Democrats	-.52** (.19)	-.31 (.21)
Supports other party	-1.09** (.41)	-.83 (.47)
Supports no party	-.71*** (.22)	-.80** (.26)
Other identity	-1.34*** (.36)	-1.02** (.39)
Integration process	-	4.17*** (.31)
Knowledge of EU	-.47 (.26)	-.19 (.30)
Political efficacy	-.80*** (.25)	-.61* (.29)
Constant	2.27*** (.48)	3.70*** (.55)
Weighted N		
Nagelkerke R Square		

Note: \*\*\*= $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*= $p \leq .01$ ; \*= $p \leq .05$ ; standard errors in parentheses. Reference categories: aged 18-29 years; degree or higher qualification; non-manual occupation; supports Labour Party. Source: BSA Survey 2005

The control variables have little impact in Models 1 and 2, so being male or in one of the older age groups (compared to those aged 18-29 years – the reference category) has little explanatory power net of the other variables. There are mixed results for the two indicators of socio-economic status. Education – measured in terms of the highest qualification achieved – has a powerful impact in both models, even when general attitudes towards the integration process are controlled for. In Model 1, having no

qualifications or a qualification below degree level has a negative relationship with wanting Britain to adopt an EU constitution (with all dummy variables being statistically significant - the reference category consists of those with a degree or higher qualification). This provides support for Hypothesis 1. Having a CSE or equivalent and A-Level or equivalent qualification is negatively related to support for an EU constitution (compared to the reference category). In Model 2, having no qualifications is no longer statistically significant, but the other two education variables remain so and all variables retain the negatively-signed relationship. Occupational status has little impact in either model (providing meagre support for Hypothesis 2), with the exception of the 'other' category (consisting of those unemployed, still in full-time education, or otherwise 'economically inactive') which is negatively-related to wanting Britain to adopt an EU constitution and is only statistically significant in Model 2. The reference category is those in non-manual occupations. To some extent, socio-economic status differentiates between positive and negative attitudes in Britain towards an EU constitution; while level of education has a strong impact in both models, occupational status performs relatively poorly as a predictor variable.

In terms of the attitudinal factors, having a European identity has a strong impact in both Model 1 and 2, compared to those with a non-European identity (such as feeling British, English, Scottish, or Welsh). This confirms the expectation outlined in Hypothesis 3 and shows the importance of group identities for questions which tap into the EU's perceived influence on the political sovereignty and cultural heritage of its member states. The dummy variables measuring party support have a strong impact in Model 1 net of other explanatory variables. As expected in Hypothesis 3, supporting the Conservative Party has a strong and negative relationship with Britain adopting an EU constitution, compared to the reference category of Labour Party supporters (which clearly fits with the trend data charted in Figure 3). Interestingly, aside from Conservative partisans, all three other categories of party support also exhibit negative relationships with favouring Britain signing up to an EU constitution. Perhaps surprisingly, this includes supporters of the Liberal Democrats, traditionally the most pro-EU mainstream party in British politics. Clearly, Liberal Democrat partisans appear less supportive of particular EU initiatives than its leaders and MPs are. All party support variables are statistically significant in Model 1. In Model 2, however, when controlling for general predisposition towards the integration process, only the Conservative Party variables retain statistical significance (and at the most demanding level), confirming Hypothesis 5.

In Model 2, general attitudes towards the integration process have a powerful impact, as would be expected, supporting Hypothesis 11. It has the largest impact of any of the coefficients and shows the need to control for the effect of support for membership or integration in general when assessing the determinants of public attitudes for specific EU-related issues. In addition to partisanship and identity, there are interesting results for political knowledge and efficacy, as shown in Table 3. Political knowledge of EU affairs has no statistically significant impact in either Model 1 or 2, and shows a negative relationship with the dependent variable, contrary to what was outlined in Hypothesis 6. Political efficacy has a strong impact in Model 1 and some effect in Model 2, though at a less demanding level of significance. The relationship in both models is negatively-signed, which does not support the expectation of Hypothesis 9. Overall, Model 1 and Model 2 show that socio-economic status and attitudinal factors discriminate between opinions towards Britain adopting an EU constitution, controlling for other factors. Some hypotheses are confirmed by the estimates reported in Table 1 and some show findings contrary to expectation. Including a general measure of attitudes towards the integration process does reduce the statistical impact of some variables but in the context of a more rigorously-specified model. The results from the estimations using Eurobarometer data are shown in Table 4 (Model 3 without general support for EU membership and Model 4 with this variable included).

In terms of the socio-demographic control variables, gender has no impact in either Model 3 or 4. Age grouping has some effect: specifically, the older age groups exhibit a negative relationship with Britain signing up to an EU constitution compared to those in the youngest age group (though these variables are significant at the least demanding level). Interestingly, the education variables - measured as the age a respondent finished full-time education - have little impact compared to their strong effect in Models 1 and 2 (providing little support for Hypothesis 1). This could conceivably result from this being a less sensitive measure of educational attainment compared to the level of qualification obtained by an individual. This represents the standardised Eurobarometer measure for education. Also, occupational status (measuring whether an individual is in manual work, self-employed or not in work compared to being in a non-manual occupation) does not have a statistically significant impact in either Model 3 or 4. Again, this does not uphold the expectation outlined in Hypothesis 2. Socio-economic status, as measured by two standard indicators, does not really contribute to our understanding of attitudes towards an EU constitution based upon evidence from the Eurobarometer survey.

The political and attitudinal factors show stronger results. In particular, having an exclusive national identity has a strong negative relationship with supporting an EU constitution, although the effect is slightly reduced when controlling for attitudes towards EU membership in Model 4. This provides confirmation for the expectation contained in Hypothesis 4 and also underlines insights from existing studies (Hooghe and Marks 2005). Similarly, respondents' degree of trust in the EU has a strong impact in Model 3 and the relationship is positively-signed, so greater trust is related to support for an EU constitution (which confirms Hypothesis 10). Interestingly, this relationship holds even when EU membership evaluations are added in Model 4. In contrast, trust in national government has no impact in Model 3 or 4, providing little support for Hypothesis 10, though the effect is negatively-signed so that less trust relates to less support for an EU constitution. Level of understanding of the EU has an impact (but at the least demanding level of statistical significance) in Models 3 and 4, with those reporting a greater understanding of EU matters more supportive of Britain adopting an EU constitution. This finding provides some support for Hypothesis 7. In contrast, perceived involvement in EU affairs does not have a statistically significant effect in Model 3 or 4, though the relationship is in the expected direction (see Hypothesis 8).

When general support for EU membership is included (Model 4), the results do not change markedly. Those variables with the largest impact, namely level of trust in the EU and possessing an exclusive national identity, retain their strong effect. As would be expected, a favourable attitude towards EU membership is strongly - and positively - related to support for an EU constitution, with the largest impact of any variable in Model 4. This tends to confirm findings from other studies which have included a general measure of support as a predictor variable (Gabel and Hix 2005; Banducci *et al.* 2009).



Table 4: Binomial logistic regression of attitudes in Britain towards an EU constitution, Eurobarometer 64.2 2005

	Model 3	Model 4
	<i>B (SE)</i>	<i>B (SE)</i>
Gender	-.23 (.19)	-.33 (.20)
Aged 30-49 years	-.30 (.31)	-.36 (.33)
Aged 50-64 years	-.79* (.34)	-.72* (.35)
Aged 65 and over	-.83* (.37)	-.87* (.38)
TEA aged 17	.92* (.38)	.94* (.39)
TEA aged 18	.37 (.33)	.33 (.35)
TEA aged 19	.47* (.24)	.25 (.25)
Manual occupation	.35 (.28)	.49 (.29)
Self-employed	.00 (.43)	.27 (.45)
Economic activity - other	.41 (.27)	.46 (.28)
Exclusive national identity	-1.30*** (.22)	-1.07*** (.24)
EU membership	-	1.67*** (.29)
Trust in government	-.25 (.24)	-.47 (.25)
Trust in EU	1.63*** (.28)	1.24*** (.30)
Understanding of EU	.49* (.20)	.54** (.20)
Involvement in EU	.73 (.46)	.25 (.49)
Constant	.60 (.43)	-.05 (.47)

Note: \*\*\*= $p \leq .001$ ; \*\*= $p \leq .01$ ; \*= $p \leq .05$ ; standard errors in parentheses. Reference categories: aged 15-29 years; TEA - aged 20 and over; non-manual occupation.

Overall, the results from the second set of model estimations based upon Eurobarometer data show some interesting results for attitudinal factors, in particular national identity and EU-related appraisals. Caution is needed, though, as the variables were operationalised in different ways due to differences in item content and measurement in the two surveys used. Moreover, standard Eurobarometer surveys carried out in Britain are based upon much smaller representative samples consisting of around 1,000 people, compared to the larger sample sizes obtained for the BSA surveys.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine attitudes towards recent attempts to constitutionalize the EU, a process that, in recent years, has experienced serious setbacks and become politically contentious across the member states. As the time series evidence showed, opinion in Britain was much less favourable compared to EU member states as a whole and support declined sharply from late 2003 onwards. Within public opinion, there were clear differences amongst supporters of the main British political parties. Attitudes were then analysed using evidence from two long-standing survey series and a range of hypotheses were tested building upon insights from research into public opinion and the EU. While we tried to specify similar models - survey resources permitting - we were also able to test the impact of key factors in a political context in which both political and national identities are thought to be more potent as individual-level predictors because of concerns generated by deeper political integration. This is even more germane to the British case because of persistent elite-level strains and stresses, both within and between parties, over relations with the EU. In such a context, the role of elite 'cues' is heightened. The important role played by political proxies on this issue underlines findings from other cross-national studies (e.g. Anderson 1998). The evidence from the BSA survey clearly showed that party political affiliation and national identity play a strong role even when controlling for general support for EU membership. The results from the analysis of Eurobarometer data, moreover, highlights the strong impact of having an *exclusive* national identity, as well as other political evaluations, such as trust in the EU.

Taken together, the findings from the two surveys demonstrate the utility of using multiple sources (Gabel and Hix 2005), particularly so as differently-worded questions about similar EU-related issues are administered on cross-national and single-country surveys. The results from these surveys, though, need to be interpreted in the context of how they differ on certain aspects of content and methodology. With these constraints in mind, the findings from this analysis both build upon and extend insights from studies of public attitudes on other EU-related questions; they also provide some key indicators about the individual-level characteristics in Britain structuring opinion towards major initiatives furthering the integration process. While no national referendum was forthcoming in Britain on attempts to provide the EU with a constitution, there is still the need for further research into public attitudes in those member states where popular consent for further political integration, and for specific initiatives pursuant to that end, is unclear. Evidence from a cross-national survey undertaken for the 2009 European Parliament election (European Election Study 2009) demonstrates large majorities in favour of referendums being staged in future to ensure popular backing for major EU treaty amendments (80 per cent in the UK and 65 per cent across the EU-27 agree that referendums should be held).

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## APPENDIX: MEASUREMENT OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

### Education

*BSA*: We use a measure of an individual's highest qualification as our indicator of educational attainment. We construct dummy variables to distinguish between those with a degree qualification or higher, those with A-Levels or equivalent, those with GCSEs or equivalent, and those with no qualifications. Those with a degree or higher qualification are the reference category.

*Eurobarometer*: We used a measure of the age at which a respondent finished full-time education (TEA – terminal education age). We construct dummy variables to represent those whose TEA was 17 years or under, 18 years, 19 years, and 20 years and older. Those whose TEA is aged 20 years and older are the reference category.

### **Social class**

*BSA*: For the measure of social class we create dummy variables to represent categories of occupational grade (non-manual occupation, manual occupation, and other economic activity – comprising those unemployed and ‘economically inactive’). Those in non-manual work are the reference category.

*Eurobarometer*: This measures whether an individual is in a manual occupation, non-manual occupation, self-employed, or not in work (comprising those who are unemployed or ‘economically inactive’). Those in non-manual work are the reference category.

### **National identity**

*BSA*: We use a question asking about a respondent’s identity and create a dummy variable to distinguish between those individuals who have a European attachment (scored as 0) and those who have another identity (scored as 1). The BSA survey did not ask a question which enabled respondents to express a multiple identity (i.e. European and British).

*Eurobarometer*: We use a dummy variable measuring whether an individual has an exclusive national identity (scored as 1) compared to those who have a composite identity (i.e. both European and national) or a solely European identity (scored as 0).

### **Party support**

*BSA*: For the measure of party support, we construct a series of dummy variables for which party a respondent feels closer to (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrats, other party, no party). Labour supporters are the reference category.

*Eurobarometer*: no measure available.

### **Political engagement**

*BSA*: We operationalise political engagement by using a ‘domain-specific’ measure (Alvarez and Brehm 2002: 36) based upon a scale of five items which tests respondents’ knowledge of EU institutions and processes. Higher scores indicate greater levels of knowledge of the EU.

*Eurobarometer*: We use two items which ask specifically about an individual’s political engagement with EU politics (self-assessed level of understanding about the EU and self-assessed level of involvement in EU affairs). Both items are scored from 0 to 1 with higher scores representing higher understanding and greater involvement

### **Domestic political evaluations and political efficacy**

*BSA*: We construct a scale (ranging from 0 to 1) which measures an individual’s perceived level of political efficacy in domestic politics, with higher scores denoting greater self-assessed efficacy.

*Eurobarometer*: We construct a dummy variable measuring whether respondents tend to trust or tend not to trust their national government (scored as 1 if they do, 0 if not).

### **General support for the EU**

*BSA*: Respondents are asked about Britain's long-term relations with the EU and given five response options (ranging from 'leave the EU altogether' to maintaining the 'status quo' through to 'work for a single EU government'). We construct a scale ranging from 0 to 1 with higher scores denoting favourable views of the integration process.

*Eurobarometer*: Respondents are asked if they think EU membership is 'a good thing', 'a bad thing', or 'neither good nor bad'. We construct a scale ranging from 0 to 1 with higher scores denoting favourable views of their country's membership.

*Eurobarometer*: We construct a dummy variable measuring whether respondents 'tend to trust' or 'tend not to trust' the EU (scored as 1 if they do, 0 if not).

### **Control variables**

*BSA*: Gender is coded as 1 for male and 0 for female. Age range is coded into four groups: 18-29 years old; 30-49 years old, 50-64 years old, and 65 and older. Those aged 18-29 years are the reference category.

*Eurobarometer*: As above except the youngest age group is coded as 15-29 years, reflecting a difference in the age range of the adult sample.

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