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## **The Roots of Confidence in the European Union<sup>1</sup>**

### *Summary*

The article analyzes public confidence in the EU using the fifth wave (2005-2008) of the World Values Survey. We argue that citizens' confidence in the European Union depends on having an underlying trust in social and political institutions in their home countries, and that confidence in the EU does not differ substantially from confidence in other international organizations. In a multivariate regression analysis of individual-level data, we also examine the impact of economic variables, knowledge, and territorial identity.

### **KEYWORDS**

Public opinion, European Union, confidence, trust, identity, international organizations

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## ŹRÓDŁA ZAUFANIA W UNII EUROPEJSKIEJ

### *Streszczenie*

Artykuł analizuje zaufanie publiczne w UE przy wykorzystaniu tzw. piątej fali (2005-2008) wyników badań World Values Survey. Autorzy artykułu stoją na stanowisku, że zaufanie obywateli w Unii Europejskiej zależy od posiadania podstawowego (ukrytego) zaufania do instytucji politycznych i społecznych w swoich krajach. Zaufanie do UE, z kolei zaś, nie różni się zasadniczo od zaufania do innych organizacji międzynarodowych. Przy zastosowaniu wieloczynnikowej analizy regresji na poziomie danych indywidualnych w artykule zbadano także wpływ zmiennych ekonomicznych, wiedzy i tożsamości terytorialnej.

### **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE**

opinia publiczna, Unia Europejska, pewność, zaufanie, tożsamość, organizacje międzynarodowe

## I. INTRODUCTION

What accounts for differences in attitudes towards the European Union among citizens in its member states? Past research has examined a variety of explanatory variables, including economic factors, political factors, knowledge, and identity, and it has found substantial empirical support for including each of these factors as part of our overall understanding of EU public opinion. EU researchers have also benefited from the rapidly growing literature on social and political trust, which is the focus of this article. The analysis draws on a broader set of explanatory factors that became available with the publication of the fifth wave of the World Values Survey (WVS). The fifth wave provides socioeconomic and attitudinal data for citizens in thirteen EU member states, including responses to a question on citizens' confidence in the EU. Although we cannot analyze support for the specific policies of the EU with the WVS, the survey does allow us to investigate the underlying support for the EU upon which approval of EU policy is built. The WVS also allows us to compare the opinions of EU and non-EU citizens on the question of international governance.

Our analysis finds empirical support of leading explanations of citizens' attitudes about the EU. It also reveals that explanatory models of confidence in the EU are underspecified, particularly when it comes to theorizing about trust. Attitudes about the EU indeed are formed partly from citizens' confidence in their national governments. However, it is not limited to this. We argue that confidence in the EU, as it is with global international organizations, depends on having an underlying trust in domestic social and political institutions. Moreover, we find that this is unrelated to a general propensity to be trusting. We begin, first, by reviewing the literature on public opinion of the EU.

### II. PUBLIC OPINION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

The spring 2011 Eurobarometer (EB75) indicates clearly that the Eurozone debt crisis led to diminished popular support of the European Union. Attitudes about the EU continue to display substantial variation, as they always have, by member state and by individual circumstances. Explaining this variation, though a focus of EU research, has been challenging. Public opinion research has analyzed both overall attitudes toward the EU and attitudes on specific topics, such as enlargement [Kentmen 2008; Tanasiou and Colonescu 2008] and the expansion of the EU's operations and powers [Niedermayer and Sinnott 1998]. Scholars have examined the impact of a variety of explanatory variables, including personal and macroeconomic factors, territorial identity, knowledge, and domestic politics. In this section, we review the findings of prior research. We also take note of the limitations of these approaches. Multivariate models of cross-sectional data on EU public opinion have generated  $R^2$  statistics that range from 0,04 to 0,40, with many clustered around 0,20 [Hooghe and Marks 2005]. Clearly, our models have limited explanatory power, and efforts are underway to develop more complex models that combine [Hooghe and Marks 2005] or interact [Garry and Tilley 2009] key explanatory variables, often across multiple levels of analysis.

Research has shown that there is an element of economic utilitarianism in EU public opinion. To some degree, citizens of EU states are weighing the potential benefits against the costs of membership. Net

recipients are more positively inclined towards the EU, compared to net donors [McLaren 2006]. Given that the primary rationale for integration is economic, it is not surprising that perception of the economic costs and benefits is an important part of public support. Gabel [1998] employs a utilitarian egocentric approach to argue that low-income groups, whose jobs and social welfare benefits are threatened, are most likely to oppose the EU. More skilled, educated, and higher income individuals, better able to take advantage of educational and economic opportunities resulting from European integration, are more likely to support the EU. Reducing trade barriers is a boon to citizens with relatively high incomes and education levels [Inglehart 1970]. In 2002, seventy percent of professionals and executives stated that their country's membership in the EU was a good thing, while only forty-eight percent of manual workers felt that way [McLaren 2006].

Hooghe and Marks [2005] use Eurobarometer data to measure the relative impact of economic calculus and a second explanatory factor, community identity, on European public opinion. They find that both factors are important, but that identity has a stronger impact on public opinion than does economic self-interest. The impact of identity on support for the EU is complex; Europeans have multiple and overlapping identities, including regional, ethnic, national, and European [Klandermans et al. 2003; Risse 2003]. In general, nationalism is positively associated with public support for the EU. However, national identity has been mobilized in opposition to the EU in cases where political parties are polarized on the EU and the radical right is powerful [Hooghe and Marks 2004]. Garry and Tilley [2009] demonstrate that economic factors condition the impact of identity on public opinion of the EU. Specifically, they find that living in a member state that receives a relatively large share of assistance from the EU acts as a "buffer" that dilutes the negative impact of nationalism on Euroscepticism. Similarly, living in a state that is relatively well off economically, and thus attractive to immigrants, results in more skeptical attitudes towards the EU. Garry and Tilley conclude that the national identity and economic utilitarian indicators of public opinion on the EU are complementary, not contradictory.

Being knowledgeable about the EU is associated with higher levels of approval [Anderson 1998]. Correct information in a variety of foreign policy issue areas has a direct impact on public opinion

[Gilens 2001]. Examining the relationship between knowledge and support of the UN in twenty-eight countries from 1989-1991, Millard [1993] finds that favorable opinion of the UN arises when the public is knowledgeable of the institution and substantially involved in UN matters. It is logical that a public that understands the institutions, goals, and costs of the European Union will be more inclined to support the organization. Analyzing European and US attitudes toward foreign aid, Diven and Constantelos [2009] observe that stronger support for foreign aid in Europe is related to higher levels of education and attentiveness to public affairs. Having prior experience with EU policy is positively related to support for the EU's defense policy [Schoen 2008]. Yet, the impact of EU socialization on attitudes appears to be of diminishing importance [Balestrini et al. 2010].

Low levels of knowledge about the EU lead Europeans to rely on their evaluation of the domestic political system as a proxy for attitudes about the EU [Anderson 1998]. This effect is especially noted in the context of referenda in the early 1990s [Franklin, Marsh and McLaren 1994], when the results clearly reflected government approval levels. Similarly, van der Eijk and Franklin [1996] argue that European elections are fought on national issues, not European-level issues. Due to a lack of specific information on the EU, and because of the more direct relationship between the nation-state and its citizens, Kritzinger [2003] argues that the public evaluation of the EU depends on the general performance of the nation-state. McLaren [2010] suggests that this explains the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in the 2005 French and Dutch referenda. However, she notes additionally that the negative vote was also the result of poorly organized campaigns in favor of the referenda.

Poorly informed individuals can also draw on other cues, such as their predispositions toward government when forming opinions about the EU. Although an individual's self-reported position on the left-right political spectrum has not been found to be predictive of EU attitudes [Anderson 1998], there is some evidence that a general trust of government may be an important factor. For example, citizens who are distrustful of national governments may be skeptical about complex and unfamiliar international engagements [Popkin and Dimmock 2002]. We turn our attention, therefore, to the rapidly developing literature on trust in world politics.

### III. TRUST IN REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Theoretical and empirical attempts to evaluate trust in institutions of national or international governance lead to debates over the definition and nature of trust. A central issue is whether trust is an inherited characteristic of individuals or a learned behavior. Is trust developed with experience or as a cost-benefit analysis of the interaction with institutions and individuals? Is trust in government related to interpersonal trust? There is fundamental disagreement between scholars who argue that trust is a logical outgrowth of political experiences and reflects utilitarian attitudes towards the benefits of membership [Hardin 2002, Levi and Stoker 2000], and those who posit that trust is more deep-seated in personality and political socialization [Uslaner 2002]. Uslaner emphasizes the innate nature of trust, arguing that some individuals are simply more trusting than others. Sztompka [1998] finds that trust is a function of three factors: the “reflected trustworthiness” of the target, the personality and disposition of the individual, and the general culture of trust that pervades society. The existence of a general culture of trust may lead individuals to be more trusting of social and political institutions.

A related question is whether recent reductions in government trust reflect shifting attitudes towards contemporary actors and conditions, or whether this decline signals longer-term consequences for the legitimacy of government and government programs. In the US, this issue is thoroughly examined in the widely cited Miller-Citrin debate [1974] over whether criticism of government is fleeting (Citrin) or deep and abiding (Miller). In a comparative context, Newton and Norris [2000, p. 53] claim that “an erosion of confidence in the major institutions of government” is a “serious threat to democracy,” and Inglehart [1999] argues that post-modern societies are less respectful of political authority and more demanding of their governments. Nye [1997] believes that this loss of confidence will curb the willingness of citizens to pay taxes and dampen the enthusiasm of promising young people to seek leadership positions in government. Crepaz [2008] identifies tensions between immigration and popular support of the welfare state in Germany, Sweden, and the United States. The recent tide of interest in the US “Tea Party” may be evidence of the growing

popularity of anti-government rhetoric. Clearly, the current political climate makes garnering support for new domestic and international governing initiatives a challenge.

For the purpose of this article, we cannot settle these philosophical questions about the nature of trust. Instead, we turn our attention to an empirical analysis of trust in the European Union. We ask whether confidence in domestic institutions leads to confidence in the EU. Prior research on trust in the United Nations suggests that it will [Diven and Constantelos 2011]. We also investigate the domestic sources of confidence in EU governance, bringing into the analysis a broader conceptualization of these sources than has been considered in previous research.

Given its complexity, one would not expect support for the European Union to be consistent across issue areas. An analysis of public opinion towards the EU, UN, and NATO finds that attitudes toward internationalization of governance vary by issue area [Everts 1998]. In the context of the US, Gronke et al. [2009] argue that “trust in government” is an overly simplistic phrase and that a more nuanced view is required to understand declining trust among US respondents. Specifically, they find that trust varies by government institution and that institutional variations are more important than variations over time. Although we are examining confidence in the EU overall, it is important to note that confidence will vary by institution, general policy area, and specific initiative.

#### IV. USING THE WORLD VALUES SURVEY TO ANALYZE CONFIDENCE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

The leading data source used to analyze attitudes toward the European Union is the Eurobarometer. Although the World Values Survey does not provide the depth or specificity of the Eurobarometer on EU issues, the WVS is a valuable supplement to the Eurobarometer, in that it asks a broader set of questions about core values of citizens. The WVS was built on the European Values Study, which was originally modeled on the Eurobarometer [Norris 2009]. The WVS describes itself as “The world’s most comprehensive investigation of political and sociocultural change.” The recently published fifth wave includes

several questions that allow researchers to test different conceptualizations of trust that have emerged in the literature. Another benefit to the WVS is that it allows us to compare the opinions of Europeans with the opinions of citizens from other nations.

The fifth wave of the WVS was conducted in 57 countries between 2005 and 2008.<sup>2</sup> Thirteen EU member states were included in the survey: Britain, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. Attitudes toward the European Union are expressed in response to WVS Question 146, which is one of many questions regarding citizens' confidence in major political and social institutions. The text of the question follows:

I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all? *The European Union.*

A great deal (1)

Quite a lot (2)

Not very much (3)

None at all (4)

The WVS question on the EU most closely resembles the Eurobarometer's Question A10.5:

I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it: *The European Union.*

Tend to trust (1)

Tend not to trust (2)

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2 Much of the EU fieldwork was conducted in 2005 and 2006. The fieldwork for Romania took place in November 2005, thirteen months before formal accession. The Bulgarian survey was completed in May 2007, after formal accession. Both countries are included in the analysis. Data from the fifth wave were released in 2009. Fieldwork for the sixth wave of the WVS is underway [cf. [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org) for additional information]. We gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the World Values Survey to this research project.



There are two main differences between the WVS and Eurobarometer questions. First, the WVS allows for greater variation of responses with its four-point scale. The Eurobarometer question permits only two responses to the trust question. Other Eurobarometer questions, including the standard question that asks respondents, “Is [your country’s] membership in the EU a good thing?” allow a wider range of responses. It is question A10.5, however, that most directly focuses on trust in the EU.

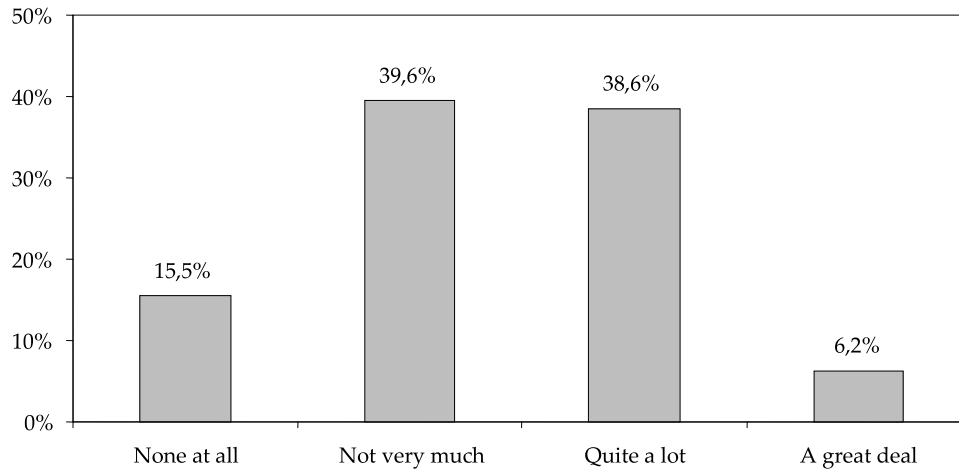
The second major difference is that the English version of the WVS uses the word *confidence* rather than *trust*. The existence of a robust literature on the multiple meanings of trust would argue for a careful analysis of the different conceptualizations of these terms, as would Crepaz’s [2008] recent work, which distinguishes the concepts when applying them to international institutions. This concern is mitigated, however, by the observation that the identical terms are used for *confidence* and *trust* in the German (*vertrauen*), French (*confiance*), Italian, Spanish, and Dutch versions of the WVS and Eurobarometer. Therefore, in this article, we treat these concepts synonymously.

### V. CONFIDENCE IN THE EU: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The WVS sample of Europeans displays a bimodal distribution in their responses to the question about confidence in the European Union (see Figure 1). Nearly forty percent of the respondents stated that they had either “not very much” (39,6%) or “quite a lot” (38,6%) of confidence, while far fewer people selected “none at all” (15,5%) or “a great deal” (6,2%).<sup>3</sup> Overall, more Europeans held negative (55,1%) rather than positive (44,8%) opinions on the question of confidence in the EU.

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<sup>3</sup> The distributions are based on the valid responses. Slightly over seven percent of the respondents provided no answer to this question.

Figure 1. Confidence in the European Union World Values Survey, 5<sup>th</sup> wave (2005-2008) (n = 14154)

Descriptive statistics by country reveal patterns that agree with the historic trends of many of the member states, with Italy having the highest confidence score and the UK (Britain) having the lowest. Of course, public opinion changed significantly with the onset of the global recession. As the 2011 Eurobarometer indicates, trust in the European Union has fallen in Italy, Spain, and other states that were at the center of the Eurozone crisis. Table 1 provides the mean values for the EU member states, which are rank ordered by confidence level, from highest to lowest. The WVS scale has been recoded so that the highest confidence level is coded with the highest numeric value (4), and the lowest confidence level has the lowest value (1). Table 1 also compares the country means in Wave 5 to those from the previous wave of the WVS and to the similar Eurobarometer question from the contemporaneous (spring 2006) Eurobarometer 65. Compared to the fourth WVS wave in 1999-2001, confidence in the EU declined in the oldest members, Germany, Italy, and, notably, in France and the Netherlands, where the constitutional treaty was defeated just eight months earlier. Confidence in the EU increased the most in Finland, Spain, and Sweden, and in the newest members of the EU, Bulgaria and Romania. WVS measurements of confidence in the European Union correlate fairly highly (0,683) with the scores in the Eurobarometer's 2006 survey.

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Table 1. Confidence in the European Union, by country and survey (rank-ordered by WVS 5 means, from highest to lowest confidence)

	WVS 5 2005-2008	WVS 4 1999-2000	Change Waves 4 to 5	EB65 2006
Italy	2,72	2,79	- 0,07	56%
Romania	2,63	2,24	0,39	68
Bulgaria	2,63	2,38	0,25	57
Spain	2,62	2,51	0,11	50
Cyprus	2,41	-	-	61
Poland	2,39	2,34	0,05	58
Slovenia	2,27	2,28	- 0,01	63
Finland	2,25	2,07	0,18	41
Sweden	2,25	2,10	0,15	39
France	2,21	2,38	- 0,17	41
Germany	2,12	2,26	- 0,14	41
Netherlands	2,09	2,22	- 0,13	48
Britain	2,03	2,00	0,03	31
Mean (pooled)	2,36			48%

Codes: A great deal of confidence (4), Quite a lot (3), Not very much (2), None at all (1) The Eurobarometer statistics are frequency distributions, indicating the percentage of individuals who “tend to trust” the EU.

To provide some context to the EU confidence statistics, we compare confidence in the EU with confidence in other national and international institutions (see Table 2). Confidence in the EU is higher than confidence in many domestic political institutions, including parliaments and political parties, though it is lower than the confidence citizens have in churches and the justice system. Europeans have more confidence in the UN than in the EU and more confidence in the EU than in their national governments. When it comes to political institutions, it may appear that familiarity breeds contempt. In fact, there is a relatively strong paired-sample correlation (0,647) between confidence in the EU and confidence in the UN, which suggests that there may be common underlying factors that shape people’s perspectives. That the correlation is not even higher is understandable, considering the essential differences between the UN, an international organization, and the EU, which has important features of a political system [Hix 1994].

Table 2. Confidence in Domestic and International Institutions (rank-ordered from highest to lowest confidence)

Confidence in:	Mean	Std. Dev.	N
Churches	2,59	,980	14778
Justice System	2,48	,848	14680
The United Nations	2,48	,823	13990
The European Union	2,36	,815	14154
Television	2,33	,749	14972
The Civil Services	2,29	,764	14432
Major Companies	2,23	,763	14035
The Press	2,22	,751	14853
Labour Unions	2,21	,804	13799
The Government	2,17	,806	14832
Parliament	2,15	,792	14698
The Political Parties	1,92	,727	14704

Codes: A great deal of confidence (4), Quite a lot (3), Not very much (2), None at all (1)

Non-EU citizens see things differently: they have slightly more confidence in the EU than in the UN. Table 3 compares the levels of confidence in the EU and UN for citizens in EU and non-EU countries using paired sample means. Overall support for the EU is actually very slightly higher among non-EU citizens than among Europeans, which is an interesting finding, assuming that the EU confers greater economic benefits to its members than to non-members (even if some non-member states may be EU foreign aid recipients). This surprising finding raises questions about the desirability of focusing primarily on national distributional outcomes to explain public support of the EU. A better understanding of the relative importance of knowledge, economic benefits, and of other explanatory factors requires us to move to a multivariate analysis.

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Table 3. Confidence in International Organizations, EU and Non-EU Citizens (paired-sample statistics)

Respondents in:	Confidence in the European Union	Confidence in the United Nations
EU countries (n = 13803)		
<i>mean</i>	2,36	2,48
<i>s.d.</i>	,815	,823
Non-EU countries (n = 20295)		
<i>mean</i>	2,40	2,46
<i>s.d.</i>	,918	,952

Codes: A great deal of confidence (4), Quite a lot (3), Not very much (2), None at all (1)

## VI. MULTIVARIATE REGRESSION ANALYSIS OF CONFIDENCE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

### A. Model and variables

OLS multiple regression analysis is used to examine the impact of several factors that are well established in the literature on EU public opinion, as well as others that have not previously been examined.<sup>4</sup> The independent variables are grouped into four categories that for descriptive simplicity we call economic, knowledge, identity, and trust. The dependent variable, confidence in the EU, is an ordinal variable that approximates an interval variable, and it will be treated as such. Complete descriptions of the WVS questions are provided in

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<sup>4</sup> We acknowledge the limitations of OLS estimation for multilevel data, specifically the inability to theorize about the level two (country) factors and the downward bias of standard errors [Steenbergen and Jones 2002]. Nevertheless, we use the classical OLS technique because a multilevel model introduces its own problems of inference when analyzing WVS data. In particular, the small number of EU country cases in the WVS falls below recommended thresholds for multilevel analysis [Hox 2010, p. 235] and these cases are not randomly selected. Therefore, it is likely that we would violate the multilevel estimation assumptions for the level two data.

the Appendix.<sup>5</sup> Listwise deletion of missing values is used, yielding samples of 6617 to 7115 observations.

The extensive literature on EU public opinion provides a strong justification for including two individual-level *economic* variables: the type of occupational tasks (manual vs. non-manual) and satisfaction with the financial situation of the household. As Gabel [1998] argues, manual workers are particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of economic liberalization. We hypothesize, therefore, that manual workers are less likely to have confidence in the EU. We also expect that people who are satisfied with their financial situation will be relatively more enthusiastic about economic developments in Europe, including European economic integration.

Many studies have examined the impact of country-level economic factors, such as the distributive impact of the EU. Multi-level analyses have revealed the added explanatory power of country-level variables [Hooghe and Marks 2005; Kritzinger 2003]. Our analysis of the individual level data from the WVS does not include country-level variables, with the exception of country dummy variables that we presume will capture but not disentangle many of the distinctive national level factors. We also include age as a control variable. Age is a variable that may correlate with economic self-interest (e.g., pensioners may have a strong interest in opposing public social spending cuts); it may also correlate with knowledge or awareness of the history and accomplishments of the EU.

Our second category of variables is intended to evaluate the level of *knowledge* about the European Union. For this category, the Eurobarometer offers superior questions. Lacking direct knowledge questions about the EU in the WVS, we draw on two proxies, interest in politics and the level of education. We hypothesize that greater interest in politics and a higher educational level will be positively correlated to confidence in the EU. It is possible that knowledge and confidence levels are negatively correlated — when it comes to the EU, ignorance may be bliss. Our hypothesis, however, assumes that approval of EU integration requires a basic understanding of European

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5 Most of the variables have been recoded in reverse order to allow for hypotheses that are more intuitively logical. Variables that have been recoded are noted in the Appendix.

initiatives. Numerous studies point to low levels of knowledge about the EU [Anderson 1998]. Confidence is built on and sustained with information. Information must be available and accessible, as it certainly is in modern Europe. The more important factor is an interest in obtaining information; therefore, we focus on the WVS question that asks people how interested they are in politics. Knowledge also depends, of course, on education. The WVS asks respondents to report their highest level of formal education. Given the complexity of the EU, we hypothesize that higher levels of education will be correlated to greater confidence in the EU.

*Identity* variables comprise a third category of explanatory factors. We include two variables that measure geographic self-identity. Respondents in the WVS provided Likert scale responses (on a 1-4 scale) to prompts about their level of self-identification with their nation and with Europe. Although prior research has demonstrated that individuals are capable of multiple territorial identities, the political battles over the EU have often framed the debate as a tradeoff between national sovereignty and supranationalism. Therefore, we include a straightforward test of the hypothesis that identification with the nation is negatively correlated to confidence in the EU. Despite earlier findings [Hooghe and Marks 2005; Risse 2003] about the overlapping nature of identities, we believe there may be a trade-off between national identity and support for the EU. We hypothesize that citizens who identify themselves as “European” will express greater confidence in the EU. Also in the category of identity, we consider the respondents’ sentiments regarding immigrants. Freedom of movement in the EU is perceived by some to be a threat to national culture and identity. We hypothesize that antipathy toward immigrants will correlate negatively with confidence in the EU.

Variables in a fourth category measure *trust in social and political institutions*. The WVS offers a particularly rich set of questions in this area. Our first “trust” variable is an individual’s confidence in his or her national government. As we discussed at the beginning of the article, researchers have demonstrated the importance of the attitudes toward national governments as key factors in explaining public support of the EU. This factor may be more important in the EU, where national sovereignty is pooled, than it is for other international organizations. The wording of the WVS question V138 makes

it more likely that respondents are thinking about the short-term performance of their national governments instead of their underlying attitude toward the state. In all likelihood, this variable captures a little of both. We expect that the relationship between domestic trust in government and support of the EU will be positive and significant, demonstrating the interconnected nature of political trust. We omit from the analysis another political variable, self-placement on the left-right continuum, which revealed weak explanatory power in previous research [Anderson 1998].

We believe that trust in international institutions stems not simply from confidence in national governments, but more generally from trust in domestic social and political institutions. We hypothesize that citizens who are fundamentally cynical or pessimistic about their chances for socioeconomic progress will also display low confidence in the EU. To capture this sentiment, we draw on a WVS question about the value of “hard work.” Those who believe hard work brings a better life may be more likely to believe that the promises of EU membership can be realized.

Another factor that we examine is trust in a social institution that many analysts have overlooked—business. This variable allows us to examine the longstanding and widespread sentiment that the EU is guided by the interests of economic elites. We draw, therefore, on WVS Q142, which asks respondents about their confidence in “major companies.” We hypothesize that confidence in major companies is positively correlated with confidence in the EU.

It has been suggested that a predisposition to trust must be considered separately from social trust [Sztompka 1998]. Trust in domestic social and political institutions may simply be related to a propensity to trust other people. The WVS includes a question (V23) about generalized trust, which we add as a control variable in one of our models. We argue that more important than a general trusting predisposition for explaining confidence in the EU is a more specific confidence in domestic social and political institutions.



## B. Results

Table 4 presents the results of the OLS regression analyses. Three explanatory models are compared. Model 1 examines the impact of independent variables that prior research has found to be predictive of citizens' attitudes toward the EU, including the economic, identity, and knowledge variables. Also included in Model 1 is the variable measuring confidence in one's national government, a factor that has been shown to be important in earlier analyses. The explanatory power of this model, with an adjusted  $R^2$  of 0,265, compares favorably to other studies. Almost all of the independent variables correlate with individual confidence in the European Union in the hypothesized direction and at the ,05 significance level (two-tailed tests). Two factors, age and educational level, were not statistically significant. The other "knowledge" factor, an interest in politics, was a statistically significant predictor of confidence in the EU.

The regression analysis of the WVS data confirms the importance of economic variables for an understanding of citizen attitudes about the European Union. Manual laborers and respondents dissatisfied with the financial situation of the household express less confidence in the EU. It is important to recall that this regression analyzes *confidence* in the European Union and does not refer to any particular economic costs or benefits from membership in the organization. We expect that the economic variables would be equally if not more important in an analysis of opinions that are more directly related to the economic benefits of EU membership.

The identity variables showed a strong relationship to attitudes about the EU. Not surprisingly, confidence in the EU is very strongly related to self-identification as a European citizen. In our analysis, territorial self-identification with the nation was negatively correlated with confidence in the EU. Unlike the results of some other studies, we find tension between national identity and support of the EU. We also find that respondents who prefer a restrictive immigration policy have less confidence in the EU than those who favor open immigration policies.

Table 4. OLS Regression Analysis of Confidence in the European Union

Variable (hypothesized sign)	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	B (SE)	Sig.	B (SE)	Sig.	B (SE)	Sig.
(Constant)	1,516 (,076)	,000	,853 (,079)	,000	1,045 (,084)	,000
Age	,001 (,001)	,061	,001 (,001)	,139	,001 (,001)	,082
<b>Economic</b>						
Nature of tasks: manual vs. cognitive (+)	,010 (,000)	,000	,008 (,003)	,008	,008 (,003)	,006
Satisfaction with financial situation (+)	,016 (,004)	,000	,009 (,004)	,023	,010 (,004)	,012
<b>Identity</b>						
I see myself as citizen of the nation (-)	-,043 (,013)	,001	-,052 (,013)	,000	-,053 (,013)	,000
I see myself as citizen of the EU (+)	,255 (,011)	,000	,245 (,011)	,000	,241 (,011)	,000
Immigrant policy (+)	,028 (,011)	,014	,033 (,011)	,004	,029 (,012)	,012
<b>Knowledge</b>						
Interested in politics (+)	,020 (,009)	,031	,023 (,009)	,013	,021 (,009)	,030
Highest educational level attained (+)	,003 (,005)	,520	,005 (,005)	,264	,004 (,005)	,376
<b>Trust</b>						
Confidence: the government (+)	,289 (,011)	,000	,233 (,011)	,000	,234 (,011)	,000
Confidence: major companies (+)			,221 (,011)	,000	,221 (,012)	,000
Hard work (+)			,011 (,003)	,001	,012 (,003)	,000
Most people can be trusted (+)					,019 (,019)	,328
Adj. R2	,265		,306		,307	
N	7115		6846		6617	

The factors related to trust in social institutions contributed substantially to the overall explanatory power of the model (see Model 2). The two social trust variables increase the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> from 0,265 to 0,306.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Standard diagnostics indicated that the OLS assumptions of the absence of multicollinearity and a normally distributed error term were not violated.

Confidence in the EU depends partly on an underlying belief that hard work can bring a better life. Individuals who display cynicism about their chances to succeed under the prevailing social structures are also less confident about the EU. Two of the strongest correlates of EU confidence are related to trust in social and political institutions. Europeans who have little confidence in major companies have little confidence in the EU. Confidence in the EU also relates strongly to confidence in national governments. These correlations retain their statistical significance even when a general propensity to trust other people is added as a control variable (see Model 3). Unlike Crepez [2008], we find that having a predisposition to trust offers little explanatory power on its own. Our analysis suggests that trust in social and political institutions has an independent effect on trust in the EU.<sup>7</sup>

### VII. CONCLUSION

Given the current global financial and political challenges, public skepticism towards major economic and government institutions is understandably strong. The mortgage and banking crises, the global recession, the Eurozone debt crisis and a variety of political scandals on both sides of the Atlantic have led to increasing dissatisfaction with current leadership in the boardrooms and in the halls of government. The rejection of the constitutional treaty in Europe and the rise of the Tea Party movement in the United States are recent indicators of anti-government sentiment. These events, which occurred shortly after the WVS held its fifth wave of interviews, have had a strong negative effect on public confidence in social and political institutions. Yet, current events explain only part of the story. The WVS data indicates that many Europeans had little confidence in the EU even when economic conditions were relatively strong.

The present analysis of European public opinion demonstrates that confidence in the European Union depends specifically on citizens'

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<sup>7</sup> A two-stage least squares regression analysis (using "confidence in parliament" as an instrumental variable) indicated that there is no evidence of an endogenous relationship between confidence in the national government and confidence in the EU.

trust in major social and political institutions, such as national governments and major companies, rather than on a general propensity to be trusting of other people. We think this finding may be equally valid for international organizations. A similar multivariate model of confidence in the UN generates regression coefficients that are close to those found in the present analysis [Diven and Constantelos 2011], which suggests that common underlying factors account for public confidence in the two institutions. Leading explanations of public opinion, including territorial identity, interest in politics, and an individual's economic circumstances find support in our empirical analysis. Yet, in finding that non-EU citizens express greater support of the EU than do its own citizens, we also raise questions about focusing too narrowly on economic explanations of public opinion. It is clear that citizens' attitudes about the EU are shaped by many factors, including their personal experiences with institutions closer to home.

#### APPENDIX: VARIABLE DESCRIPTIONS

Variables marked with an asterisk have been recoded, with the values reversed from their original order in the WVS.

\*V23. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people? 1 Need to be very careful 2 Most people can be trusted.

V68. How satisfied are you with the financial situation of your household? Please use this scale again to help with your answer :

Completely dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely satisfied

\*V95. How interested would you say you are in politics? Are you  
4 Very interested; 3 Somewhat interested; 2 Not very interested;  
1 Not at all interested

## The Roots of Confidence in the European Union

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- \*V120. 10 In the long run, hard work usually brings a better life  
...9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2...  
1 Hard work doesn't generally bring success – it's more a matter  
of luck and connections
- \*V124. How about people from other countries coming here to  
work. Which one of the following do you think the govern-  
ment should do?
- 4 Let anyone come who wants to?
  - 3 Let people come as long as there are jobs available?
  - 2 Place strict limits on the number of foreigners who can come here?
  - 1 Prohibit people coming here from other countries?

Here are a number of organizations. For each one, please indicate how  
much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence,  
quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all?

A great deal (4) Quite a lot (3) Not very much (2) None at all (1)

\*V138. The government (in your nation's capital) 1 2 3 4

\*V142. Major Companies 1 2 3 4

\*V146. The European Union 1 2 3 4

People have different views about themselves and how they relate to  
the world. Would you indicate how strongly you agree or disagree  
with each of the following statements about how you see yourself?:  
Strongly agree (4) Agree (3) Disagree (2) Strongly disagree (1)

\*V212. I see myself as citizen of [country] 1 2 3 4

\*V213. I see myself as citizen of Europe 1 2 3 4

V237. This means you are \_\_\_\_ years old (*write in age in two digits*).

V238. What is the highest educational level that you have attained?  
[NOTE: if respondent indicates to be a student, code highest level  
s/he expects to complete]:

- 1 No formal education
- 2 Incomplete primary school
- 3 Complete primary school
- 4 Incomplete secondary school: technical/vocational type

- 5 Complete secondary school: technical/vocational type
- 6 Incomplete secondary: university-preparatory type
- 7 Complete secondary: university-preparatory type
- 8 Some university-level education, without degree
- 9 University-level education, with degree

V244. Are the tasks you perform at work mostly manual or non-manual? Use this scale where 1 means “mostly manual tasks” and 10 means “mostly non-manual tasks”:  
Mostly manual tasks 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Mostly non-manual tasks

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