

The Reluctant Europeans: Britain and the EU, 1952–2014

David Sanders

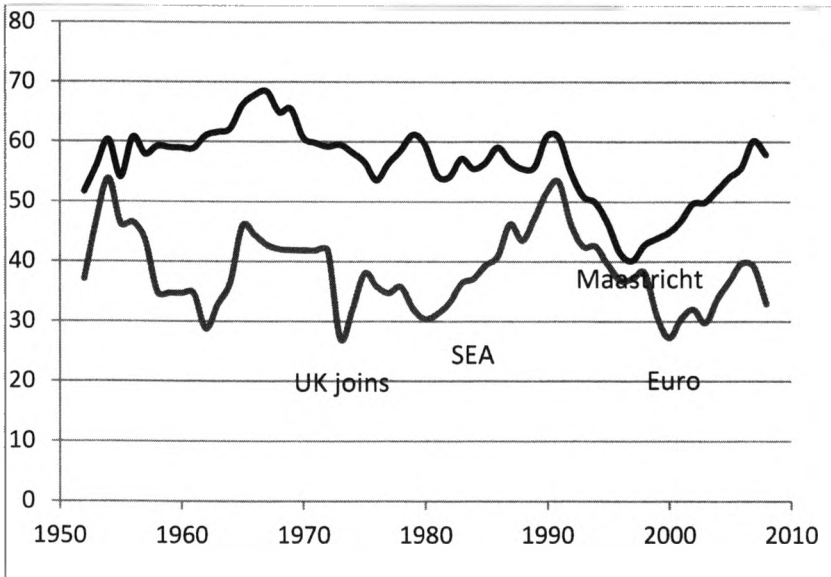
The elections for the European Parliament that took place in May 2014 revealed a widespread dissatisfaction with established political parties across the EU. Eurosceptic parties made significant electoral gains in a large number of countries in both northern and southern Europe. In the UK, the United Kingdom Independence Party secured the largest share of the popular vote (27.4%), beating the incumbent Conservatives (24% of the vote) and Liberal Democrats (8%) as well as the main Labour opposition (25%). Even in Scotland, where the hugely successful SNP was looking forward enthusiastically to the forthcoming referendum on Scotland's possible exit from the UK, UKIP obtained 10% support and a corresponding Scottish seat in the European Parliament. The reasons for UKIP's success in this particular election have been picked over extensively in recent popular and scholarly writings – it resulted from a combination of genuine Euroscepticism, a generalised concern about decades of under-controlled immigration to the UK, and a broad conviction that the establishment political parties were increasingly failing to address the problems and concerns of ordinary people. This chapter, however, focuses less on the specifics of UKIP's successes in May 2014 and more on the general disposition towards Euroscepticism that the British public has displayed for over six decades. The British stood aloof from the European project from its inception in the early 1950s. The country modified its position in the 1960s and early 1970s as it became clear that economic growth in the original EEC 'six' was outstripping growth rates in the UK. But from the time of the 'retrospective referendum' on EC membership in 1975, substantial (though varying) proportions of the British electorate have felt ill at ease with Britain's membership of the European club.

The first part of the chapter tries to put this British disaffection into comparative perspective. It shows that there is good reason to suppose that at both the mass and elite levels the British have always been 'reluctant Europeans'. Part 2 asks whether different groups of UK voters vary in their predispositions towards Europe. It shows, using a new dataset covering the period 2004–2013, that they do. Voters with greater 'resources' are generally more pro-EU than those without them –

though there are some notable (though explicable) exceptions. Finally, part 3 of the chapter tries to identify the major factors that explain *why* the British, on average, are so Eurosceptic. These range from elite-level conceptions of Britain's 'place in the world' to mass-level understandings and misunderstandings about the way in which EU and national institutions interact and intersect. With the available data, it is difficult to assess the precise empirical merits of the various claims that are made. Nonetheless, the factors that are identified offer a possible agenda for developing and evaluating causal explanations of British 'Euro-reluctance' in future research.

British Euro-reluctance in Comparative Perspective

Measuring public attitudes towards the European Union is not always straightforward. For one thing, the character of the Union itself has changed over time. For another, the form in which mass survey questions about "Europe" have been asked has also changed. Figure 1 summarises the results of an extensive statistical analysis conducted by Anderson and Hecht (2014), in which the authors explored long-term response patterns to a range of questions about the European project in a number of countries between 1952 and 2008. The graphs presented show variations in support for European integration in Britain and Germany over this period. Germany is chosen as a typical comparator country – similar levels of support for integration are also found in the other countries analysed by Anderson and Hecht. As the figure shows, support for integration is consistently lower in Britain than it is in Germany. And certain events, such as Britain's joining the then EEC in 1973 and the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, appear to be associated with "turning points" in support for integration. This said, support appears to vary over time in relatively unpredictable ways even though on occasion the British and German graphs appear to move in the same direction for lengthy periods of time (as after Maastricht and after the introduction of the euro). The key point, however, is that support for "Europe" is on average markedly lower in Britain than it is elsewhere – the British *public* at least has always been more Eurosceptic than its continental counterparts.

Figure 1: Percentage Support for European Integration, 1952–2008

Source: Anderson and Hecht (2014); lower graph is UK, higher graph is Germany.

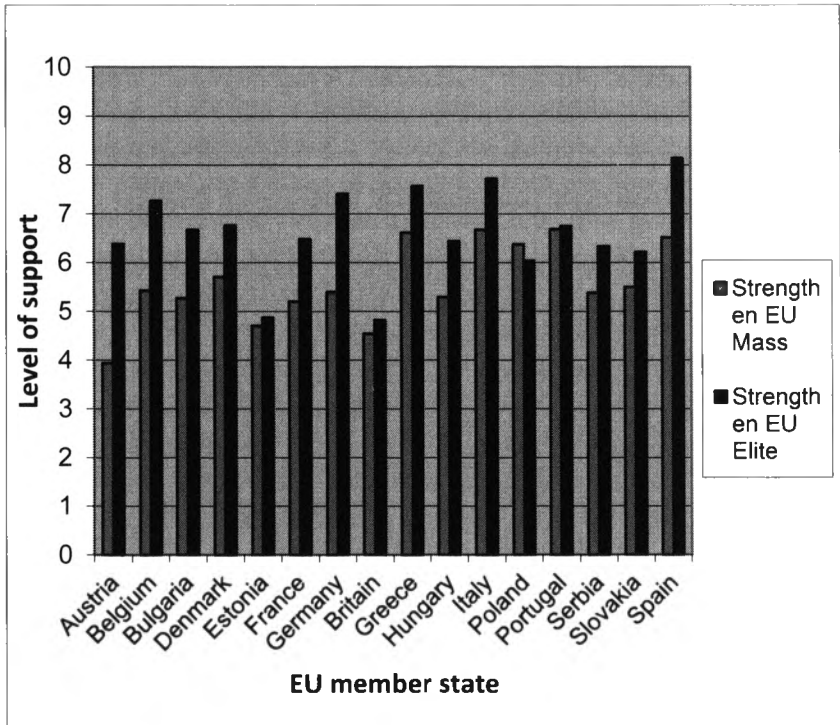
The sort of mass evidence presented in Figure 1 has been complemented in recent years by more extensive and detailed surveys of mass and elite opinion in a large number of European countries. The IntUne project, funded by the European Commission, conducted identical simultaneous mass and elite surveys in 16 European countries in 2007 and 2009.¹ The responses to the surveys provided the evidential base for an extensive analysis of attitudes towards the EU across countries at both the elite and mass levels (Sanders et al, 2012a and 2012b; Sanders and Toka, 2013). The empirical analysis conducted found that there were four key dimensions of EU support that were consistently observed across all the countries surveyed: *Strengthen EU* (the extent to which respondents thought that EU institutions should be strengthened relative to those of national governments); *EU Policy Scope* (the extent to which individuals thought that the policy competences of EU institutions should be extended); *sense of EU Representation* (the extent

¹ The total number of mass respondents in each survey wave was 16,000, with approximately 1000 random digit dialling telephone interviews being conducted in each country. The elite interviews were conducted face-to-face, with 1354 respondents from national legislatures and 706 senior executive respondents sampled from the top 100 companies in each country.

to which people trusted EU institutions); and sense of *European Identity* (people’s feelings of being European).

Figures 2-5 report the country by country variations in each of these EU attitude measures, at mass and elite levels, as revealed by the IntUne surveys. Each attitude measure is calibrated on a 0 to 10 scale where a high (low) score represents a high (low) level of European support. Figure 2 shows the pattern of response with regard to preferences for *strengthening the EU*. Here, the UK displays the lowest elite average score and the second lowest mass level score. On this attitude dimension, in short, both elite and mass respondents from the UK demonstrate similar (relatively high) levels of Euro-reluctance.

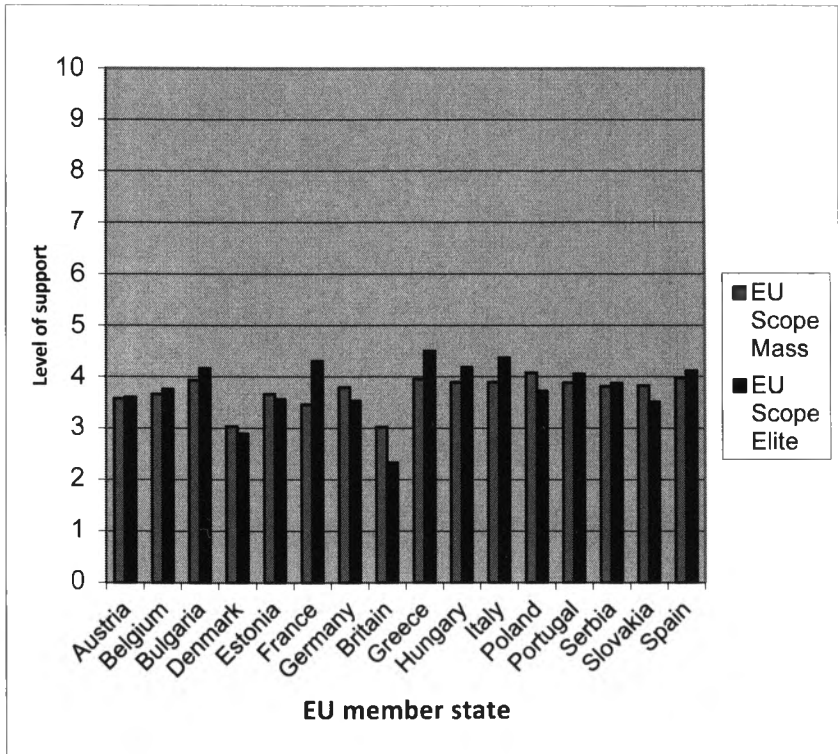
Figure 2: Elite and Mass Support for Strengthening the EU, 2009



Source: Sanders and Toka (2013). Average responses to a question on the principle of strengthening the EU’s institutions relative to those of national governments. Support measured on a scale 1-10, where 10 means ‘strongly in favour’ of strengthening the EU’s institutions and 1 means ‘strongly against’.

Figure 3 reports the equivalent distribution of responses with regard to preferences for extending *EU policy scope*. As the figure shows, the overall pattern again demonstrates the Euro-reluctance of the British. Support for transferring more policy areas to EU institutions is lowest in Britain at both the mass and elite levels, with mass respondents being even less supportive than their elite counterparts.

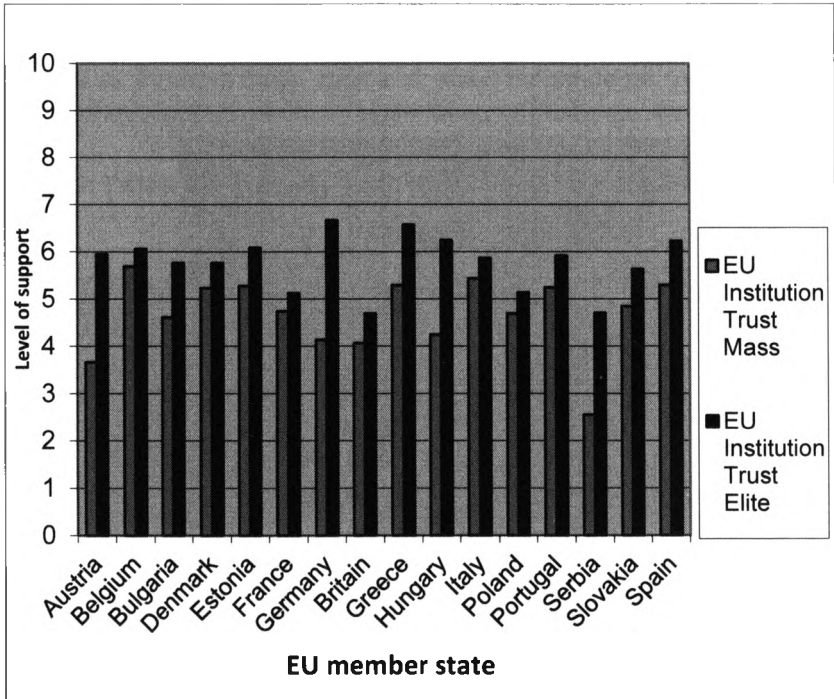
Figure 3: Elite and Mass Support for Increasing EU Policy Scope, 2009



Source: Sanders and Toka (2013). Average responses to a question on the principle of transferring more policy areas to the EU level. Support is measured on a scale from 1-10, where 10 means 'strongly in favour' of transferring more policy areas and 1 represents 'strongly against'.

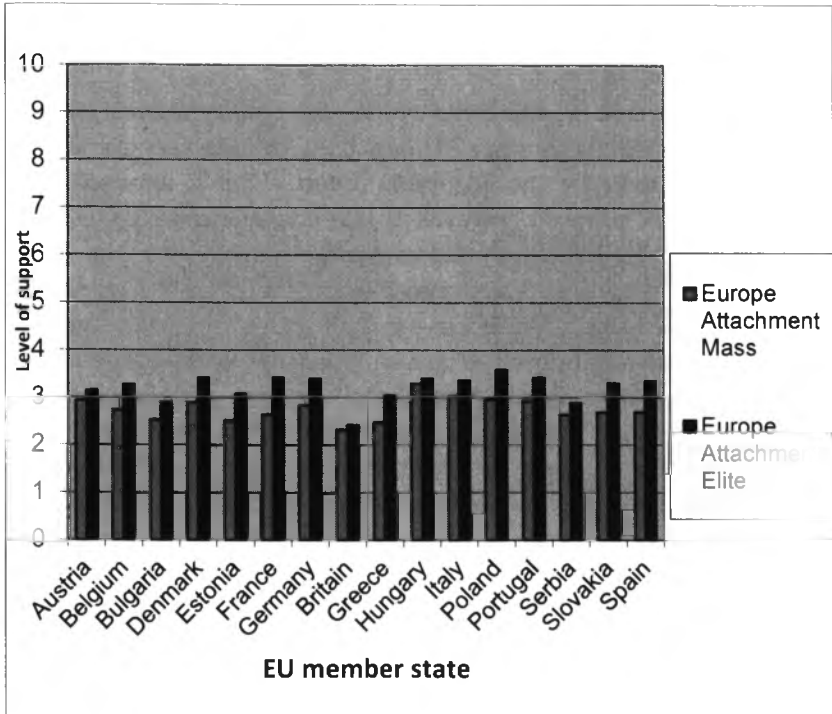
Figure 4 shows the cross national pattern of mass and elite *trust* in *EU institutions* (the Commission and the Parliament). As the figure indicates, the UK displays the lowest amount of institutional trust at the elite level and among mass respondents only Serbia and Austria reveal higher levels of mistrust.

Figure 4: Elite and Mass Trust in EU Institutions, 2009



Source: Sanders and Toka (2013). Average responses to a question on whether individuals trust the European Commission and European Parliament. Trust is measured on a scale from 1-10, where 10 means high trust, and 1 means the lowest level of trust.

Finally, Figure 5 summarises the cross national variations in elite and mass measures of *European identity*. It is clear from this figure that most respondents in most countries do not feel “strongly European”. Nonetheless, the same broad pattern is evident as in our other measures of EU support – the sense of European identity, although low everywhere, is lowest of all in the UK at both mass and elite levels.

Figure 5: Elite and Mass Levels of European Identity, 2009

Source: Sanders and Toka (2013). Average responses to a question on whether individuals felt 'European'. Responses are measured on a scale from 1-10, where 10 indicates that an individual felt strongly European, and 1 indicates that an individual did not feel European at all.

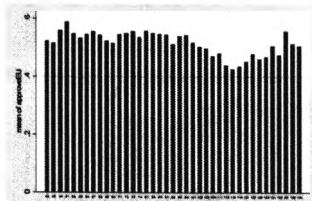
It would be possible to speculate almost endlessly about the country specific findings presented in Figures 2 to 5. The crucial point, however, is that the graphs reported strongly reinforce the notion that the British are distinctively Eurosceptic across a range of measures of EU support – and that this scepticism extends across both mass and elite respondents. There is clearly something that needs explanation here. As Figure 1 suggests, support for the European project has always been lower in Britain than in comparable European countries, even though it is varied over time. And, as Figures 2-5 demonstrate, this Euro reluctance embraces a range of elite and mass measures of EU support. The crucial question is *why* the British are so ill disposed to Europe. In the next section, I explore the differences in EU attitudes that are evident among different *groups* of British citizens. In the final

section, I seek to provide some tentative answers to the puzzle of Britain's Euro-reluctance.

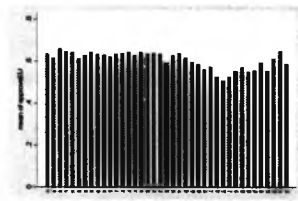
Who are the British *euro*sceptics?

It is clearly not the case that all British voters are equally Eurosceptic. In common with citizens of other EU countries, Britons vary significantly in their support for the European Union. What is interesting about the pattern of support, however, is that across a wide range of different sociodemographic and political groupings, support varies in very similar ways over time. The British Election Study began a series of monthly cross-sectional sample surveys of the British public in April 2004, known as the Continuous Monitoring Survey. The surveys include a regular question about respondents' approval (versus disapproval) of the European Union. The responses to this question allow for an analysis of EU approval that can be broken down by sociodemographic group, newspaper readership, party identification, economic perceptions and attitudes towards immigration. Figure 6a presents the overall monthly EU approval data in quarterly form. Presenting the data this way means that each data point summarises the views of over 3000 individuals and reduces that the amount of short-term sampling fluctuation. The results show that, across the British public as a whole, support for the EU was more or less constant from the spring of 2004 until the second quarter of 2009. Support subsequently declined progressively, as the sovereign debt crisis began to unfold, reaching its nadir in the third quarter of 2011 and recovering thereafter. By the end of 2013 support had almost returned to its long-term average of around half (52%) of the British electorate approving of Britain's membership of the EU.

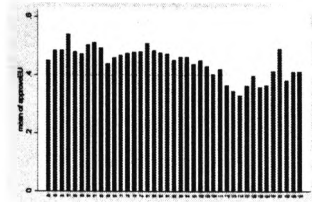
Figure 6: Variations in Percentage EU Approval by Socio-demographic, Press Exposure and Attitudinal Group, 2004Q2–2013Q4 (Source: BES Continuous Monitoring Survey, 2004–2013)



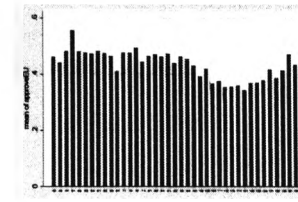
6a: All Respondents (52%)



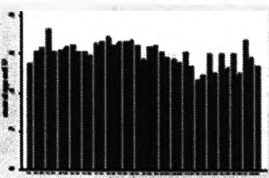
6b: Professional/Managerial (61%)



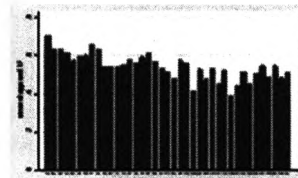
6c: clerical/Sales/Foremen (45%)



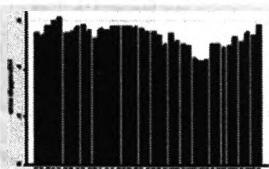
6d: Manual/Other (44%)



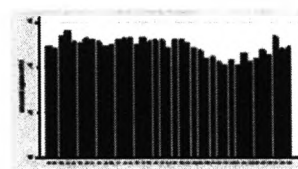
6e: Scotland (61%)



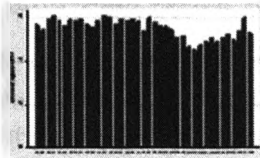
6f: Wales (54%)



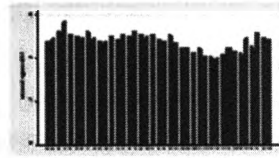
6g: London and SE (54%)



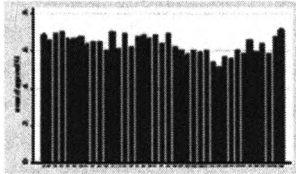
6h: England - rest (49%)



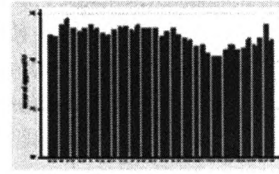
6i: Male (55%)



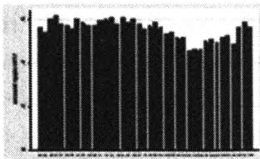
6j: Female (48%)



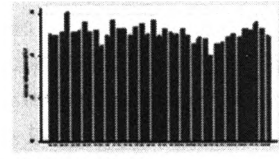
6k: Ethnic minority (63%)



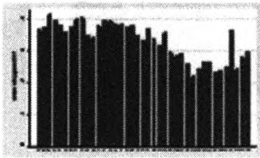
6l: White (51%)



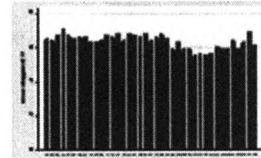
6m: Mortgage (56%)



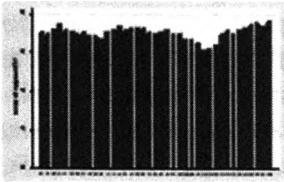
6n: Rents (51%)



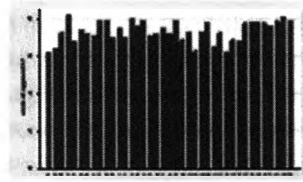
6p: Reads Express, Mail, Sun, Teleg (33%)



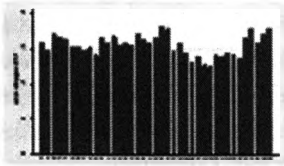
6q: Reads other papers (63%)



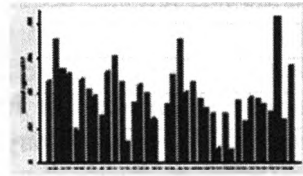
6r: Labour Identifiers (71%)



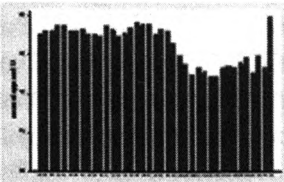
6s: Lib-Dem Identifiers (74%)



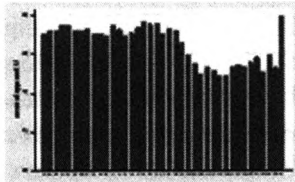
6t: Conservative Identifiers (31%)



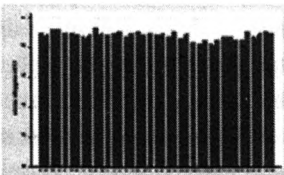
6u: UKIP Identifiers (3%)



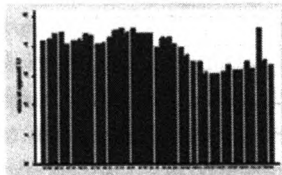
6v: Financial Optimists (67%)



6w: Financial Pessimists (44%)



6x: Keep Immigration Same/Increase (88%)



6y: Reduce Immigration (40%)

What is intriguing about the decline-recovery pattern in EU support shown in Figure 6a is that it is replicated across a wide variety of

demographic and other subgroups. Figures 6b-6d break down over-time movements in EU approval by social class. As the figures indicate, although professionals and managers exhibit a higher *level* of EU support (61%) than other social class groups (45% for clerical/sales/foremen and 44% for manual/other), the same sort of decline – recovery pattern that occurs in Figure 6a is replicated in Figures 6b-d. This clearly indicates that *exogenous shocks like the sovereign debt and subsequent Euro crisis move people in different social classes to change their views of the EU in very similar ways.*

This conclusion is reinforced in most of the remaining graphs displayed in Figure 6. A comparison of Figures 6e-6h shows that although levels of EU approval vary across different parts of the UK (with Scotland showing the highest level of support at 61%), the broad decline-recovery pattern is observed everywhere. Similar patterns are observed among men and women (Figures 6i and 6j); among members of ethnic minorities and whites (Figures 6k and 6l); and among homeowners and renters (Figures 6m and 6n). Even when we move away from simple demographics to newspaper readership, we find a similar pattern among readers of Eurosceptic newspapers (Express, Mail, Sun and Telegraph readers – Figure 6p) and among readers of other papers (Figure 6q), though there are predictable difference in average EU approval levels, with readers of Eurosceptic papers exhibiting substantially lower EU support (33%) in comparison with readers of other papers (63%). Among those who identify with different parties, UKIP apart, the same broad pattern obtains. As Figures 6r-6t show, average EU approval among Labour and Liberal Democrat identifiers is significantly higher (both exceed 70%) than among Conservatives (31%), but support dips temporarily after 2009 among all three sets of identifiers. A similar, though lagged, effect is also evident for financial optimists (Figure 6v) and financial pessimists (Figure 6w), where a similar decline-recovery pattern can be observed – though there is a again a clear difference in approval levels, with optimists showing far higher levels of approval (67%) than pessimists (44%). Finally, there is less of an obvious decline-recovery pattern (though there still is a hint of one) when the sample is divided into those who wish to see immigration reduced (Figure 6y) and those who believe it should stay the same or be increased (Figure 6x). Here, however, there is clearly a marked difference in EU support *levels*, with EU approval among those who wish to see immigration reduced averaging only 40% over the 2004-2013

period compared with 88% among those who take a more relaxed attitude to immigration.

Three broad conclusions are suggested by the graphs presented in Figure 6. First, as noted, attitudes towards the EU among almost all of the subgroups, however defined, tend to move together over time in more or less the same way. Second, this broad pattern of over time movement probably reflects the operation of *external* factors which have similar effects across subgroups. In this case, the most likely source of the downward trajectory in EU approval from the autumn of 2009 onwards was the emerging sovereign debt crisis which transmuted into a more general crisis about the future and survival of the Euro. As the crisis slowly dissipated, so approval of the EU gradually recovered – by the end of 2013 almost back to the levels that had been enjoyed in 2008. Third, with some exceptions, the groups that exhibit the highest *levels* of support for the EU tend to be those with the most resources (in terms of social class position, gender, housing tenure), those who identify with political parties broadly sympathetic to the European project, and those who are relatively relaxed about immigration to Britain. The notable exceptions are Scots and members of ethnic minorities (who presumably see Brussels as a potential source of protection, respectively, against domination by Westminster and the white majority).

The problem with the sort of aggregate level evidence presented in Figure 6, of course, is that it is very broad brush. Are these aggregate level differences replicated when we consider individual level data? This issue can be directly addressed by specifying and estimating an individual level model of EU support over the 2004 to 2013 period. Table 1 presents two simple individual level models of EU support in which the individual cases are all the respondents interviewed in the Continuous Monitoring Survey between April 2004 and December 2013. The dependent variable in both models is the individual's score on a 4-point EU approval scale in which 4 means strong approval and 1 means strong disapproval. The first model (A) includes demographics, newspaper readership, economic perceptions and immigration attitudes as independent variables. The second model (B) includes the same variables but adds party identification terms and a dummy variable term to reflect the overall dip in approval associated with the sovereign debt/Euro crisis as control variables. Estimation is by clustered ordered logit, where the clusters are the time-points (quarters) when the data were collected.

Table 1: Clustered Ordered Logit Models of EU Approval (four-point scale), 2004Q2–2013Q4

	<i>Model A</i>			<i>Model B</i>		
	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Robust SE</i>	<i>Signif</i>	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Robust SE</i>	<i>Signif</i>
Male	.28	.02	.000	.32	.02	.000
Scotland	.09	.02	.000	.05	.02	.006
Wales	.12	.03	.000	.04	.04	.254
Prof/Managerial	.39	.02	.000	.50	.02	.000
Clerical/Sales	.17	.02	.000	.18	.02	.000
Mortgage	.17	.01	.000	.14	.01	.000
Financial Optimist	.25	.02	.000	.21	.02	.000
Financial Pessimist	-.38	.04	.000	-.32	.02	.000
Mail/Express/Sun/Tel e-graph	-.69	.02	.000	-.53	.02	.000
Ethnic Minority	.07	.03	.026	.11	.03	.001
Negative Emotions Immigration	-.34	.01	.000	-.33	.01	.000
Reduce Immigration	-1.45	.03	.000	-1.25	.03	.000
Conservative Identifier				-.21	.03	.000
Labour Identifier				.71	.04	.000
Lib-Dem Identifier				.76	.03	.000
UKIP Identifier				-1.94	.05	.000
Plaid Cymru Identifier				.47	.11	.000
SNP Identifier				.09	.06	.139
Green Identifier				.56	.07	.000
2010q4-2012q4 dummy				-.38	.03	.000
Pseudo R2	.13			.17		

Source: BES Continuous Monitoring Survey, 2004-2013.

N 97606, 39 Clusters (quarters)

The results presented in Table 1 can be interpreted very straightforwardly. The coefficients reported in Model A are all statistically significant. They confirm that even when all of the individual-level effects on EU approval identified above are considered simultaneously, EU support remains higher among men (as opposed to women), in Scotland and Wales (as opposed to England), among professionals and

non-manual workers (as opposed to manual workers), among homeowners (as opposed to renters), among financial optimists (as opposed to neutrals and pessimists), among readers of Eurosceptic papers, among those from ethnic minority groups (as opposed to whites), and among those who have negative (as opposed to neutral or positive) emotions towards immigration and who believe immigration should be reduced. Pseudo R2 is a modest .13, though this relatively low level of explained variance is not uncommon with individual level data of this sort. The results reported for model B show that almost all of the individual level variables included in Model A retain their significance when controls are applied for a party identification. The only exception is the coefficient for Wales, which loses its significance – suggesting that it is identification with Plaid Cymru rather than being Welsh as such that enhances EU approval. The signs on the coefficients for the party identification terms or make good sense given the stances that the various party elites take towards the EU. The largest negative coefficient ($b=-1.45$ implying significant reduction in the probability of EU approval) is for UKIP identifiers, with a smaller negative effect ($b=-.38$) for Conservative identifiers. Other things being equal, identification with any of the other parties increases an individual's approval of the EU. Pseudo R2 shows a modest increase to 17.

The sort of findings reported in Table 1 always need to be interpreted with caution. As with almost any model based on survey data, there is always the risk of endogeneity – the possibility that some of the independent variables included in the model could themselves be affected by the dependent variable – which is known to distort estimates of 'causal effects'. For example, individuals who identify strongly with UKIP might do so precisely because they disapprove very strongly of the EU and UKIP is the only important British party that unambiguously opposes Britain's EU membership. Similarly, an individual might choose to read the *Express* precisely because it shares her/his own Eurosceptic position. This said, it seems relatively unlikely that the independent variables included in Model A (with the possible exception of the newspaper readership term) would generate serious endogeneity effects. In this sense, Model A does offer a tentative partial explanation of why some Britons are more Eurosceptic than others – it is partly a matter of demographic characteristics (typically rooted in less access to resources), partly a matter of financial pessimism (having concerns about the financial prospects of one's household) and partly a reflection of negative attitudes and emotions towards immi-

gration. Model B demonstrates that these effects remain equally powerful even when controls are applied for partisanship and that the overall level EU approval is additionally affected by exogenous shocks.

The difficulty with these findings is that they are unavoidably modest. They certainly do not provide a *full* account of variations in British Euroscepticism either across individuals or over time. More seriously, they fail to explain the underlying predisposition towards Euroscepticism that was illustrated at the mass level in Figure 1 and confirmed at both mass and elite levels in Figures 2-5. In trying to offer a fuller explanation of British Euro-reluctance, we have to move away from what can be demonstrated empirically and more into the realm of speculation. The explanatory factors that are advanced in the next section are not capable of being supported by solid empirical evidence given current data availability. This is not to say that the hypotheses underpinning them are intrinsically incapable of being falsified or that they are empirically false – merely that I cannot provide strong (or, in some cases, any) supporting evidence for them at present.

Why are the British (on average) so Eurosceptic?

It is sometimes suggested that British elites are Eurosceptic because they wilfully choose to misunderstand the true nature of the European project, and that British public opinion is Eurosceptic because the mass public is either stupid or ignorant, or both. Unfortunately, this sort of glib and easy interpretation is unhelpful – and almost certainly wrong. British Euroscepticism is rooted in the stories that British elites and masses have told about themselves and about Europe for a very long time. In my view, these stories can be broken down into seven sets of explanatory or causal factors that together provide at least a plausible account of why the British seem incapable, to date, of shedding the mantle of Euroscepticism that has characterised both elite and mass discourse in the UK since the early 1950s. I do not in any sense seek to integrate these different explanatory factors into a theory of British Euroscepticism. If the British are sceptical about Europe, I am sceptical about theory. I have yet to encounter a single theory of social (or economic or political) behaviour that has provided a convincing explanation of why people think and act in the diverse ways that they do. I accordingly offer a putative, eclectic set of explanations of British Euro reluctance that is self avowedly non-theoretical. As noted above, it is also speculative.

Explanation (1): The historical role conception of British foreign policy. Historians and scholars of international relations have engaged in extensive documentary analysis aimed at uncovering the ways in which British foreign policy makers have thought about Britain's role in the world and the principles that might guide its foreign policy. The broad consensus is that for at least two centuries prior to 1945, the core of British strategy was that Britain would have no permanent allies and no permanent enemies; it would play the role of an imperialist power-balancing actor that always sided with the weakest coalition of powers to prevent the emergence of hegemony in Europe or elsewhere. In the years after 1945, with Britain's position weakened by two world wars, this doctrine transmuted into a model that Winston Churchill described as Britain's "three circles" of interest – in Europe, in the "special relationship" with the United States, and in the evolving Empire-cum-Commonwealth. Britain had enduring economic and strategic interests in all three circles and it accordingly needed to use all diplomatic and if necessary military means to maintain and extend them. The emphasis on the "Empire" circle dissipated with decolonisation but its residue lingers on, reinforced by the frequently repeated support role that Britain has taken on to add weight to US military efforts aimed at "defending Western interests" worldwide. The continuing shadow of the Empire circle in the determination of British foreign policy was reflected in Britain's military involvement in Afghanistan after 2001 and in Iraq after 2003. It is reinforced by the continued (and often stated) belief among British politicians and diplomats that Britain "punches above its weight" in international forums. Critics of this idea regard it as an embarrassing self-delusion that prevents its exponents from asking themselves what conceivable benefits might flow from any state's ability to punch above its weight. The key point, however, is that the continued attachment to all three of Churchill's circles has made it difficult for British foreign policy makers to embrace a strategy that prioritises Europe and the EU in a manner similar to that adopted by its European partners. There have been occasional moments when a more European focused approach appeared to be possible. In 1990 for example, a survey of the British foreign policy elite showed overwhelming support for Britain's membership of the Exchange Rate Mechanism, the forerunner of the Euro. This support could have presaged a more European oriented approach to Britain's global role, particularly as it coincided with the end of the Cold War. However, subsequent events intervened – and Britain's ignominious

exit from the ERM in September 1992 provoked a distancing of the UK from moves towards monetary union in the EU. This distancing in turn reinforced doubts about the European project more generally, particularly within the (currently incumbent) British Conservative Party.

Explanation (2): Perceptions of UK economic and financial disadvantage deriving from EU membership. One of the key arguments that motivated Britain's applications to join the EEC in 1961/2, 1967/8 and 1972 was that British exporters would enjoy greater and easier access to an enlarged European market. As Figure 7 shows, there has certainly been a significant increase in the percentage of UK exports that are destined for European markets since 1960. What is less clear, however, is that Britain's *balance* of trade has been improved over the same period. There is certainly a widespread belief in the UK that somehow our European partners have benefited more from improved market access than Britain has. Figure 8 shows how Britain's balance of trade with Europe changed between 1900 and 2010. The figures reported show Britain's balance of trade deficit (or surplus) with Europe as a percentage of all UK exports. Although there have been two periods (in the late 1940s and late 1990s) when the gap between UK exports to and imports from Europe was close to zero, for most of the period (and certainly since 2000) European exporters have been far more successful than their UK counterparts in taking of the advantage of the single European market. Not surprisingly, perhaps, this feeds British sentiment that "they get more benefit out of the EU than we do", which in turn represents a resource that can be mobilised by those with strong Eurosceptic opinions.

Figure 7: UK Exports to Europe (black) and EU (grey) as Percentage of UK exports, 1900–2009

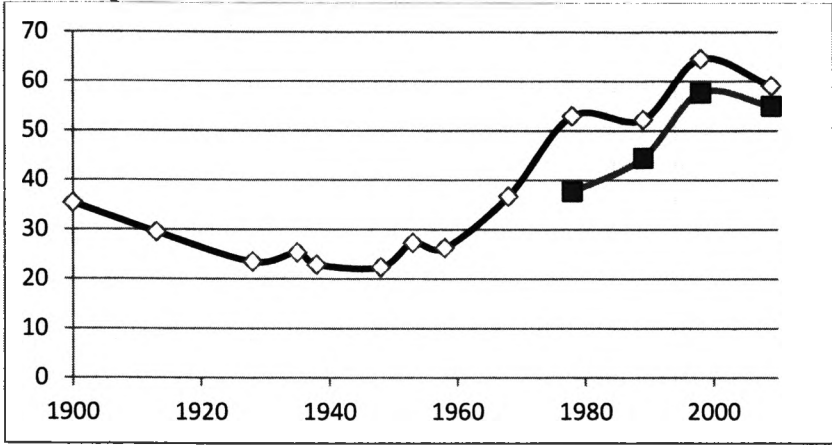
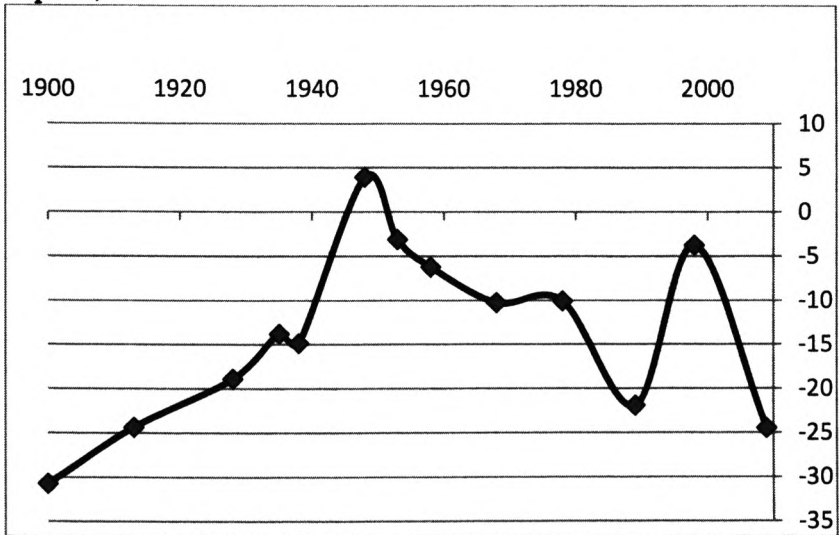


Figure 8: UK Balance of Trade with Europe as a Percentage of all Exports, 1900–2009



There are two related considerations that help to reinforce the sense that Britain has not benefited economically from EU membership. The first is a widespread popular belief that the UK makes a disproportionately high net contribution to the EU budget whilst at the same time failing to obtain many indirect advantages from that budgets distribution. There is no question that Britain is one of the largest net

contributors to the EU – a position that derives almost entirely from the fact that it is one of the largest and most prosperous countries inside the union. What is much less well-known in the UK is that there are significant indirect advantages that accrue to British business and the wider public as a result of Britain's EU membership. Unfortunately, these advantages are much more difficult to demonstrate and quantify than simple calculations about EU budget contributions. It may well be the case, as Figure 8 shows, that Britain has a large trade deficit with Europe. However, there is no telling how much worse that position might be if Britain was not part of the EU. Equally, it is almost impossible to assess either the precise extent of the foreign direct investment from inside and outside the EU that is drawn to the UK as a result of Britain's membership of the EU or the indirect trading benefits that Britain derives from the greater bargaining power that it enjoys as an EU member state in international trade negotiations. These indirect benefits of EU membership are not only difficult to measure; they are also generally (and often disgracefully) underplayed in popular discourse about the EU – again with the result that Eurosceptic opinion flourishes.

A second factor that has reinforced the belief that Britain fails to prosper economically from its EU membership relates to the perceived damage that the continuing Euro crisis has inflicted on both the European economy in general and upon the EU's economically weaker member states in particular. There is certainly a widely held belief in Britain that the European political elite, in the ideological pursuit of ever-closer political union when the component national economies remain radically different, has failed to understand that the premature move towards monetary union has had disastrous economic consequences for productive activity in Europe. The European elite has framed the Euro crisis as a monetary problem that can be solved by the policies of the European Central Bank. However, for many critics in the UK, the real crisis in the European economy is one of *production*, where producers of industrial goods in Europe's increasingly large economic periphery cannot compete with their much more efficient industrial counterparts in Germany and northern Europe. For these critics, the European elite's response to the continuing Euro crisis has not been to conclude that the widening and deepening associated with the Euro has failed and therefore needs to be modified or reversed. Rather, they have concluded that yet further widening and deepening (further monetary and fiscal integration) is urgently needed. The mes-

sage that this conveys to the critics is simple. The European elite is effectively saying: “we screwed up by widening and deepening before economic convergence had occurred; give us more powers to widen and deepen even further and this will solve the problem”. The precise mechanisms, through which this greater accrual of powers to Brussels might provide a solution to the production crisis that Europe confronts, are not articulated. It is perhaps not surprising in these circumstances that scepticism about the judgement of European political leaders – and of the European project more generally – is reinforced.

Explanation (3): Constitutional uncertainty and incomprehension.

Notwithstanding the various EU treaties that successive UK leaders have signed, the British public and a large section of the British political elite have failed to grasp or accept the principle of ‘ever-closer union’. As a result they have resisted efforts to increase either the general powers or the specific policy competencies of the EU’s central institutions. This has in turn created a situation where any strengthening of EU institutions is greeted by many Britons with the cry “we didn’t sign up to this”.

Constitutional incomprehension manifests itself in three domains: legislative, executive and judicial. In the legislative field the key difficulty has always been the British doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty. This was traditionally understood to mean that any parliament could in principle pass any legislation for which a majority could be secured or reverse any law or treaty obligation that had been entered into by its predecessors. Strictly, the doctrine ended in 1973 when the UK acceded to EEC, since the treaty of accession explicitly transferred certain tightly defined policy competence powers to the Council and Commission. In spite of this formal change in the character of parliamentary sovereignty, British political discourse has continued to emphasise the role of parliamentary sovereignty, even though it is being progressively challenged by treaty changes (such as the Single European Act in 1986 and Maastricht in 1992) and the accumulation of EU Directives over time. The European Parliament is widely seen in Britain as unrepresentative and ineffectual, yet paradoxically every attempt to increase EP power collides with the notion that this represents a further reduction in the sovereignty of the Westminster Parliament. The British, in short, have never been convinced that the supranational pooling of sovereignty could act as a substitute for, or even an improvement upon, losses in national sovereignty. Their resistance to the further losses of sovereignty implied by the transfer of evermore

policy competences to Brussels has accordingly continued to fuel their Euroscepticism.

A second form of constitutional incomprehension relates to the executive functions of government. For most of the post-war period Britain was dominated by a two party system that produced very clear executive responsibility and accountability. Voters knew at election times exactly who the rascals were that they wanted to throw out – and they frequently acted accordingly. This “clarity of responsibility” was frequently cited as a key feature of British domestic politics and it contrasted strongly with the much more diffuse notions of executive responsibility that characterised the politics of the EU. Although responsibility is far less clear in contemporary UK politics than it was historically – with a coalition government in Westminster and multi-party systems in the Scottish Parliament and in the Welsh and Northern Ireland assemblies – the EU model has always appeared alien and fundamentally unaccountable, with its effective executive divided between the Council and an unelected Commission and President, neither of which can be removed by popular vote. This is obvious incongruity in the executive branch of the EU has been an easy target for cynicism, criticism and Euro scepticism.

The third area of constitutional incomprehension involves the judiciary. Under Britain’s “unwritten constitution” there was until the 1970s a relatively strong tradition of the judicial branch – courts – being subordinated to politics. Not only was there an absence of easy legal routes through which citizens could challenge state administrative decisions, but judges themselves preferred if at all possible to avoid making critical decisions on difficult political or moral issues. Major changes in policy were typically effected by major new legislation, not by new judicial interpretations of old laws and practices. This position contrasted quite strongly with judicial practice in the United States and in those European countries where, under written constitutions, the courts played a decisive role as the highest – and frequently deployed – interpreter of the law and of the Constitution. The British have always found it difficult to come to terms with the fact that the European Court of Justice enjoys a much more powerful and explicit role in interpreting EU law and EU treaties than was common in UK domestic law at the time of Britain’s entry into the European Community. Ironically, since the early 1970s there has been a significant increase in the judicialisation of British politics. The range and volume of appeal processes against administrative and court decisions have in-

creased enormously. A formal system of *judicial review* has been introduced, which can be deployed to interrogate, evaluate and reform all manner of UK administrative processes. The UK has even created a Supreme Court, formally designated as the definitive source of legal judgement and, critically, interpretation. This increased role for the judiciary in UK politics has correspondingly weakened the legislature and the executive. It is sometimes cynically observed that it is now easier to affect policy change in Britain by persuading a court to interpret an existing law in one's favour than it is to affect policy change by enacting new legislation. Ironically, the enhanced role for the judiciary that Britain has witnessed over the last four decades or so would probably have occurred anyway, as a result of changes in juridical theory and practice across the developed world. However, because of the increased prominence accorded to the ECJ (especially in the popular press), it is the EU that has frequently been the target of blame for the disempowerment of legislative politics – even though most of the responsibility for any such disempowerment lies elsewhere.

Explanation (4): The mistake over the European Court of Human Rights. As if it were not enough that the EU is often blamed for a judicialisation of politics that would probably have taken place anyway, there is a widespread mistaken belief among large sections of the British public that the ECHR is an EU institution, a sort of specialist version of the ECJ. Most of the decisions made by the ECHR are largely ignored by the British press and commentators. However, in a number of critical judgements which have supported a liberal, human rights-based interpretation of the relationship between the individual and the state, the ECHR has received rather more media attention. As a result, its decisions have frequently appeared to contradict the deep-seated authoritarian beliefs and instincts of the majority of British voters. Evidence from repeated surveys, particularly those conducted by the British Election Study in 2001, 2005 and 2010, show that most UK voters place themselves squarely at the authoritarian end of liberal-authoritarian scales – and that they perceive themselves to be far more authoritarian than the mainstream political parties (Clarke et al 2004, 2009; Whiteley et al, 2013). Decisions of a court that seem to be more in sympathy with the rights of criminals and welfare recipients than the rights of taxpayers and the community at large are not well received by the British public. Indeed, many UK voters regard to the phrase “human rights” as something that only criminals enjoy – and usually at the expense of the silent majority. It is in relation to the ECHR and

its judgments that Britain's *euroscptics* do show themselves to be ignorant, and perhaps even a little stupid. Because they confuse ECHR with the EU itself, their disenchantment with the decisions of the Court is translated into negative assessments of the EU in general.

Explanation (5): The British discourse on immigration. Opinion polls in the UK have repeatedly shown that for over four decades immigration has been a major issue for British voters. Until recently, however, the main political parties were not prepared seriously to debate it publicly. The reason for this silence was simple: since most immigration was from the Caribbean, Africa or the Asian subcontinent, politicians were afraid of being labelled as racist if they identified immigration as "a problem". Behind this public silence, voter discontent – inchoate and in effectively articulated – developed from the belief that communities were changing without any consent having been asked of or given by those most directly affected. The only groups that articulated real concern were those from the far right – and fortunately their views were generally rejected by the mainstream parties, by the media and by most voters. Since the expansion of the EU in the early 2000s, with a significant influx to the UK of white immigrants from Eastern Europe, individuals, groups and political parties have increasingly been able to raise immigration as a public issue without eliciting immediate and potentially damaging accusations of racism. A discourse has accordingly developed in which people who are concerned about immigration in general are able to articulate those concerns publicly by referring to the possible immigration to the UK of large numbers of low-paid East European workers who will compete for low pay UK jobs and drive down real wages. Since these workers have the right to enter and work in Britain because of EU labour mobility rules, the EU has become a critical focus and rallying point for any individual, group or party that wishes to see less immigrants (of whatever sort) coming to Britain. Euroscpticism, in short, has appropriated anti-immigrant sentiment, cloaking it with an aura of non-racist political respectability. It has simultaneously damaged the image of the EU in the eyes of some Britons by blaming the EU for Britain's continuing high levels of net immigration.

Explanation (6): Beliefs about the superior honesty, transparency and efficiency of British *versus* EU institutions. A number of survey based studies of public attitudes towards the EU have shown that British respondents display relatively high levels of trust towards their own domestic political institutions, in contrast to the relatively low levels of trust that they feel towards the institutions of the EU. The British pattern is similar to that observed in a number of other northern and western European countries, but it contrasts sharply with the pattern typically observed in southern and eastern Europe, where EU institutions are generally trusted much more than their domestic counterparts. A likely explanation for this differential pattern is that the lack of trust in national institutions evident in the south and east reflects a genuine failure in performance: state institutions in those countries do not perform particularly effectively and their citizens accordingly prefer to place their confidence in the EU. There can be no doubt, however, that there is a broad swathe of popular opinion in the UK that strongly mistrusts the integrity of the EU's financial procedures and reward structures. The popular press in Britain makes much of the repeated inability of the annual EU budget round to pass conventional audit procedures. And, notwithstanding the scandals surrounding British MPs' parliamentary expenses of recent years, there is frequent press criticism of the disproportionately high salaries and allowances that are paid to MEPs and EU functionaries in carrying out their duties. Brussels and Strasbourg are collectively regarded by many Britons as a "grave train", populated by greedy and self-serving activists and bureaucrats, which appear to be incapable of putting their own house in financial order. To make matters worse, it is also widely believed in Britain that EU directives, particularly in the fields of employment law and health and safety at work, are implemented far more conscientiously and thoroughly by UK state agencies and quangos than is the case in many other EU states. These sentiments are fed and mobilised by the Eurosceptic elements of the popular press. There is undoubtedly a huge amount of exaggeration in all this, with EU directives frequently (and usually erroneously) being blamed for unnecessarily restrictive local authority and company policies that have been introduced for reasons entirely unrelated to the EU. As is often the case, however, mud sticks – and it is the EU that picks up the blame, with a resultant reinforcement of Euroscepticism.

Explanation (7): Inconsistent party leadership. It is a self-evident truth of democracy that political leaders must listen carefully to the followers and publics that they represent, but that at the same time they must also be prepared to provide clear leadership and direction when decisive policy decisions need to be taken. Since the 1960s, the two main UK parties – the Conservatives and Labour – have been seriously internally divided over Europe and have taken varying positions towards the European project over time (Forster, 2002). The Liberal Democrats, for their part, have been consistently pro-European but, in spite of their participation in the current coalition government, they have remained minor players on the British political stage since the 1920s. Although the dominant groups inside the Conservative and Labour parties are currently pro-European, internal opposition has always made it difficult for the party leaderships, in either government or opposition, to make consistent efforts to lead public opinion towards Europe, rather than to follow it. The result has been that there has never been a consistent message from either the Conservatives or Labour that has sought to explain how Britain’s strategic and economic interests can be strengthened through its membership of a strong European Union. Indeed, there have frequently been times when the leadership of the Conservative party in particular has felt obliged to bury the European issue altogether, in order to avoid giving its own “backbench opposition” an opportunity publicly to display its deeply held anti-European sentiments. This lack of constructive engagement with Europe, over several decades, by Conservatives and Labour alike has left the field ripe for exploitation by *euroscptics*. The recent success of UKIP in the 2014 European Parliament elections, which very effectively mobilised popular concerns about immigration, is a clear testament to the failure of the mainstream parties to engage the British electorate with a pro-European agenda and message that might properly explain the risks and dangers that would be associated with Britain’s departure from the EU.

Conclusions

The conclusions from the analysis presented here can be very simply stated. First, and this can be thoroughly documented empirically, the British are reluctant Europeans at both the mass and elite levels. On almost all dimensions of European attitudes, British elite and popular opinion is less supportive and approving of the European Union than equivalent opinion elsewhere. Second, Britons with economic and so-

cial resources tend to be more supportive of the EU than those without them, but even their support (like everyone else's) dipped in the wake of the sovereign debt crisis after 2009. Third, the sources of British Euro scepticism are many and varied. I have tried here to identify the ones that I consider to be most important. The list that has been presented is not proffered as one that can be fully (or in some cases even partially) substantiated empirically. The necessary data to support the explanatory claims I have proposed are simply not at present available. This is not to say they cannot be collected in the future – but this must be a matter for future survey research at both the elite and mass levels, a not inconsiderable task. In my judgement, of the various explanatory factors I have listed probably the most important are the following: (1) the general concern that the UK fails to benefit proportionately in economic terms from trade with other EU countries; (2) the constitutional uncertainty associated with the continued British discourse surrounding parliamentary sovereignty and with the judicialisation of politics, particularly in the field of human rights; and (3) the way that immigration as an issue has been underplayed by the mainstream parties, leaving the field free for exploitation by the Eurosceptic right.

I offer one final thought about the character of British Euroscepticism and Euro-reluctance. In April 2013 the British polling company YouGov asked a representative sample of British people if they believed that the MMR vaccine (against Measles, Mumps and Rubella) was safe or unsafe. Scientific studies, widely reported in the press, have repeatedly shown that the vaccine is safe, so this was really a question about people's belief in scientific evidence. When the responses were broken down by party preference, it was found that 3% of Labour voters thought MMR was unsafe, with corresponding figures of 1% for Conservatives, 12% for Liberal Democrats and 28% for (typically Eurosceptic) UKIP supporters. I am not suggesting that we read too much into this single statistical finding. However, it does perhaps suggest that Euroscepticism among some British voters is less about Europe and more about a vein of generic, ignorance-based, scepticism that exists among a section of the British public. If this ignorance-based scepticism can effectively be challenged in one domain – as it clearly was in relation to MMR – it can perhaps also be challenged in its anti-EU Eurosceptic manifestation.

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