

simultaneously. Moreover, efforts to understand the contingent nature of cueing effects have only recently begun and have focused exclusively on the top-down linkage (Ray, 2003). Thus, our understanding of mass–elite linkages in the context of European integration remains incomplete.

This paper revisits the question of who is cueing whom. Using Eurobarometer and expert survey data for the period 1984–2002, we estimate a series of dynamic simultaneous equations models that allow for both top-down and bottom-up effects. Our focus is on linkages between national party elites and their supporters, since this has been the emphasis of most prior studies and is a particularly good place to observe the politics of European integration. We consider how context and the attributes of political parties and their supporters influence the nature of the linkage between these actors. We conclude by drawing out the implications of our findings for the future of European integration.

The politics of European integration: Two views

According to received wisdom, at least until the late 1980s the process of European integration was accompanied by a ‘permissive consensus’ on the part of the European citizenry. The technical nature of the European project and its marginal impact on the individual lives of citizens created a scenario in which an ill-informed, uninterested and generally favourably disposed public gave political elites free rein in pursuing integration. For the most part, the permissive consensus thesis suggests that there is no mass–elite linkage or that, if one exists, it is ever so slight and runs from top to bottom (see Feld and Wildgen, 1976).

Much has been made of the ‘erosion’ of this permissive consensus in the post-Maastricht era. The EU of the 1990s and of today is more relevant to the lives and interests of European citizens, as it increasingly affects their individual welfare and involves policies (notably the common currency, citizenship, immigration, the common defence and foreign policy) that are both highly salient and highly controversial (Gabel, 2000; Hooghe and Marks, 2005). Moreover, recent scholarship casts doubt on the permissive consensus theory. Research on public support for European integration suggests that even relatively uninterested and ill-informed individuals hold meaningful and systematic preferences on the EU. Relying on self-interest and macro-economic explanations of political attitudes, utilitarian theory implies that those who experience direct material gains from EU policies tend to support integration, whereas those who are hurt by such policies are likely to be against it (Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993; Gabel, 1998a, 1998b; Anderson and Reichert, 1995). Work on national identity and support for integration also

suggests that the public hold meaningful preferences on the EU but that their evaluations rely on symbolic political considerations, i.e. feelings of national identity (Carey, 2002; McLaren, 2002; Hooghe and Marks, 2005; Netjes and Edwards, 2005).

European integration as a bottom-up process

This work on public opinion and mass behaviour suggests the potential for a bottom-up connection, whereby mass publics shape elite positions over European integration. One implication of the EU becoming a more salient issue and of individuals holding systematic preferences on European integration is that rational political parties have a strong incentive to base their positions on EU policies on electorate preferences (Carrubba, 2001). Although parties may not be seeking to turn the EU into an issue to attract new voters, surely they are paying attention to their constituents in order to avoid losing them. If it is true that voters are now paying attention to the EU, then no rational party would pursue unpopular policies. Instead, parties would actively monitor the electorate, in particular their constituents, making sure to be on the same wavelength on EU matters. Note that, in contrast to the permissive consensus argument, here constituents do not simply loosely define the space in which political elites can manoeuvre; rather, constituents continually feed party elites with information about their preferences, to which these elites invariably respond. In sum, the causal arrow goes from constituents to party elites.

In a recent article, Carrubba (2001) finds that there is evidence for this bottom-up connection in the EU and, moreover, that this is not a post-Maastricht phenomenon. Using a two-stage least squares regression model and party manifesto data from 1977–92, Carrubba (2001: 153) demonstrates ‘that the more pro-EU the electorate is, the more pro-EU national parties tend to be’. His results are particularly suggestive since he focuses on the EU pre-Maastricht. It seems reasonable that we would observe public opinion exerting an influence on parties in a post-1992 Europe in which the EU is salient and contested, but Carrubba shows that national political parties were responding to voters’ preferences on European integration years before the EU became such a heightened issue. Carrubba’s results are provocative and persuasive, in part because his estimates of the bottom-up effect control for potential reverse causation.

European integration as a top-down process

At least one other interpretation of the correlation between mass and elite preferences on European integration is possible: the causal arrow may flow

from elites to masses. This, indeed, is the essence of top-down theories of integration, which stress that citizens take cues from political elites, including party leaders, and adjust their views to be more or less in line with those elites (Feld and Wilgden, 1976; Franklin et al., 1994; Wessels, 1995; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Ray, 2003). One theoretical impetus for the top-down view is a more pessimistic reading of the cognitive limitations of citizens than is typically found in bottom-up theories. Top-down theorists argue that European integration presents sufficiently technical issues that citizens may find it hard to formulate a view. For instance, it may be difficult to make utilitarian calculations about the impact of European integration, because it is unclear how the EU affects a person's life (Chong, 2000). Boundedly rational (Simon, 1985) citizens may look for elite cues, including those from parties they tend to support, and may adjust their views accordingly, either through information or through persuasion (Zaller, 1992; Lupia and McCubbins, 1998). The top-down view may also represent a division of labour between citizens and elites, whereby citizens expect elites to provide them with information that can form their opinions.

There is impressive evidence of top-down effects on public opinion about European integration. The 1989 European Election Study provides evidence that the opinions of party supporters are for the most part related to the opinions taken by parties (Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996). Using party manifesto data as an indicator of a party's position on European integration, Wessels analyses the direction of influence between the parties and their electorates and finds that 'parties are able to mobilise their supporters, bringing them closer to the party, whether for or against the EC' (Wessels, 1995: 161). In his test of various theories of support for integration, Gabel (1998b) demonstrates that, alongside utilitarian considerations, elite cues are an important influence on public opinion. Similarly, Anderson (1998) illustrates that at least in some countries, notably Denmark and France, political influences are a key determinant of public support for the EU.

One of the most recent and informative contributions to this body of literature is Ray's (2003) evaluation of the conditional influence of party positions on public opinion about the EU. Ray points out that the empirical record of elite cueing is rather mixed when it comes to European integration and argues that the contradictory results stem from the conditional nature of partisan influence. His findings indicate that the effect of party positions on the electorate varies with levels of disagreement among parties, party unity, issue salience and party attachment. Ray's work is a significant advance over many of the previous studies in that, like Carrubba (2001), he controls for reverse causation.¹

Table 4 Mass–elite linkages and opinion leadership

<i>Electoral context</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Party elites</i>		<i>Supporters</i>	
		<i>b</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>s.e.</i>
Weak leadership	423	0.155	0.156	0.024	0.027
Strong leadership	112	0.766**	0.160	0.240**	0.090

Notes: Table entries are G2SLS random effects panel estimates and their estimated standard errors. The estimate for party elites is the effect of the EU stance of party supporters. The estimate for party supporters is the effect of the EU stance of party elites. The models include country dummies and other predictors, which have been suppressed in the table (these are available upon request from the authors).

** $p < .01$ (one-tailed).

in parties rich in opinion leaders. If there are comparatively few opinion leaders, then it becomes much more difficult for supporters to have their views represented. Second, the ability of party elites to cue their supporters depends critically on the strength of opinion leadership. Parties starved of opinion leaders are generally parties that have a difficult time cueing their supporters. Thus, when opinion leadership is weak, neither bottom-up nor top-down linkages seem to operate.

This finding has a great deal of political significance when one considers the distribution of opinion leadership across parties. Almost 74% of the mainstream parties score weak on opinion leadership, compared with just less than 50% of the remaining parties. If there is a disconnection between masses and elites, it seems to affect the mainstream parties disproportionately. Of course, these are also the parties that participate more frequently in the government and thus carry more weight in pushing European integration into new territory.

Conclusions

Mass–elite linkages lie at the heart of the politics of European integration. In this paper, we have uncovered evidence that these linkages run in both directions: party supporters influence elites and the reverse is also true. Additionally, we have uncovered evidence that mass–elite linkages are conditioned by a variety of factors, including electoral context, party (system) attributes and attributes of supporters. These findings carry significant weight. At a theoretical level, we have demonstrated that theories of mass–elite linkages on European integration should allow for reciprocal causation and explore the conditional nature of cueing effects. Conditionality in the

dynamic representation of party supporters carry special weight, since the literature to date has failed to explore them. At a methodological level, we have amended past efforts at estimating mass–elite linkages by explicitly incorporating the time series aspect of elite and opinion data on European integration. As a result, we believe that our estimates provide a more accurate view of the connections between masses and elites.

Finally, our findings are relevant for a practical understanding of the politics of European integration. On the whole, we find very little evidence for allegations that political elites are out of step with the masses when it comes to EU policies. There are strong bottom-up and top-down processes, which cause the EU stances of party supporters and elites to be associated. However, within mainstream political parties, there is more evidence of a disconnection between party elites and supporters. Those parties tend to attract relatively few opinion leaders and, where opinion leadership is weak, so too are bottom-up and top-down linkages.

Of course, our study has limitations. We have discussed only one aspect of mass–elite linkages, namely the connection between national party elites and their supporters. A more comprehensive analysis would also consider connections between party elites and the median voter, between government policies and citizen preferences, and between European parties and voters. Second, our analysis has explored the conditionalities of mass–elite linkages one at a time, rather than pitting them against each other in a multivariate analysis. Third, we lack data for the past three years. Finally, some of the moderators may suffer from endogeneity. For example, why do mainstream parties tend to attract fewer opinion leaders? These issues will have to be addressed in future research.

Despite these limitations, our results are suggestive of the future of European integration. The legitimacy of future integration efforts depends on the maintenance of an effective mass–elite linkage. Although many factors play a role in this linkage, several stand out. First, referendum mechanisms seem to be a useful lubricant of mass–elite linkages. After the end of our study period, the Dutch introduced a consultative referendum. Although the outcome caused some parties to question the wisdom of a referendum, it has actually led to widespread discussions in the parties about how to connect better with their supporters.

Second, inter-party dissent is critical for an effective mass–elite linkage. In this regard, the rise of anti-EU political entrepreneurs may prove beneficial for the European integration process, because they force other actors to engage their base, through either representation or persuasion. Moreover, these entrepreneurs will help to increase the salience of the EU in national and European elections.

Finally, opinion leadership is a key component. Often ignored because it does not seem to affect opinion directly (e.g. Gabel, 1998b), we believe that a reappraisal of the role of opinion leadership is in order. Forging a better linkage between masses and elites may require increasing awareness of and interest in the EU. This will take time and the input of many actors, including the mass media and the EU itself. However, political parties have a role to play in this process, by formulating clear positions, by emphasizing the importance of European integration as an issue, and by demonstrating that they take their supporters seriously.

Notes

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- 1 In examining the influence of intra-party dissent on voter opinion in this issue, Gabel and Scheve also control for reverse causation by means of an instrumental variable approach.
- 2 We would have made the opposite prediction had we focused on mass–elite linkages defined in terms of the median voter (see Adams et al., 2004).
- 3 An alternative approach would be to use vote intention. However, this measure is unavailable for the most recent Eurobarometer surveys. Moreover, vote intention poses methodological concerns because respondents may intend to vote for a party because of its EU stance. This makes it difficult to determine whether a respondent's EU stance is a function of party cues or whether the respondent self-selected into the party because of its EU stance. Identifying the electorate on the basis of ideology does not raise this problem and has the added advantage that we focus not on a party's current electorate but on its potential electorate (Carrubba, 2001). Note, however, that there is an implicit model of voting behaviour here that may not always hold true, namely that votes are cast on the basis of ideology using the proximity of the positions of the voter and the party. Nevertheless, identifying party supporters on the basis of ideology seems reasonable. When we matched predicted vote intentions on the basis of ideology to actual vote intentions when we had data on them, we correctly classified 65% of the respondents (see also Van der Eijk and Franklin, 1996: Ch. 20).
- 4 The model does not contain lagged values of the endogenous variables. Apart from the fact that the use of lagged dependent variables has come under attack in recent years (Achen, 2000), the lags in the current data are too large to be meaningful, averaging a little over two years. Moreover, the present approach addresses autocorrelation through a GLS approach. This approach has been shown to work well (Baltagi and Li, 1992), but, as an added security,