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Mixed Messages

Party Dissent and Mass Opinion on European Integration

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ABSTRACT

Mass opposition to Europe may stem from mainstream as well as formally Euroskeptic parties. Large parties in the member states of the European Union (EU) tend to combine support for Europe with a high level of intra-party dissent over the issue. Thus, these parties provide heterogeneous yet potentially influential signals about European integration to their supporters. In this paper, we examine the effect of intra-party dissent on the opinion of party supporters. Our estimation of this relationship explicitly addresses the issues of endogeneity, omitted variables, and measurement problems endemic to the empirical study of elite effects on mass opinion. Specifically, we use variation in the central-ization of candidate selection rules as an instrumental vari-able for intra-party dissent. We find substantial evidence that intra-party dissent does indeed increase variation in support for integration among party supporters. With common levels of intra-party dissent, even pro-EU parties can cause a substantial portion of their supporters to adopt anti-EU opinions.

Introduction

The recent failures of national referendums on the EU Constitution in France and the Netherlands pose an interesting puzzle regarding our understanding of public opposition to or support for European integration. A longstanding tradition in public opinion research argues that voters adopt their opinions about policies by taking cues from their preferred party. Yet, whereas we find mainstream parties generally adopting a formal pro-EU position, many supporters of these parties have adopted anti-EU positions in referendums (Crum, in this issue). Thus, variation in voter opinion does not appear to follow the cues from parties closely.

What explains this disconnect? Perhaps referendum votes reflect public support for the incumbent government at the time rather than voters' actual attitudes toward European integration (Franklin et al., 1994). Although plausible, this same mass/elite divide has persisted across countries and over time in the absence of referendums (Hooghe, 2003; Schmitt and Thomassen, 2000: 324). Alternatively, political parties may not consider the issue of European integration sufficiently important to provide effective cues. This may have applied 20 years ago, but since the 1980s the salience of European integration in the manifestos of political parties has generally increased over time (Hooghe and Marks, 2006; Kriesi, in this issue).

In this paper, we examine an alternative explanation for this puzzle. Although most mainstream parties publicly support European integration, very few such parties are perfectly united on this issue. Indeed, intra-party dissent over the issue has increased fairly consistently over the past 20 years (Hooghe and Marks, 2006). This dissent could disrupt cue-taking in a number of ways. We develop and test one such model of the effect of dissent. Our theoretical argument is that, as in Zaller's (1992) general model of opinion formation, voters adopt opinions based on the opinion of like-minded elites (e.g., the voter's preferred party). When that elite opinion within a party is unified, partisans receive that cue and adopt the party position. But when that elite opinion within the party diverges, partisans differentiate among the cues such that partisan opinion divides on the issue, leading to greater hetero-geneity of partisan opinion. That is, we expect greater intra-party dissent over European integration to increase the observed variation in public opinion about European integration among partisans. This cue-taking, consequently, can result in partisans adopting positions that are inconsistent with the official public position of the party.

Estimating this effect of intra-party dissent on the opinions of party supporters faces the same difficulties found in the broader literature investigating the effect of elites on mass opinion. The fundamental problem is that

there are strong theoretical reasons to expect party elites to adopt policy positions in response to the preferences of their voters (see Schneider and Weitsman, 1996). This raises a clear problem of endogeneity in estimating the effect of party dissent on partisan opinion. Moreover, determining the influence of elites' cues on partisans is complicated by the possibility that party elites and partisans alter their opinions in response to observing the same stimuli (e.g. an international event), raising the problem of omitted variable bias. And, finally, measurement error in the variables used to indicate elite opinion generates the possibility of attenuation bias. For these reasons, it is difficult to interpret correlations between party dissent and partisan opinion as indications of the causal effect of dissent on opinion.

To address these problems, we use variation in the centralization of candidate selection rules as an instrumental variable for intra-party dissent. Centralized candidate selection processes, dominated by the central or parliamentary party organization, should be more likely to foster dissent between the party leadership and party activists than more open candidate selection processes where party leaders must gain the support of party activists or the rank-and-file membership. This relationship and, as we argue below, the implausibility that candidate selection rules have a direct effect on mass opinion about Europe make the centralization of candidate selection a reasonable instrument for intra-party dissent. The instrumental variable method allows us to interpret our estimates of the relationship between intra-party dissent and variation in support for integration among party supporters as reflecting the causal effect of the former on the latter rather than a simple correlation. Further, our empirical strategy generates consistent estimates in the presence of unmeasured and omitted common events that elites and voters might be responding to, as well as measurement error in our variable capturing party dissent.

Employing this methodology, we find substantial evidence that intra-party dissent does indeed increase variation in support for integration among party supporters. This result suggests that, because many large parties in the EU member states tend to combine support for Europe with intra-party dissent over the issue, mass opposition to Europe has elite sources from mainstream as well as from formally Euroskeptic parties.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, we present our argument about how intra-party dissent influences partisans' opinion formation about European integration. In the third section, we describe our data and develop our estimation strategy, including discussing the methodological problems endemic to estimating party effects on public support for or opposition to European integration. The fourth section presents the results of our analysis and the paper concludes with a discussion of the implications for our

understanding of how parties shape their voters' attitudes toward European integration.

Intra-party dissent and public attitudes toward European integration

Intra-party dissent in the EU

We begin by defining dissent and describing its prevalence in national parties in the EU member states. Dissent, as traditionally used in the literature, refers to internal divisions within political parties on the issue of European integration (Franklin et al., 1994; Ray 2003a; Steenbergen et al., in this issue). This dissent involves publicly observable debates and disagreement within parties among activists, factions, and leadership. Consonant with this definition, Gary Marks, Marco Steenbergen, David Scott, and Carole Wilson collected data on party dissent for most political parties in the EU member states for the period 1984–99. The resulting Marks and Steenbergen (2004b) data set includes a measure of party dissent derived from an expert survey. For each EU member state, country experts were asked to estimate the degree of dissent over European integration for a set of national parties, where the options were: (1) complete unity; (2) minor dissent; (3) significant dissent; (4) party evenly split on issue; and (5) leadership position opposed by a majority of party activists. The expert estimates for each party in each year were then averaged. The data set includes expert average estimates for 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, and 1999. The total number of observations on parties over this time period is 682.

Is dissent over European integration uncommon among parties? The mean level of dissent for the full set of parties is 1.72, with a minimum of 1, a maximum of 4, and a standard deviation of 0.57. This indicates that levels of dissent are on average low but that most parties are not perceived to have a perfectly unified position on European integration. More importantly, significant dissent is not uncommon: over 30% of the parties received a score of greater than 2. The average level of dissent has generally increased over time, with the party average score increasing from less than 1.65 in the 1980s to 1.80 in the 1990s. Furthermore, national party systems differ substantially in the average level of party dissent. Not surprisingly, the United Kingdom has relatively high dissent, with parties averaging a score of 2.2. The Netherlands has the lowest average party dissent score (1.5).

More importantly for this study, do many voters support parties that feature dissent over European integration? A conventional assumption in the

study of public opinion about the EU is that voters take cues on the issue from the party they support electorally (e.g. Gabel, 1998; Ray, 2003a, 2003b; Steenbergen and Jones, 2002; Steenbergen et al., in this issue; Wessels, 1995). Thus, for dissent to be of consequence to cue-taking, dissent would need to be prevalent in parties that attract large numbers of voters. In fact, dissent is most prevalent in large parties. As Table 1 shows, the parties that receive the most votes are the most likely to show intra-party dissent. Small parties – those receiving less than 5% of the vote in the most recent election – have a relatively unified position on Europe. But parties that attract more than 25% of the electorate are relatively uncohesive on this issue. This difference between large and small parties in the mean level of dissent is statistically significant at the 0.00 level ($t = 7.4$).

In sum, these descriptive statistics indicate that intra-party dissent characterizes the partisan cues on European integration observed by a large number of voters. That said, most parties have a low level of dissent and so it is not at all clear that intra-party dissent is important for understanding whether and how parties influence their voters. Before examining empirically the importance of dissent, the next section outlines our theoretical expectations for how intra-party dissent shapes public opinion.

How does intra-party dissent affect public opinion?

Although there are a number of potential effects of intra-party dissent, we focus on two alternatives that resonate with much of the literature on the influence of parties on the political opinions of their voters. First, in forming their own evaluation of European integration, partisans may average across all messages from elites in their party, including those that dissent from the official party position. In the presence of dissent, this behavior would lead partisans to adopt, on average, views about Europe that diverge from the official party position. This reduction in congruence between the party and its voters, however, would in this view be commonly shared, at least on average,

Table 1   Intra-party dissent by party vote share

	Party vote share		
	> 25%	< 25%	< 5%
Average dissent	2.00	1.68	1.57
Standard deviation	0.65	0.54	0.47
Number of parties	96	586	360

by party supporters. Thus intra-party dissent would not have an influence on the variation of opinions among partisans on European integration.

A second and, we argue, more persuasive account borrows from Zaller's (1992) work on public opinion formation in response to elite cues. Zaller (1992) distinguished voter opinion formation when elites provide a single cue from situations where elites provide competing cues. In the one-message setting, voters with sufficient political awareness to receive the elite cue adopt the elite position.[1] In the current context, this is analogous to partisans receiving a unified cue from their party about European integration. And, with a unified message, we would expect to see partisans' opinions converge on their party's position, which is the standard cue-taking effect described in the literature on public support for European integration.

However, when the elite cues to which voters are exposed diverge, Zaller expects to see divergence in public opinion on the issue. In a setting with two conflicting cues, a voter accepts or resists the elite cues depending on the consistency of these cues with the voter's interests, values, and political predispositions (Zaller, 1992: 45). As a result, we expect to see more divergent opinions of voters on an issue when the voters differ in their interests, values, and political predispositions and when elites provide divergent cues. A simple way for voters to infer the consistency of a cue with a particular interest or predisposition is to consider the context of the cue, particularly the political or social affiliation of the source of the cue. Consequently, voters adopt different policy positions owing to their differential willingness to accept or resist elite cues from different sources.

Returning to the question at hand, recall that party dissent is measured such that dissent is characterized by observable conflict between leadership and activists. Applying Zaller's model, this conflict can cause divergence in opinion among partisans. Activists typically have a base of constituents in the party (e.g. labor leaders represent union members within many socialist parties). Consequently, the base is likely to accept cues from its activist leaders and resist a divergent cue from party leaders. Other partisans, who do not have the same interests or values as the activists, are likely to accept the cues of the party leadership and resist the cues of the activists. This model suggests that intra-party dissent has at least two effects. First, since some partisans will follow the cues of activists advocating a position on Europe at odds with the leadership, dissent reduces the congruence between the party and its voters, as in the first simple averaging argument. The second implication, which is at odds with the averaging argument, is that, as dissent increases, we expect the diversity of partisans' policy positions to increase as well. So long as party activists and leaders have different electoral bases and the members of these bases can observe elite cues, then dissent should raise the heterogeneity of partisan opinion about European integration.[2]

The key empirical prediction that distinguishes these two arguments is the effect of intra-party dissent on the variation of partisan opinion about Europe. Our adaptation of the Zaller model suggests a positive relationship, whereas the averaging account does not. Further, it should be emphasized that a simple null prediction that parties do not influence the opinions of their supporters also does not indicate that dissent causes greater variation in partisan opinions about Europe. Consequently, the central empirical question of this paper, to which we turn in the following section, is whether or not intra-party dissent increases the variation of opinion among party supporters.

The two arguments that we have focused on do not exhaust the possible effects of intra-party dissent on opinion formation. For example, Steenbergen, Edwards, and de Vries (in this issue) as well as Ray (2003a) argue that contradictory party elite cues muddle the party message received by partisans and weaken the influence of party cues on partisan opinion. The main idea of this approach is that noisy signals from a party are more or less ignored by partisans. This argument also predicts reduced congruence between parties and voters as dissent increases and may, under additional assumptions (e.g. about the distribution of the considerations that citizens do use to evaluate Europe if they ignore the noisy signals of their parties), imply that dissent increases the variation of partisan opinion. The mechanism, however, is quite different than in our adaptation of the Zaller model: in Steenbergen et al. and Ray's approach, citizens ignore party cues when these are diverse; in the Zaller model, citizens are influenced by party cues if sent by members of the party with whom they share interests, values, and predispositions. Nonetheless, neither Steenbergen et al. nor Ray explicitly formulated or tested our key prediction regarding the impact of intra-party dissent on the level of variation in partisan opinion.

Estimation framework

Data and model

Consistent with past studies of how parties influence voter opinion on European integration, we combine expert survey data on party stances on European integration with mass survey data from the Eurobarometer on public attitudes toward European integration (e.g. Ray, 2003a). Our unit of analysis is the political party. Our measure of observed intra-party conflict over European integration – *Intra-Party Dissent* – is the measure from the Marks and Steenbergen party data set described above. We use party observations from 1984, 1988, and 1992 because we have relevant data on the instrumental variable in only those years.

To measure the level of variation in support for Europe among supporters of each party in each year of the expert survey, we created the variable *Variation in Support among Partisans*.[3] This variable is based on responses to the following regularly asked Eurobarometer survey question:

'Generally speaking, do you think that [your country's] membership in the European Community is a good thing (1), neither good nor bad (2), or a bad thing (3)?'

This question measures support for membership in the European Union. Previous research shows that responses to this question also reflect respondents' support for integration generally and support for a variety of specific policy components of EU membership (Gabel, 1998).[4] The Eurobarometer also includes a question asking the respondent his/her vote intention. Consistent with Ray (2003a: 984), we use this information to assign voters to parties. We then calculate the standard deviation in responses to the question about membership to create the variable *Variation in Support among Partisans*.

We include controls for two well-established determinants of support for European integration: the level of education and the level of income (e.g. Gabel, 1998). Income is coded by national quartiles, as reported in the Eurobarometer survey. Education is measured by the number of years after age 15 at which the respondent completed his or her formal education. In the relatively rare instances where the respondent was still studying, we assigned a value based on his or her current age.

Because the dependent variable is *Variation in Support among Partisans*, we would expect variation among partisans in the level of educational attainment and the level of income to be positively related to the variation in opinion about European integration among partisans. Accordingly, we created variables measuring the standard deviation in the level of income and the level of education for the supporters of each party in the data set. We also control for nationality and year. A variety of national or temporal factors may affect the baseline level of variation in support for European integration among partisans within a nation or at a particular point in time. For example, the tenor of media coverage of European events, the proximity to European Parliament or national elections, or the relevance of EU issues to inter-party competition may vary across countries and over time. These national and temporal factors may also cause national and temporal variation in the level of intra-party dissent. Theoretically, we are not directly interested in the influence of these factors on variation in partisan opinion. But we are concerned that these factors could bias our estimates if they are not controlled for in our analysis.

Finally, it is important to note that the Eurobarometer survey does not include equal numbers of respondents for each party. For some parties, only a handful of respondents express electoral support. For others, several hundred state they will vote for the party. Our estimates of variation in support for Europe among partisans of parties with a small number of respondents will be less precise than our estimates for parties with a large number of respondents. Consequently, we weight the data by the number of respondents, which gives greater weight to those parties with more respondents.[5] Table 2 reports descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables.

As described above, we model *Variation in Support among Partisans* as a function of *Intra-Party Dissent* and the control variables. Formally, we want to estimate the following equation:

$$\text{\textit{Variation in Support for Europe}}_{pt} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * \text{\textit{Intra-Party Dissent}}{pt} + \Gamma \mathbf{Z}_{pt} + \varepsilon_{pt}, \tag{1}$$

where *Variation in Support for Europe* and *Intra-Party Dissent* are defined above, p indexes parties, t indexes time, $\mathbf{Z}$ is a vector of control variables, ε is the error term, and β_0, β_1, and Γ are parameters to be estimated. Since higher values of *Variation in Support for Europe* indicate greater variation in support for integration among partisan voters, the key hypothesis to be evaluated is

Table 2   Descriptive statistics

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation
Variation in Support among Partisans	0.61	0.14
Intra-Party Dissent	2.03	0.57
Variation in Education among Partisans	2.55	0.31
Variation in Income among Partisans	1.10	0.06
France	0.10	0.30
Germany	0.18	0.39
Italy	0.10	0.30
Netherlands	0.14	0.35
Belgium	0.10	0.31
Denmark	0.12	0.33
Ireland	0.11	0.32
United Kingdom	0.14	0.35
1984	0.35	0.48
1988	0.32	0.47
1992	0.34	0.47

Note: These statistics are for 122 parties, weighted by the number of survey respondents indicating electoral support for the party.

that higher levels of *Intra-Party Dissent* induce increases in *Variation in Support for Europe* – or, more precisely, that β_1 is positive.

The methodological problem here is that an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression that estimates the parameter β_1 is not a convincing estimate of the effect of intra-party dissent on opinion because of potential bias owing to the endogeneity, omitted variable, and measurement problems that are common to the empirical study of elite effects on mass opinion.

First, we may fail to account for unobserved or unmeasured determinants of variation in public support for European integration that also affect the level of intra-party unity on that issue (omitted variable bias). For example, an event (e.g. enlargement of EU membership or media coverage) may cause divisions among the electoral constituency of a party on the issue of European integration. This event may simultaneously stimulate divisions among the party activists and leaders, perhaps for the same reasons it affected voters. The resulting omitted variable bias would bias inferences about the impact of party dissent on the heterogeneity of partisan opinion.

Second, the level of diversity in partisans' opinions may be an important determinant of the level of intra-party dissent. Many parties have factions with distinct constituents that could differ on European integration. As discussed earlier, issues of European integration often cross-cut the traditional left–right dimension of political conflict (Gabel and Anderson, 2002; Kriesi, in this issue). This means that supporters of mainstream political parties are likely to differ among themselves on European issues. Party elites vying for control or influence in the party have incentives to advocate for these different views on Europe and represent the voter heterogeneity of opinion over Europe at the party level. As a result, the observed level of party unity on European integration may be endogenous to variation in partisans' opinions. Under these conditions, the correlation between intra-party dissent and variation in partisan opinion about Europe may provide substantially biased estimates of the causal effect of party dissent on the diversity of partisan opinion.

Third, available measures of party dissent may be measured with significant error. For example, some of the expert survey estimates of party dissent depend on the expert's recollection of parties in previous years, which could introduce significant measurement error. Measurement error in explanatory variables results in attenuation bias for the mis-measured variables as well as bias in either direction for other coefficient estimates.

Given these limitations of OLS, we propose in the next subsection an instrumental variables (IV) solution to the estimation problem. We use candidate selection rules to instrument for *Intra-Party Dissent* to estimate the impact of party unity on the variation in public support for European integration among that party's supporters.

It is worth noting that two other common solutions to these problems – time series analyses and survey/laboratory experiments – are not particularly promising for the problem at hand. In the context of public attitudes toward European integration, we have very few relevant time series data sets. Some national election studies – e.g. the British Election Study – do provide rich time series data with relevant questions regarding European integration (see, for example, Evans, 2002). However, for cross-national studies, the Euro-barometer is the primary survey and it does not have a panel design. Laboratory or survey experiments are also hard to implement in this empirical setting. It is difficult experimentally to manipulate the level of internal party dissent so as to simulate the environment of actual party cues that we study here.

Instrumental variable strategy for estimation of party unity effects

Appropriate instruments for *Intra-Party Dissent* must be correlated with intra-party disagreement on European integration but otherwise uncorrelated with *Variation in Support for Europe*. Specifically, the instruments must have a significant partial correlation with *Intra-Party Dissent* after controlling for all other exogenous determinants of *Variation in Support for Europe*, but the instruments may not be correlated with ε_{pt} in equation 1.

Our approach for identifying valid instruments is to specify characteristics of party organizations that influence how cohesive party activists and leaders will be on policy generally and on European integration in particular. Recall that our measure of dissent focuses on the level of observable disagreement between the party leadership and activists. Accordingly, we are interested in identifying institutional features of parties that affect the degree to which the public face of the party leadership presents policy positions that diverge from the observable policy positions of party activists.

Our basic argument is that party organizations that secure the greatest independence for party leaders from activists are most likely to develop party positions that are in tension with the positions of the party activists. Put differently, as party activists' control over the selection of party leaders increases, the party leadership is more likely to behave consistently with activists' interests, resulting in low observed dissent. Consequently, voters and the experts who provided our estimates of dissent will observe less activist/leadership policy conflict in parties that empower activists with institutional means to control the leadership than in parties where activists lack such means. Below, we develop this argument in greater detail.

Since at least Michels (1949/1915), students of party organization have recognized the hierarchical nature of modern European political parties.

Michels' 'iron law of oligarchy' holds that political parties tend toward oligarchy, with the party leadership exercising significant independence from the activists and the membership. This, according to Michels, is a natural result of the need to organize the party hierarchically to execute its basic functions – e.g. contesting elections and managing parliamentary behavior. Particularly in their pursuit of electoral advantage, the leadership is frequently driven to adopt policies that diverge from the preferences of party activists. Thus, at a basic level, the structure of modern political parties provides the leadership with the opportunity and incentive publicly to express policy positions that diverge from the interests of the activists.

However, the extent to which this divergence occurs in any particular party depends on whether the party is organized so as to grant the leadership independence from the activists in adopting party policy positions. What are the specific institutional features that determine this independence? To answer this question, we first need to define who within the party holds the leadership positions responsible for articulating the public positions of the party on various policies. Parties express their policy positions in a variety of ways: e.g. their election manifestos, public statements by the party office, and the legislative behavior of party representatives. In particular, a party's candidates for legislative office serve as a key public voice of the party. Michels (1949/1915: 138) saw legislative representatives as the primary leaders of the party. And Katz (2001: 278) asserts that 'a party's candidates in large measure define and constitute its public face in elections. They articulate and interpret the party's record from the past and its program and promises for the future.'

Thus, a party's institutional rules governing the influence of the central party leadership relative to party activists in selecting candidates should be an important determinant of the observed level of divergence in policy positions expressed by the leadership and the party activists. Where candidate selection is a decentralized process involving activists, we expect lower divergence in policy positions. In contrast, where the central office of the party controls candidate selection, we would expect greater divergence.

We can provide evidence consistent with this argument about the effect of candidate selection rules on intra-party dissent. To measure the level of divergence between the policy positions of activists and the public position of the party leadership, we use data from the Manifestos Research Group (MRG) and from the European Political Parties' Middle-Level Elites Project (see Reif et al., 1980). The Middle-Level Elites Project surveyed conference delegates in 60 parties from 12 West European countries in the period 1978–80. These delegates consist generally, but not exclusively, of activists. From these elite survey data, Rohrschneider (1994) calculated average left–right ideological scores for activists in each party on an 11-point scale.

We then compare each party's activists' left–right position with the party's publicly stated left–right position, as determined from their election manifestos in their last election in the 1970s.[6] We follow the 'vanilla' method developed by Gabel and Huber (2000) for estimating a party's left–right positions on an 11-point scale from manifesto data. To capture the divergence in policy positions between the publicly stated party position and that of the activists, we simply calculated the absolute difference in the two left–right scores for each party.

If our story about the effect of candidate selection rules on the level of intra-party dissent is valid, we would expect to find greater absolute differences in left–right positions for parties with relatively centralized candidate selection rules than for parties with relatively decentralized candidate selection rules. This is, in fact, what we find. To measure candidate selection rules, we used data from Krouwel (1999) to designate parties as centralized or decentralized based on their characteristics in 1980 (we describe the coding in detail below).[7] For parties with centralized candidate selection, the average difference in left–right positions between the manifestos and the activists was 2.22 points on the 11-point scale. For parties with decentralized candidate selection, the average difference was only 1.21 points. A difference in means tests verifies that this is a statistically significant difference ($t = 3.37$). Thus, this evidence is consistent with our story that candidate selection rules influence how far the positions publicly taken by the party stray from the preferred policy positions of the activists.

Finally, we would expect a divergence between activist and leadership opinion on European integration to manifest itself in observable dissent. Such a divergence does not necessarily cause dissent. Activists may withhold dissenting opinions out of deference or loyalty to the leadership. But deference is most likely on issues that are fundamental components of the ideological identity of the party (Rohrschneider, 1994). As Rohrschneider (1994) shows, activists are considerably less likely to defer to the party leadership on policies that are unrelated to the traditional left–right dimension. European integration is one such issue. Both voters and parties adopt positions on Europe that are generally unrelated to their positions on the traditional socioeconomic left–right dimension (Gabel and Anderson, 2002; Marks and Steenbergen, 2004a). Thus, we would expect activist/leadership disagreement over Europe to result in observable dissent.

In sum, we expect the level of observed party dissent over any policy to vary systematically with the centralization of candidate selection in the party. This effect should be particularly pronounced for issues such as European integration that do not readily accord with the traditional left–right dimension. We therefore have a theoretical reason to expect a significant

positive partial correlation between the centralization of candidate selection rules and the level of party dissent.

Our instrument – centralized candidate selection – must also have no direct causal effect on partisans' attitudes toward European integration. Any effect of candidate selection rules must be via their influence on party dissent. We are aware of no argument that candidate selection rules cause voters to adopt specific attitudes on any issue, including European integration, except through their effects on the unity of cues emitting from the party.

Finally, variation in our instrument must not be caused by variation in partisans' attitudes toward European integration. We are aware of no evidence that the adoption of party candidate selection rules is the result of public attitudes toward European integration. Candidate selection rules have changed over the past three decades in Western Europe. In Belgium, for example, several parties gave greater power to the central party office in the 1970s to facilitate the selection of candidates who were electorally attractive but unpopular with the party activists (De Winter, 1988). Other parties have become less centralized. These changes appear to have been designed to attract and retain membership or, possibly, to strengthen the role of the party leadership (Bille, 2001; Katz, 2001; Pennings and Hazan, 2001). In addition, Lundell (2004) identifies significant regional variation in organizational traditions. But we find no accounts of parties adopting their candidate selection rules in response to differences of opinion among their partisans on the issue of European integration. Thus, the proposed instrument arguably satisfies the exclusion restriction.

To the extent that these expectations hold, this IV estimation strategy will purge the potentially endogenous regressor – i.e. *Intra-Party Dissent* – of variation that is not exogenously determined. Furthermore, IV estimates can eliminate bias due to omitted variables and measurement error. Of course, the usual qualifications for any IV analysis apply. IV estimates are less efficient than OLS estimates and can be badly biased if the assumptions of the model are violated (see e.g. Bartels, 1991).

To measure candidate selection rules, we rely on the classification by Krouwel (1999), which distinguishes parties according to the number and status of participants in the candidate selection process. Krouwel assigned each party to one of seven categories for the period 1980–5 and the period 1985–90.

a. The incumbent party leader selects the parliamentary candidates.
b. The party central office or executive selects the parliamentary candidates.
c. Groups outside the official party organs (e.g. affiliated interest groups) select the parliamentary candidates.

d.   The parliamentary leader or group selects the parliamentary candidates.
e.   The official congress representatives or local leaders select the parliamentary candidates.
f.   Party members (party activists) select candidates through local meetings and/or party congresses.
g.   All members of the party formally have the right and opportunity to participate in the selection of parliamentary candidates (e.g. open primaries).

For our purposes, categories a, b, and d are centralized or closed procedures because party members and activists do not have a voice in the selection process. Categories c (which is rare), e, f, and g give party members and activists influence over the selection of candidates. Consequently, we consider parties that use these procedures to be open or decentralized. Based on this distinction, we created the variable *Candidate Selection*, where 0 indicates a decentralized procedure and 1 indicates a centralized procedure. Because we have argued that centralized procedures promote intra-party dissent, we expect *Candidate Selection* to be positively related to *Intra-Party Dissent*. We matched the candidate selection rules for each party in each period with the corresponding year of expert and mass survey data (the 1992 survey data were matched with the 1985–90 period).

Although we provide a theoretical argument to make our identification strategy plausible *ex ante*, it is still necessary for us to provide evidence that the chosen instrument meets the assumptions for IV models to provide consistent estimates. We cannot directly verify the exclusion restriction assumption that the instrument is not correlated with the error term in the second-stage regression. However, as stated in our earlier discussion, we are aware of no theoretical or empirical reasons to reject this assumption.

We can evaluate whether the instrument is in fact significantly correlated with *Intra-Party Dissent* in our data and whether it has the theoretically expected effect on *Intra-Party Dissent*. Table 3 reports the results of the ordinary least squares first-stage regression. Our interest is whether the instrument is significantly and positively correlated with the endogenous regressor – *Intra-Party Dissent* – after controlling for the included exogenous variables in the model, including country and year fixed effects. Identification in this regression thus comes from within-country variation.

The *F*-test for excluded instruments is significant at the .01 level, indicating that the instrumental variable is significantly correlated with *Intra-Party Dissent*. The partial R^2 for excluded instruments is .081 [$F (1,109) = 6.45$], which has a *p*-value of .013. Furthermore, the sign on *Candidate Selection* is in the expected direction. The results indicate that a change from a decentralized

Table 3 Ordinary least squares estimates of intra-party dissent

Regressor	Coefficient	
Candidate Selection (0–open, 1–closed)	0.375	(0.148)
Variation in Education among Partisans	–0.068	(0.238)
Variation in Income among Partisans	–0.925	(0.701)
France	–0.168	(0.218)
Germany	–0.450	(0.213)
Italy	–0.915	(0.220)
Netherlands	–0.659	(0.199)
Belgium	–0.981	(0.170)
Denmark	–0.088	(0.247)
Ireland	–0.395	(0.173)
1988	0.030	(0.099)
1992	0.259	(0.109)
Constant	3.396	(0.977)
Standard error of the regression	0.44	
No. of observations	122	

Notes: The table reports the OLS coefficient estimates and their robust standard errors (in parentheses). The level of analysis is the political party. The observations are weighted by the number of respondents (partisans) in the mass survey data such that greater weight is put on parties with more respondents. The dependent variable is *Intra-Party Dissent*.

(0) to a centralized (1) candidate selection procedure is associated with an increase in intra-party dissent.

Empirical results

Table 4 reports the results of an OLS estimation of the effect of intra-party dissent on the variation in public support for European integration among supporters of that party. The coefficient on *Intra-Party Dissent* is positive and statistically significant. As disagreement over Europe increases in a party, its voters' variation in support for Europe also increases. The magnitude of this effect is modest. The variable *Variation in Support among Partisans* has a standard deviation of 0.14. A one standard deviation increase in *Intra-Party Dissent* (0.57) is associated with, on average, only a 0.03 increase in the dependent variable.

Table 5 presents the results of the IV estimation, based on the first-stage regression reported in Table 3. As in Table 4, *Intra-Party Dissent* has a positive and statistically significant effect on *Variation in Support among Partisans*.

Table 4   Ordinary least squares estimates of variation in support for European integration among partisans

Regressor	Coefficient	
Intra-Party Dissent	0.053	(0.017)
Variation in Education among Partisans	0.017	(0.041)
Variation in Income among Partisans	0.013	(0.157)
France	−0.181	(0.041)
Germany	−0.112	(0.023)
Italy	−0.244	(0.035)
Netherlands	−0.315	(0.037)
Belgium	−0.158	(0.033)
Denmark	−0.068	(0.031)
Ireland	−0.067	(0.040)
1988	0.012	(0.021)
1992	−0.034	(0.021)
Constant	0.596	(0.212)
Standard error of the regression	0.083	
No. of observations	122	

Notes: The table reports the OLS coefficients and their robust standard errors (in parentheses). The level of analysis is the political party. The observations are weighted by the number of respondents (partisans) in the survey data so that greater weight is put on parties with more observations. The dependent variable is *Variation in Support among Partisans*.

Again, this is consistent with expectations. However, the substantive impact of dissent is three times larger than in the OLS estimation reported in Table 4. A one standard deviation increase in dissent (0.57) is associated with a 0.09 unit increase in *Variation in Support among Partisans*. This is a substantively important effect, representing over half of one standard deviation of variation in the dependent variable.[8] And, if we change from the lowest to the highest observed levels of intra-party dissent in these data (from 1 to 3.89), the level of variation (i.e. the standard deviation) in support among partisans would increase, on average, by 0.45.

In both tables, the coefficients on the control variables for education and income are in the expected direction but are statistically insignificant. The national controls indicate that the level of variation in opinion on European integration among partisans is systematically lower in France and the Netherlands than in the United Kingdom (the baseline nationality). We also find that variation in support for European integration among partisans was lower, on average, in 1992 than in 1988 and 1984 (the baseline year).

Table 5 Instrumental variable estimates of variation among partisans in support for European integration

Regressor	Coefficient	
Intra-Party Dissent	0.156	(0.074)
Variation in Education among Partisans	0.020	(0.043)
Variation in Income among Partisans	0.125	(0.187)
France	−0.152	(0.050)
Germany	−0.031	(0.066)
Italy	−0.152	(0.078)
Netherlands	−0.220	(0.077)
Belgium	−0.054	(0.081)
Denmark	−0.037	(0.041)
Ireland	0.004	(0.063)
1988	0.012	(0.022)
1992	−0.062	(0.028)
Constant	0.201	(0.368)
Standard error of the regression	0.091	
No. of observations	122	

Notes: The table reports the IV coefficients and their robust standard errors (in parentheses). The level of analysis is the political party. Observations are weighted by the number of respondents (partisans) in the survey data so that greater weight is put on parties with more observations. The dependent variable is *Variation in Support among Partisans*. The variable *Intra-Party Dissent* is the endogenous regressor. The instrument is *Candidate Selection*.

Discussion

Our analysis demonstrates that the level of dissent in a party over European integration has a systematic exogenous effect on the position that the party's supporters take on that issue. Consistent with our adaptation of Zaller, greater dissent leads to greater diversity of opinion among partisans. Our theoretical interpretation of the result is not that dissent implies that voters no longer follow elite party cues but that they are influenced by those elites in the party who share their interests, values, and predispositions. The empirical result is inconsistent with an averaging story in which dissent simply reduces the level of congruence between partisan and party positions on Europe. Moreover, it is inconsistent with a null prediction that parties do not influence their supporters on the issue of European integration. Our analysis shows that parties influence the policy positions of their voters and that the specific characteristics of this influence depend on the diversity of messages from the party.

Significantly, this result adds important nuance to the standard cue-taking story of party influence on mass opinion. The standard story contends that the party's policy position – i.e. the position formally presented by the party through its manifesto and its leadership – cues partisans to adopt that position. Our result is consistent with this claim. But our result is also consistent with the idea that cues from party elites can do more than promote congruence between partisan and party positions. We find that, when party elites publicly differ on a policy, partisans diverge systematically in their positions proportionate to the level of elite discord. Although, under some assumptions, this effect might be driven by partisans ignoring noisy signals from their parties (Ray 2003a; Steenbergen et al., in this issue), it is also consistent with party supporters taking their cue from those elites in the party who share their interests and values, as suggested in Zaller's account of elite influence on opinion formation.

Under either interpretation, our empirical results cast serious doubt on whether parties in the EU, through their official positions, significantly direct public opinion by cueing their voters to converge on their official public positions. Many parties, particularly large mainstream parties, adopt pro-integration positions in their electoral manifestos and in their official pronouncements but exhibit substantial internal dissent around this position. This is apparent in the Marks and Steenbergen expert survey data set, which includes a measure of party position on European integration. For example, parties that received at least 25% of the vote in the most recent election were generally more supportive of European integration than were parties earning less than 10% of the vote. Indeed, most firmly Euroskeptic parties are relatively small parties. But the large parties had an average dissent score of 2.15 whereas the small parties had a lower level of dissent, averaging 1.80 on the five-point scale. Consequently, whether a large portion of the electorate adopts positions on European integration consistent with their favored party's official position – i.e. whether voters take their cue from their party's position – depends crucially on whether the level of internal dissent in the large parties is sufficiently low to generate congruence between party and partisan opinion.

Our analysis allows us to estimate whether the level of dissent observed in large parties undermines cue-taking from official party positions on Europe. According to the results reported in Table 5, the predicted level of *Variation in Support among Partisans* with an intra-party dissent of 2.15 is 0.72.[9] This is a very large level of variation in partisan opinion. To see this, recall the dependent variable is the standard deviation of responses to the Eurobarometer survey question about membership, which has responses ranging from 1 to 3. Thus, the largest possible standard deviation is approximately 1

– where half the partisans consider membership a bad thing and half consider membership a good thing. Obviously, if partisans exhibited this maximum variation in opinion this would preclude a convergence of their opinion on the official party position on European integration. A predicted standard deviation of 0.72 is therefore a serious constraint on cue-taking from the party's official position. Consequently, for a sizable portion of the national electorates in the EU, the level of intra-party dissent associated with the preferred party is large enough to cause substantial dispersion of opinion rather than congruence toward the party's official position on European integration.

This is not to say that voter cue-taking from official party positions is inconsequential for understanding public opinion about European integration. It is also true of our data set that the most Euroskeptic parties are, on average, among the most unified in their position on Europe. Their voters can receive the party cue without the distortion experienced by voters for larger parties. The impact of these parties on the electorate, however, is limited by their relatively small numbers of partisans.

Finally, the substantive findings in this paper have important implications for understanding the sources of Euroskepticism in the electorate. We show that party dissent causes variation in public support for European integration, independent of inter-party conflict on that issue. In principle, a set of internally divided parties could all take a public pro-EU position, for example, and generate a great deal of opposition to integration through the observable disagreement between activists and party leadership. Formally Euroskeptic parties are therefore not the only parties that might systematically cue voters to adopt anti-EU positions. Consequently, our analysis provides an explanation for the observed disconnect between the pro-EU positions of political parties and the ambivalence and sometimes opposition expressed by their partisans in referendums and in surveys. Partisans take cues from party elites, but dissenting views can cue voters to oppose the official party line.

Notes

1   When voters have low awareness, they are less likely to take their cue from any messages from elites. Variation in intra-party dissent is not expected to influence their opinions and so any systematic effect of dissent on the degree of congruence or variation in opinion should be driven by relatively aware citizens.

2   This account focuses on the influence of parties on their partisans exclusively. One potential problem with the argument is that partisans are exposed to the messages of other parties and other elites, which might have a number of effects, including mitigating the importance of intra-party dissent. Alternatively, it is certainly possible that intra-party dissent as discussed here is more important for most voters' opinion formation than are inter-party differences in opinion about Europe. Dissent is most evident in the larger parties and citizens may not devote significant attention to messages from sources other than their own party. Another potential problem with our focus on the effect of parties on their partisans is that it ignores non-partisan voters. We use a relatively weak definition to identify partisan voters that does not leave out many respondents. Nonetheless, looking at non-partisan voters and how they are or are not influenced by parties or other elites is an interesting question for future research.

3   We used Eurobarometer 21 (Spring 1984), Eurobarometer 29 (Spring 1988), and Eurobarometer 37 (Spring 1992). These data were made available by the Inter-University Consortium for political and social research. The data for these Eurobarometers were originally collected by Jacques-Rene Rabier, Helene Riffault, Anna Melich, and Ronald Inglehart. Neither the collectors of the original data nor the consortium bear any responsibility for the analyses or interpretations presented here.

4   A small portion of respondents either did not answer this question or answered 'don't know'. These respondents were deleted from the analysis.

5   Specifically, we use the 'aweight = n' option in STATA, when n is the number of respondents supporting a party. This option weights each observation by the square-root of n. Alternatively, we could simply drop those parties with a small number of observations (e.g. fewer than 50). We have estimated the models in our analysis using this adjustment instead of the weighting correction and the results are largely similar to what we present here.

6   The only exception is West Germany. The most proximate election to the timing of the elite survey was the 1980 federal election.

7   We analyze the 33 parties for which middle-level elite data and party centralization data were available. Krouwel (1999) presents the results from a similar analysis at a more aggregated level.

8   The descriptive statistics for the data in the analysis differ from the statistics reported in the second section because the analysis does not include years after 1992 and some parties for which we lack information about party organization.

9   This is calculated at the baseline country (UK) and year (1984) and at the mean value of the education and income variables. If we change the baseline country to France or the Netherlands, the predicted level of variation in support among partisans decreases by about a quarter from that of the UK (the baseline country).

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