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Integration: Using the Eurobarometer to Measure Support

The march toward a deeper and wider European Union (EU) raises important questions about how the publics of different member states perceive the process of integration. Do people consider themselves citizens of Europe, their home state, or both? How much support is there for the integration project generally? What factors encourage public support for different aspects of integration, such as the euro or the expansion of the EU to new states? Is individual support based on individual economic circumstances, the national macroeconomic context, or both? How do sociocultural

attitudes, such as views on welfare or women's rights, affect support?

In order to study these questions, researchers often use the Eurobarometer (EB), a public opinion survey that has been conducted twice annually since 1973 by the European Commission in all member states of the EU. The Eurobarometer allows for international comparability over time across standard variables, several of which have been included since the first few surveys. In addition to a standard battery of questions, each Eurobarometer includes specific questions in a variety of issue areas, such as social and economic aspects of integration or the quality of life and health in the Eurozone.

This entry looks at how researchers have chosen or constructed dependent variables using the Eurobarometer to analyze different questions about support for the European project. A *dependent variable* is what the researcher explains using independent or explanatory variables. For example, a researcher interested in how party affiliation affects support for European integration might choose a dependent variable that asks respondents whether they are for or against European integration and an explanatory variable that asks which party they voted for in the previous election. Utilizing these variables, a researcher could test whether those on the left are more or less supportive of the European project than those on the right.

Choosing the Appropriate Dependent Variable

In deciding which dependent variables to use in their analyses, researchers must balance theoretical and practical considerations. Theoretically, the dependent variable should fully capture what the researcher is trying to explain. For exam-

ple, one of the standard variables included in most Eurobarometer studies evaluates respondents' view of the benefits of European integration ("benefit/not benefit"). The wording of this question is the following: "Taking everything into consideration, would you say that (our country) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?" Respondents can only choose among the following options: benefited, not benefited, and don't know. Using this variable to capture even general sentiments can be problematic. A dichotomous variable such as this one does not allow respondents to express mild displeasure with the European project. Since most mainstream parties and governments support the EU, most people would see at least some benefit to integration. These variables also do not provide a baseline from which to make comparisons. For example, whether a country has benefited from the EU may depend on the time period, that is, pre-Maastricht Treaty or pre-Single European Act. Further, perhaps a respondent recognizes the economic benefits of the European Union but questions the loss of national sovereignty. It is hard to gauge what a respondent means by benefiting from the EU without some kind of anchor point or understanding of which type of integration the respondent is considering. In order to avoid many of these problems, researchers have turned to other variables or constructed indices from several similar variables.

Many others, however, continue to use dichotomous and trichotomous variables such as "benefit/not benefit" in their analyses despite the theoretical drawbacks due to practical reasons. For instance, many problems require long time-series variables. Matthew Gabel (1998) uses the following question as his depen-

dent variable: "Generally speaking, do you think that [our country's] membership in the European Union is..." Respondents can choose among: a good thing, neither good nor bad, a bad thing, and don't know ("good/bad"). This variable has been available continually since 1975. Since Gabel is trying to explain how an individual's relative market position or skill level affects support for European integration across several different time periods, the availability of the dependent variable over time is necessary.

Problems arise when questions about significant integration issues are only available in one or a few Eurobarometers. For example, some researchers may be interested in support for specific integration issues, such as the euro. Support for the euro is not continuously available in the Eurobarometer, so researchers may only use those surveys in which it is present, such as EB54 (October–November 2000). Yet another problem is that the explanatory variables can differ substantially across Eurobarometers, limiting researchers to the explanatory variables that are common to all the surveys under review. For example, EB44.3OVR (February–April 1996) contains variables about individual support for welfare policies, which may affect support for European integration because individuals may fear eventual convergence of social policies in the Eurozone. Considering this to be a potentially important explanation of support for European integration, Adam Brinegar, Seth Jolly, and Herbert Kitschelt (forthcoming) use EB44.3OVR but unfortunately may not test the significance of the explanatory variable across time.

Now we discuss the trends in measuring public support for European integration with an eye to the theoretical and

practical reasons why researchers choose the variables they do. We also argue in favor of an alternative dependent variable—Overall European Integration View (OEIV). OEIV has several virtues: it moves beyond ambiguous dichotomous and trichotomous variables, permitting individuals to choose among alternatives that more closely match real-world choices about integration; it is anchored in current perceptions of the process of integration; it allows for more response variance compared to other measures; and it is available in a substantial number of Eurobarometers, permitting researchers to do longitudinal or time-series analysis.

Trends in Measuring Support for European Integration

The most commonly used dependent variables are consistently available over a long period of time and are generally dichotomous or trichotomous, such as the benefit/not benefit and good/bad questions. Some authors also construct additive indices, which increases the number of possible responses. For example, Leonard Ray combines the benefit/not benefit and good/bad questions, creating an index that varies from 2 to 6. This variable contains nearly all of the same problems as simply using good/bad or benefit/not benefit but has the benefit of increased variance. Gabel and Harvey Palmer (1995) use good/bad as well as another dichotomous variable that is worded as follows: "In general, are you (very much/to some extent) for or against efforts being made to unify Western Europe?" ("for/against").

One reason for doing this is that they are all correlated to some degree, which means that the variables vary together in the same way. So, for example, if good/bad is correlated with benefit/not benefit, then as a respondent's perception of

integration as "good" increases, her perception of integration as having benefited her country also increases. A correlation of 1 means that two variables are perfectly correlated and measure the same thing, whereas a correlation of 0 indicates they are perfectly uncorrelated and measure completely different things. In the EB44.2Biz (January–March 1996), for/against has a .447 correlation with good/bad and a .4397 correlation with benefit/not benefit. Some have used the high collinearity among variables to justify using only one of them. For example, Christopher Anderson (1998) uses only the good/bad variable in his study of the domestic effect on attitudes toward European integration for this reason. But while they all measure the same underlying concepts, a polychotomous variable increases response variance.

Marco Steenbergen and Bradford Jones (2002) create an index using benefit/not benefit and "desired speed." This latter variable is always preceded by "current speed." The wording of current speed is "In your opinion, how is the European Union, the European unification, advancing nowadays?" Respondents can choose from 1, which equals a "standstill," to 7, which is "runs as fast as possible." For desired speed, respondents are asked: "And which corresponds best to what you would like?" and they are provided with the same answers as before. This additive index provides as much variance as a combination of good/bad, benefit/not benefit, and for/against and allows individuals to make a choice about how fast they would like integration to proceed, but is not fully anchored in a current evaluation of the European project. However, the fact that current speed always precedes desired speed may help provide

some baseline by conditioning respondents' opinions.

These indices can be created across many—though certainly not all—Eurobarometers. But those who are interested in using one Eurobarometer alone may have more flexibility in developing dependent variables that more closely reflect the object of interest based on which non-standard variables are included in the survey. Robert Rohrschneider (2002), for example, creates a variable called "EU-wide government" from three separate indicators concerning attitudes about the European parliament. But even when researchers use their own indices, they frequently test the results against the standard variables because so much of the literature on public support for integration is built on them. For example, Rohrschneider adds three dichotomous variables—including the standard good/bad questions—into his index to test the robustness of his model.

When using most variables it is a generally accepted practice to place the respondents who answered "don't know" in the middle. This allows researchers to keep the opinions of many respondents in the analysis, increasing statistical significance. The problem with this method is that it may add some ambiguity into the variable. We do not have a good idea of what any individual respondent means by "don't know," thus perhaps reducing the precision of the estimations to varying degrees.

In Figure 1, we evaluate the trends in these variables across time by charting the aggregate mean scores of the two most commonly used variables—benefit/not benefit and good/bad. Both exhibit fairly stable patterns with scores ranging from 2 to 2.5, though the graphs show a

decline in support since 1991. But given the multiple problems with these variables and the constructions developed from them, how can we create an index that gives us more leverage over public support for European integration?

Overall European Integration View

OEIV is an attempt to more precisely measure support for the European project by anchoring individuals' perceptions in their own baseline evaluation of the

progress of integration. For this reason, OEIV combines both current speed and desired speed, creating a 21-point scale (see Table 1). Although scholars may employ desired speed alone without much loss of precision (as desired speed and OEIV are highly correlated), OEIV still provides a stronger theoretical construct from which to evaluate support for European integration.

The theoretical basis for this variable is explained in Table 1, which shows four

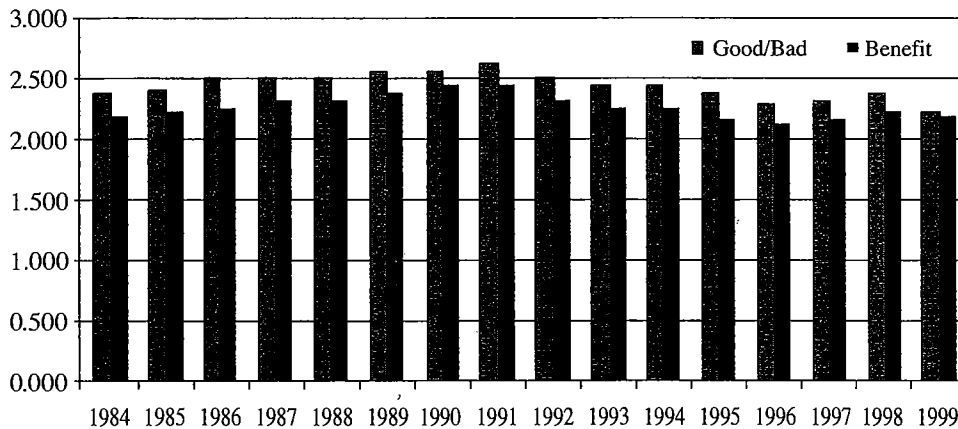


Figure 1 Tracking "Good/Bad" and "Benefit" across Time

Table 1 Constructing Overall European Integration View (OEIV)

	DESIRED SPEED: SLOW	DESIRED SPEED: FAST
PERCEIVED SPEED: SLOW	2 STATUS-QUO CONTENTED I: SLOW, BUT ADEQUATE	4 MILITANT ADVOCATES: WANT TO SPEED UP THE PROCESS
PERCEIVED SPEED: FAST	1 MILITANT OPPONENTS: WANT TO SLOW DOWN INTEGRATION	3 STATUS-QUO CONTENTED II: FAST AND ADEQUATE

different categories of respondents: militant opponents, status-quo contented I, status-quo contented II, and militant advocates. This is a much more accurate representation of the options on the political agenda, since the yes/no choice on European integration is no longer a realistic option for European citizens. The militant opponents are dissatisfied with the fast speed of integration and would like to slow it down. The status-quo contented I supporters of European integration see the process as being slow and are satisfied with the pace of reform. The status-quo contented II supporters also support the current pace of reform but consider it to be fast, not slow—and they want to keep it that way. Militant advocates believe the pace of reform is slow and should be speeded up. This variable was developed to show how individual assessments of integration depend on their national economic system (Brinegar, Jolly, and Kitschelt forthcoming). But OEIV would be equally appropriate as a general assessment for any other deepening or widening questions. Like many other variables, however, it is not available in all data sets, becoming first available in 1986 and sporadically since then.

Similar to the good/bad and benefit/not benefit questions, OEIV does vary over time for the available years (see Figure 2), showing a decline in support since 1994.

Also, the international differences in support are quite interesting (see Figure 3). Some states, such as Italy and other relatively less wealthy southern European states, strongly support a faster speed for the integration of the EU, whereas others—such as Great Britain—take a much more cautious approach. Although both have benefited from membership in the EU and believe it has been good in the simple good/bad sense, there are widely diverging ideas about the necessity of proceeding at such a fast pace. This is reflected in the UK's decision to opt out of the euro and Italy's efforts to lower its budget deficit in time to meet the requirements imposed by the Stability and Growth Pact.

Simple correlations also suggest that OEIV is different from the standard dependent variables. In the EB44.2Biz survey, OEIV is correlated with good/bad at .23, benefit/not benefit at .32, and for/against at .49. OEIV is correlated the most with for/against, most likely because it asks respondents to evaluate "efforts

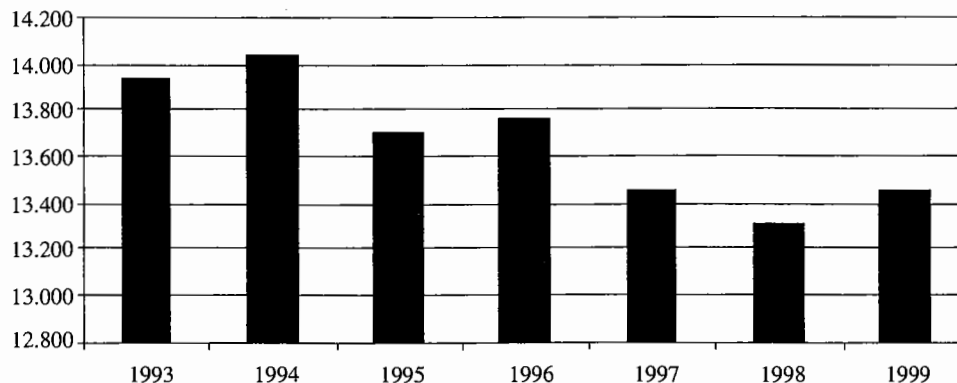


Figure 2 Tracking OEIV across Time

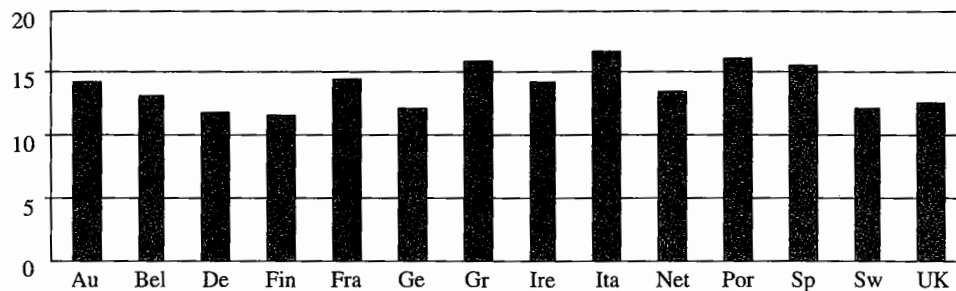


Figure 3 OEIV by Country (1996)

being made to unify Western Europe" and is not simply a rough calculus of the total benefit or good arising from the European project. However, one may also view the lack of correlation between the different measures of support for European integration as suggestive of a lack of salience of the issue for most European citizens.

Conclusion

The choice of dependent variable in analyzing the EU is of substantial importance because it should accurately reflect the theoretical concerns of the researcher in the most appropriate way possible, given practical limitations across time and space. Specific policy questions—such as support for widening of the EU—often seem to be most appropriate, but the lack of time-series data on most issue-specific dependent variables makes it difficult to employ them. Also, theories developed using specific policy questions might not be applicable across all issue areas, limiting the generalizability of some theories tested on issue-specific dependent variables.

Researchers thus have traditionally used simple dichotomous and trichotomous variables alone or in combination that often contain substantial measurement error because of the ambiguity of

the questions, their inconsonance with most individuals' preferences over European integration, the technical problem of inserting "don't knows" into the middle of the questions, and the lack of a baseline from which to evaluate the process. Although researchers have nonetheless made significant advances in our understandings of a variety of subjects, the use of more precise dependent variables will increase theoretical rigor and, to a variety of extents, empirical estimations of support. OEIV represents one possibility to bring researchers closer to more precisely measuring and explaining public support for European integration.

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World Opinion

World opinion is a concept with ancient roots. References to it appear in the Old Testament, Greek antiquity, and during the Middle Ages (Niedermann 1995). Cardinal Richelieu in 1630 argued that international opinion had social-psychological meaning for a country's international and domestic politics, by likening states to individuals concerned with public opinion and the judgments of their peers. As a result, nations strove to avoid a negative reputation and isolation from the international community (Niedermann 1995, p. 280).

Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham echoed these ideas in the final decade of

the eighteenth century, stating that "public opinion is peace-loving . . . and public opinion is a useful instrument, the main driving force to achieve international organization" (Herberichs 1966, p. 627). James Mill, a disciple of Bentham's, described processes of international opinion in 1823 that would be supported by the approbation of other nations if violated. He argued that if an international law were published, "the intelligence of the whole world being brought to operate upon it, suggestions obtained from every corner, it might be made as perfect as possible . . . the eyes of all the world being fixed upon the decision of every nation with respect to the code, every nation might be deterred in shame from objecting to any important article in it" (Herberichs 1966, p. 634).

These ideas influenced theorists and policymakers at the fourth Hague Convention in 1907, which wished to recognize the "principles of the law of nations, as they result from the usages established by civilized peoples, form the laws of humanity, and the dictates of public conscience" (Herberichs 1966, p. 634). Hence, despite its ancient usages, "world opinion" came to be associated with the Wilsonian idealism following World War I, when its proponents, inspired by the optimism of writers in the early twentieth century, predicted it would restrain the behavior of nations (Davison 1973). This idealism was shattered in the wake of World War II, however, when "mere opinion" proved inadequate for warding off genocide and other atrocities in the international realm. Indeed, in an ironic footnote to Wilsonian optimism, the *International Herald Tribune* printed a story in 1936 about how Adolf Hitler was attempting to affect "world opinion"