

# Research Note: The Influence of the Press in Shaping Public Opinion towards the European Union in Britain

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Existing research finds that European citizens evaluate the EU according to the perceived costs and benefits of integration. Instead of assuming that cue-givers provide an informational role in this process, we investigate the direct effects of positive and negative EU messages from prominent cue-givers, including political parties and the media. Using the 2001 British Election Study, we examine the impact of the main political parties and newspapers on public attitudes towards membership of the EU and the prospect of joining the single European currency. During the 2001 British General Election campaign, the media and the main political parties had small independent effects on attitudes towards EU membership and the potential adoption of the single European currency. When voters receive the same messages from both their party and their newspaper, these effects are considerable.

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God is opposed to Britain joining EU's single currency  
(Headline in the *Daily Telegraph*, 14 May 2001)

For many decades, European integration was an elite-led process and public opinion was assumed to be relatively unimportant to its progression. European mass publics now play a much greater role in the integration process. Across the member and candidate-member states, seventeen referendums have been held on issues of European integration, and the reticence of public opinion in Britain, Sweden and Denmark was significant in influencing the omission of these countries from the first round of monetary union. With the prospect of a major expansion and the further integration of European states, an understanding of why individuals support or oppose European integration is an increasingly important area to study.

Research on attitudes towards the EU has focused on the perceived costs or benefits that individuals receive from European integration. Matt Gabel argues that the rational cost-benefit theory applies, because citizens respond to cues from fellow citizens, elites and 'easily accessible information from the media and interest groups' (1998a, p. 41). In this paper, we explicitly model the influence of two of these cues – the mass media and political parties – on individual attitudes towards the EU.

We investigate the impact of the print media on attitudes to European integration and European Monetary Union (EMU) during the general election campaign in Britain in 2001. We find that newspapers do have an impact on attitudes to Europe, but that these effects are relatively small. Identification with a political party is found to exert greater influence on public opinion; and when individuals receive reinforcing cueing information from both parties and the media, these effects are stronger still.

### Public Support for European Integration

Since the early 1990s, studies of public attitudes towards the EU has been dominated by economic and rational cost–benefit explanations. Gabel (1998a, b) finds that support for the EU rises as material gains within a country increase through the liberalisation of the EU market. These individual-level socio-economic effects are also supported by longitudinal aggregate-level evidence that support for European integration is influenced by national economic performance (Eichenberg and Dalton, 1993).

Most cost–benefit-based explanations of support for the EU assume that individuals are able to recognise the implications of European integration and how it affects them. However, Chris Anderson (1998) demonstrates that, in virtually all measures of knowledge and awareness of basic aspects of the integration process, citizens are not particularly well informed. Without the necessary information that cost–benefit models assume, he suggests that individuals use proxies in helping to form attitudes towards the EU.

It has also been argued that identity acts as a cue in influencing support for the EU. Within European countries, stronger feelings of national identity are identified as proxies for opposition to the EU (McLaren, 2002). This relationship is more complex in the British case, where sub-national identities are particularly strong. In the case of the UK, strong sub-national allegiances to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are related to higher levels of support for European integration, but English identity tends to be related to opposition (Carey, 2002).

Political parties have been identified as having strong effects on attitudes towards the EU, especially in research on EU referendums (see, for example, Hug and Sciarini, 2000). Franklin *et al.* (1994) find that party preferences – in particular, the support for the governing parties – was important enough to be the difference between the ‘no’ and ‘yes’ outcomes in the two Danish referendums on approving the Maastricht Treaty. There is evidence to suggest that the British public take their leads on European integration from their preferred party (Flickinger, 1994).

### The Influence of the Mass Media on Political Attitudes in Britain

With the growth of mass media in the 1930s and 1940s, many observers feared that media influence would lead to a new form of elite domination of public opinion. However, initial and subsequent research found that the effects of print

and broadcast media were relatively small (Berelson *et al.*, 1954). In recent years, studies have found more convincing evidence of the effects of the media in influencing political attitudes, particularly voting preferences in the US (Bartels, 1993; Dalton *et al.*, 1998). Research in the British context has found that the media asserts influence on attitudes and behaviour and that these effects are significant, although relatively small (Norris *et al.*, 1999; Newton and Brynin, 2001). Looking more closely at the impact of the press on attitudes towards monetary union, Curtice finds that there was no significant evidence that newspapers influenced their readers on this issue either in the period between elections or in the campaign leading up to the 1997 election (1999, pp. 26–7).

In the US, the press is said to be largely impartial. Although political views are clearly expressed in editorial opinion, there is a marked ‘wall of separation’ between editorial partisanship and the reporting of the news (Seib, 1994). This is not the case in the British press, which tends to be overtly and completely partial.

Recent research has found that television exerts very little effect on vote choice, as, unlike newspapers, it contains so little perceptible bias (Norris *et al.*, 1999). There are no paid political advertisements on British television. The only partisan broadcasts on British television are party election broadcasts (PEBs).<sup>1</sup> These are three-, four- or five-minute slots in the television schedule given to all of the main parties, and all major channels broadcast them.

The only published study that we are aware of that deals with the influence of the media on attitudes towards European integration is the aggregate study of this relationship by Pippa Norris (2000). She finds that, when an attentive public receives extensive media coverage of an issue that displays a consistent directional bias, the media are likely to have an impact sufficient enough to change public attitudes at the aggregate level. She finds a strong association between negative press coverage of monetary union and decreasing levels of aggregate support both for the euro and the EU in general (2000, p. 206). But she does qualify this conclusion by pointing out that the direction of causality in the relationship between media coverage and aggregate public attitudes on monetary union cannot be established.

## The Process of Attitude Change

According to John Zaller, attitude change cannot be understood as a conversion experience, but as a ‘change in the balance of positive and negative considerations relating to a given issue’ (1992, p. 118). He argues that ‘attitudes’, in the conventional sense of the term, do not really exist, but responses to survey questions are the result of an evaluation of a number of conflicting considerations in a person’s mind. As such, attitude change can occur for relatively salient issues when individuals receive messages with a consistent directional bias.

Where individuals are receiving a dominant flow of information, such as by reading a pro-EU newspaper and identifying with a pro-EU party, they are likely to use this information to evaluate the issue. We would expect them, *ceteris paribus*, to be more likely to hold positive attitudes towards the EU than those who read an anti-EU newspaper and identify with an anti-EU party. However, when there is

not a dominant message, the effects will be different according to predispositions and awareness. For example, those with a stronger attachment to their political party receiving mixed messages from party and media will be able to resist the messages of the media that contrast with those of their party.

We expect that, where individuals are receiving a dominant message from both the party they identify with and the newspaper they read the likelihood of this message influencing their opinions will be increased. Therefore, we expect that, during the 2001 British general election campaign, Conservative identifiers reading an anti-EU newspaper will be more likely to hold an anti-EU opinion. Similarly, Labour identifiers reading a pro-EU newspaper will be more likely to be influenced positively towards the EU. If individuals are receiving contrasting messages from their political party and their daily newspaper, these effects are likely to cancel each other out and media/partisan influence will be minimal.

### The 2001 General Election and the European Issue

The 2001 British general election is an interesting case study for investigating the effects of media on public attitudes towards European integration. Firstly, greater insight into the effects of media on the issue of integration in general, and monetary union in particular, has important implications for a potential referendum on the adoption of the euro in Britain. Secondly, the issue of European integration, which has never been of particularly high saliency for voters or parties in the UK, was of high saliency for political parties in this election. The predominance of the European issue for the Conservatives during this election campaign has even led to descriptions of them as a single-issue party (Geddes, 2002, p. 161). Thirdly, Europe was the issue during the election campaign that received the most coverage in the media. Deacon *et al.* (2001) investigated the content of all media sectors during the 2001 election campaign. They find that the issue of 'Europe' was the principal news theme in all media sectors, after stories about the process of the campaign itself (pp. 106–7). Fourthly, newspapers in Britain are highly partisan and tend to make their political views extremely clear. Moreover, most British people read a daily national newspaper. In the 2001 British Election Study (BES), 62 percent of the sample regularly read a daily newspaper.

The press concentration and the predominance given to the European issue by the Conservatives had an effect on voters' perception of the saliency of European integration issues. When respondents in the BES panel study were asked before the campaign which was the most important issue to them, 5.2 percent selected either Britain's membership of EMU or Britain's relations with the EU. When the same respondents were asked the same question after the campaign, more than double (11.5 percent) selected one of these issues, making Europe second only to health as the most important issue for voters in this sample.

Previous studies have outlined the overwhelmingly Euro-sceptic nature of British newspapers. Anderson and Weymouth (1999) conducted a detailed analysis of the discourse of the British press on issues relating to European integration during the general election campaign of 1997 and during the British presidency of the EU in 1998. They find that articles within the Euro-sceptic press during this time

(*Sun*, *Mail*, *Express*, *Times* and *Telegraph*) explicitly aimed to influence attitudes on European issues, and the purpose of this discourse was to influence and to persuade their readers of the non-acceptability of monetary union.

There are a number of concerns about whether newspapers influence their readers or whether readers influence their newspapers. Certainly, newspapers in Britain have been known to switch allegiances along with the tide of public opinion. This has been evident in the past two elections, where newspapers have realigned themselves in line with an apparent realignment of the aggregate party preferences of the electorate. A newspaper's partisan direction and its stance on the EU are not necessarily linked. There are newspapers that are pro-Labour but anti-EU. So Labour supporters could realistically be expected to read, for example, either the *Sun* (anti-EU) or the *Mirror* (pro-EU). It is unlikely that readers will change their newspaper based on just a single issue.

A second concern is that individuals choose their newspapers according to their political preferences. We have no way of testing whether those with strongly held views on European integration choose their newspaper according to these criteria. However, drawing on existing research, there is reasonable evidence that choice of newspaper is influenced by long-held political affinities, but not by relatively recent changes in preference (Norris *et al.*, 1999).

## Data and Method

We use data from the 2001 BES<sup>2</sup> to analyse attitudes to the EU and the euro in Britain. There are two dependent variables in our analysis. We are interested in investigating general attitudes towards the EU, but also attitudes to the specific policy area of monetary union. The following questions were asked in the BES panel study to gauge both general attitudes to the EU and the single European currency:

- Overall, do you approve or disapprove of Britain's membership in the European Union? Strongly approve (5), approve (4), neither approve nor disapprove (3), disapprove (2), strongly disapprove (1).
- Thinking of the single European currency, which of the following statements would come closest to your own view? Definitely join as soon as possible (4), join if and when the economic conditions are right (3), stay out for at least the next four or five years (2), rule out on principle (1).

These dependent variables are ordinal, they are clearly ranked, but the distances between the categories are not known; therefore, we use ordered probit, a method more suited to estimating a categorical dependent variable with ordinal outcomes.

The dependent variables are taken from the post-election survey data. However, we are interested in the changes in attitudes during the campaign. Therefore, to control for existing predispositions towards the EU and the euro, we include an independent variable for attitudes to the EU and towards monetary union from the pre-campaign survey. As we expected, the attitudes of the British voters are not firmly held on this issue, with 51.5 percent of people changing their response between the beginning and the end of the campaign. There was slightly more

stability on attitudes towards the euro, although 44.8 percent of respondents still changed their response to this question during the relatively short campaign.

### *Press Influence*

Although newspapers during the 2001 general election were overwhelmingly encouraging their readers to vote to re-elect the Labour government (Scammell and Harrop, 2001), they were not all backing Labour's policy on Europe. The British press has a history of Euro-scepticism (Anderson and Weymouth, 1999). Colin Seymour-Ure (2002) analysed the editorial attitudes of the national daily newspapers towards the EU. He concludes that the *Sun*, *Star*, *Mail*, *Telegraph* and *Times* were all sceptical of the EU, whereas the *Mirror*, *Express*, *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Financial Times* were all sympathetic to the EU. Of these, only the *Express* and *Star* had changed their attitudes to Europe since the 1997 election. To analyse the effects of these newspapers on attitudes to the EU, we include dummy variables accounting for readership of each of these ten national newspapers.<sup>3</sup>

### *Party Influence*

Gauging the positions of the British political parties on Europe has never been an easy task. The parties have a history of disunity on the issue and a tendency to present vague hints at their positions to avoid intra-party conflict over the issue. However, the positions of the parties at the 2001 election were clearer than in any previous contest. In previous elections, the Conservatives had sent mixed messages to the electorate on what exactly their stance on Europe was. It has been suggested of previous campaigns that, if they presented a unified Euro-sceptic position, they would receive both electoral gain (Evans, 1998) and greater support from the partisan press (Seymour-Ure, 1997). This they clearly did in the 2001 election campaign, as Geddes observes: 'by 2001 the Conservatives had established "clear blue water" between themselves, Labour and the Liberal Democrats' on Europe (2002, p. 145).

To account for the effects of parties, we include variables that measure the party identification of the respondents. The pre-election questionnaire included the traditional party identification question.<sup>4</sup> The party identification variables used in this research include 'leaners'. This may mean that we are treating those with strongly held opinions in the same way as those who have only weak partisan affiliations. To overcome this problem, we measured the strength of party identification by creating interactions between party identification and the strength of partisanship. In the BES, those with a party identification are asked if they are 'very strong', 'fairly strong' or 'not very strong' supporters of that party.

Of the three major parties, only the Conservatives devoted time in their PEBs to present their views on the issue of Europe. Three of their five PEBs revolved around negative representations of EMU. They leaned heavily on Europe as an issue in their PEBs in an attempt to refocus the election coverage in the media on this subject, for which they considered they had an electoral advantage over the other parties. We include a variable that records whether the respondent has watched any Conservative PEBs.

### *Socio-economic Explanations*

Economic factors have frequently been used to explain variations in the levels of public support for European integration. In line with previous research, we expect that economic evaluations will be positively related to support for the EU. Gabel and Whitten (1997) find that citizens take into account both their personal and the national economic situation when evaluating European integration. Responses to both sociotropic and egocentric subjective economic retrospective questions are included in this analysis.

Gabel (1998a) uses levels of education to explain citizen support for the EU. He identifies that EU citizens with high education levels are better able to adapt their skills to economic changes brought about by labour-market liberalisation and that poorly educated workers have less valuable skills, which make them more expendable in economic downturn (pp. 42–4). We include education in our model, coded as the age of the respondent on completing education. Gabel also finds that support for the EU is dependent on the income level of individuals, as the liberalisation of capital markets has advantaged wealthier citizens more than those on lower incomes (pp. 46–7). We include variables measuring the upper, middle and lower thirds of income. In line with Gabel's income hypothesis, a positive relationship is expected for those in the upper income band and a negative relationship for those in the lower.

Although education and income tap into particular demographic characteristics that are likely to influence attitudes towards the EU, citizens in some occupational sectors will be affected differently from the process of integration. In particular, individuals in higher-skilled professions will gain from integration because they are better able to adapt to economic changes in their production sector (Gabel, 1998a, pp. 43–4). Gabel suggests that unskilled workers have less valuable and adaptable skills and are likely to be more fearful of unemployment resulting from greater competition of the labour market (p. 43).

Younger citizens are generally expected to have a more cosmopolitan outlook and are therefore more likely to be positively disposed towards the EU (Inglehart and Rabier, 1978), so a variable measuring age is included in the analysis. Gender is also included in the model, based on previous research that finds that 'women are among the "losers" of the integration process because of their position in the labour market' (Gelleny and Anderson, 2000, p. 185). This variable is coded with 1 as male and 0 as female; therefore, a positive impact is expected.

Previous research has found evidence that there is a complex relationship between national identities and attitudes to European integration in Britain. Carey (2002) finds that individuals identifying themselves as English (the dominant nationality) in Britain are less supportive of the EU than those identifying with the minority identities. This suggests that the English are resistant to the threat that the EU poses on its identity, whereas the Scottish and Welsh see the EU as a positive force for the expression of theirs. In line with this research, we include variables for declared English, Scottish and Welsh identity, as opposed to those with a British identity, which forms the reference group.

## Estimating the Impact of Media on Public Attitudes on the EU

Table 1 presents the ordered probit estimates for the media, partisanship and control variables in predicting attitudes towards Britain's membership of the EU and towards Britain joining the single European currency.<sup>5</sup> In order to investigate the effects of changes in opinions over this time period, we include a variable to account for predispositions towards Europe and the euro in the respective analysis. The questions that form our dependent variables were asked in both the pre- and post-campaign surveys. We use the post-campaign responses as our dependent variables and control for existing attitudes by including a lagged dependent variable from the pre-campaign surveys. Unsurprisingly, the variables measuring predispositions towards the EU and euro are both significant and positive, as would be expected in the two models in the table. However, even accounting for pre-campaign attitudes, there are still some noticeable effects from other variables, although the effects of the media appear minimal on general attitudes towards the EU. Only two of the newspaper variables have statistically significant effects on their readers' attitudes towards Britain's membership of the EU during the election campaign – the *Independent* with a positive impact and the *Sun* with a negative one. The *Sun* also has an effect on its readers' attitudes towards the single European currency, as does the *Star*, *Mail* and *Times*, all exerting a statistically significant negative influence on support for Britain's involvement with the European currency. These results make intuitive sense, as these newspapers advocated a hard Euro-sceptic line on membership of the euro, which was well documented during the course of the campaign. As Scammell and Harrop observe: 'Europe dominated the *Sun's* political world for the last two weeks of the campaign' (2001, p. 162).

There is also a significant negative effect of not reading a newspaper on attitudes to the euro, even when controlling for previous attitudes and other factors. This suggests that those individuals who do not read a daily newspaper still changed their opinions about the single currency during the campaign. This attitude change may well have been influenced by other cues not investigated here, such as personal contacts. It is interesting to note that the pro-EU press has little influence in affecting the attitudes of its readers. This is not an unexpected result, as the intensity of the pro-EU press is far weaker than the anti-EU press, and the euro was certainly a far less salient issue for these newspapers during the 2001 election campaign.

The other variable that taps into media effects is one that accounts for those individuals who watched a Conservative PEB. Although the relationship between watching a Conservative PEB is negative in both models, as we would expect, there are no statistically significant effects on attitudes towards the EU or the euro.

The variables that measure the partisanship of voters are illuminating for explaining support for the EU and the euro. Even accounting for existing attitudes towards the EU, identification with Labour has a positive and statistically significant impact on attitudes to Europe for all levels of attachment. Conversely, attachment to the Conservatives is not found to be a statistically significant predictor of attitudes to the EU when controlling for predispositions and other factors. However, the

**Table 1: Media and Party Effects on Attitudes towards the EU and the Single Currency (Ordered Probit Estimates)**

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Attitudes to the EU</i>		<i>Attitudes to the euro</i>	
Attitudes to Europe $t-1$	0.625	(0.040)**	–	–
Attitudes to the euro $t-1$	–	–	0.904	(0.044)**
Watched Conservative PEB	–0.008	(0.058)	–0.014	(0.061)
No newspaper	–0.155	(0.111)	–0.345	(0.114)**
<b>Pro-EU newspapers</b>				
<i>Mirror</i>	–0.191	(0.128)	–0.104	(0.137)
<i>Express</i>	–0.160	(0.134)	–0.002	(0.168)
<i>Guardian</i>	0.028	(0.205)	–0.147	(0.187)
<i>Independent</i>	0.502	(0.214)**	–0.143	(0.246)
<b>Anti-EU newspapers</b>				
<i>Star</i>	–0.493	(0.320)	–0.580	(0.314)*
<i>Sun</i>	–0.448	(0.135)**	–0.258	(0.139)*
<i>Mail</i>	–0.128	(0.127)	–0.285	(0.135)*
<i>Telegraph</i>	–0.063	(0.148)	–0.093	(0.153)
<i>Times</i>	–0.031	(0.176)	–0.399	(0.173)*
<b>Party identification</b>				
Labour – very strong	0.474	(0.151)**	0.187	(0.147)
Labour – fairly strong	0.247	(0.094)**	0.064	(0.105)
Labour – not very strong	0.272	(0.095)**	0.003	(0.108)
Conservative – very strong	0.021	(0.173)	–0.490	(0.189)**
Conservative – fairly strong	–0.010	(0.111)	–0.369	(0.123)**
Conservative – not very strong	0.027	(0.106)	–0.260	(0.112)**
Liberal – very strong	0.823	(0.462)*	–0.133	(0.517)
Liberal – fairly strong	0.122	(0.145)	–0.057	(0.168)
Liberal – not very strong	–0.049	(0.144)	–0.097	(0.146)
<b>Control variables</b>				
English national identity	–0.203	(0.066)**	–0.084	(0.072)
Scottish national identity	–0.016	(0.110)	–0.102	(0.100)
Welsh national identity	–0.101	(0.078)	–0.222	(0.091)**
Personal retrospective economic evaluations	0.061	(0.034)*	0.024	(0.037)
National retrospective economic evaluations	0.041	(0.036)	0.025	(0.037)
Education	0.044	(0.025)*	0.077	(0.026)**
High income	0.118	(0.086)	0.029	(0.095)
Medium income	–0.068	(0.085)	–0.002	(0.092)
Low income	–0.043	(0.094)	0.035	(0.099)
Gender (male)	0.168	(0.063)**	0.106	(0.065)
Age	–0.001	(0.002)	0.000	(0.002)
Professional	0.116	(0.092)	0.048	(0.096)
Executive/manager	0.072	(0.095)	0.185	(0.096)*
Manual worker	–0.002	(0.084)	0.125	(0.085)
Unemployed	0.226	(0.157)	0.246	(0.216)
Correctly predicted cases (%)	49.3		59.3	
Wald test (d.f.)	1190 (36)**		623.2 (36)**	
Log likelihood	–2445.4		–1868.7	
N	2021		1963	

Note: Figures are ordered probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*  $P \leq 0.05$ ; \*  $P \leq 0.10$ .

partisan effects on attitudes towards the euro tells a different story, where the relationship is statistically significant only for the Conservatives, and negative as expected.

Looking at the substantive impacts of Conservative identification, these effects on attitudes to the euro are stronger when the attachment to the party is stronger. The predicted probability of ruling out joining the single currency on principle increases by seven percentage points for weakly aligned Conservative identifiers compared to non-Conservative identifiers holding all other variables at their means or modes.<sup>6</sup> This difference is twelve percentage points for 'fairly strongly' attached Conservative identifiers and twenty percentage points for 'very strong' Conservative identifiers. Overall, these party effects demonstrate that the Conservatives had a major impact on their supporters' opinions towards joining the single currency. This is hardly surprising, given that the party made its aversion to monetary union abundantly clear. Labour, on the other hand, were generally positive towards Europe during the campaign, but they were reluctant to be drawn on the specifics of policy on the euro continued their tried and trusted 'wait and see' policy. Thus, Labour's influence on their supporters is to lead them to positively view the EU in general, but it has no significant effects on their attitudes towards monetary integration.

The coefficients for independent variables in an ordered probit model are difficult to interpret, and the substantive importance of the independent variables cannot be easily determined by comparing the size of the coefficients such as presented in Table 1 (Long, 1997). To better interpret the parameter estimates, it is helpful to estimate the marginal effects that a change in each variable has on the probability of responding in one of the categories of the dependent variable. Table 2 contains more meaningful predicted probabilities for the ordered probit estimations of support for the EU. These estimations are computed using the Tomz *et al.* (2001) Clarify routine. Clarify uses simulation techniques to help interpret statistical results. The table includes the first differences of the press variables, expressed as percentages, with all other explanatory variables set to their means or modes. The results are presented for 'fairly strong' identifiers of the two major parties. There are significant substantive effects of a number of newspapers on their readerships, and these effects appear to be consistent across identifiers of both parties. For instance, 'fairly strong' Labour identifiers reading the *Independent* are fourteen percentage points more likely to approve of the EU than individuals who do not read that newspaper, and seven percentage points more likely to strongly approve of Britain's membership of the EU. 'Fairly strong' Conservative readers of the *Sun*, on the other hand, are seven percentage points more likely to disapprove of membership of the EU and four percentage points more likely to strongly disapprove than non-*Sun* readers.

Table 3 presents predicted probabilities for attitudes towards the single European currency. One noticeable substantive difference is that the pro-EU newspapers have virtually no measurable effect on attitudes towards the euro for either moderate Labour or Conservative supporters when controlling for previous attitudes and other explanatory factors. However, the anti-EU newspapers do have an effect, and a negative one, as we would expect. For example, Conservative readers of the *Mail*

**Table 2: Media and Party Effects on Attitudes towards Britain’s Membership of the EU (Predicted Probabilities)**

Independent variables	Labour identifiers (fairly strong)				Conservative identifiers (fairly strong)					
	Strongly disapprove	Disapprove	Neither	Approve	Strongly disapprove	Disapprove	Neither	Approve	Strongly approve	
No newspaper	0.3	0.9	0.3	-1.2	-0.3	0.4	0.9	0.1	-1.2	-0.2
Pro-EU newspapers										
<i>Mirror</i>	0.7	1.8	0.4	-2.5	-0.5	1.0	1.8	0.1	-2.5	-0.4
<i>Express</i>	0.2	0.3	-0.1	-0.4	-0.01	0.2	0.2	-0.1	-0.3	0.05
<i>Guardian</i>	-2.0*	-6.6*	-3.1*	8.8*	2.9*	-2.7*	-7.0*	-1.9	9.4*	2.2*
<i>Independent</i>	-2.9**	-11.3**	-7.0**	14.3**	6.9**	-4.0**	-12.2**	-5.2**	16.1**	5.3**
Anti-EU newspapers										
<i>Star</i>	4.5	7.4	-0.2	-10.3	-1.4	5.7	6.7	-1.7	-9.8	-1.0
<i>Sun</i>	3.3**	7.0**	0.8	-9.5**	-1.6**	4.3**	6.7**	-0.6	-9.2**	-1.1**
<i>Mail</i>	0.3	0.9	0.2	-1.2	-0.3	0.4	0.9	0.1	-1.2	-0.2
<i>Telegraph</i>	-0.5	-1.7	-0.6	2.2	0.6	-0.7	-1.7	-0.3	2.3	0.4
<i>Times</i>	-0.4	-1.3	-0.6	1.7	0.5	-0.5	-1.3	-0.3	1.8	0.4

Note: Figures are the first differences, expressed as percentages, when simulating a change from 0 to 1 in each independent variable while keeping all other explanatory variables at their means or modes.

\*\* P ≤ 0.05; \* P ≤ 0.10.

Table 3: Media and Party Effects on Attitudes towards Britain Joining the Single European Currency (Predicted Probabilities)

Independent variables	Labour identifiers (fairly strong)				Conservative identifiers (fairly strong)			
	Rule out on principle	Out for 4/5 years	Join if conditions right	Definitely join	Rule out on principle	Out for 4/5 years	Join if conditions right	Definitely join
No newspaper	4.4**	3.4**	-6.6**	-1.1**	6.2**	0.9	-6.6**	-0.5**
Pro-EU newspapers								
<i>Mirror</i>	0.3	0.3	-0.5	-0.1	0.4	0.2	-0.6	-0.1
<i>Express</i>	-0.1	-0.2	0.2	0.1	-0.2	-0.2	0.3	0.0
<i>Guardian</i>	-1.1	-1.4	2.0	0.6	-1.7	-0.8	2.3	0.3
<i>Independent</i>	1.4	0.3	-1.7	0.0	1.7	-0.4	-1.3	0.0
Anti-EU newspapers								
<i>Star</i>	14.3	4.3	-16.8	-1.8	17.9	-2.5	-14.7	-0.7
<i>Sun</i>	5.2**	3.7**	-7.7**	-1.3**	7.3**	0.8	-7.6**	-0.5**
<i>Mail</i>	4.9**	3.6**	-7.2**	-1.2**	6.8**	0.8	-7.1**	-0.5**
<i>Telegraph</i>	1.9	1.4	-2.8	-0.5	2.6	0.4	-2.8	-0.2
<i>Times</i>	5.6	3.6	-8.0	-1.2	7.7	0.6	-7.7	-0.5

Note: Figures are the first differences, expressed as percentages, when simulating a change from 0 to 1 in each independent variable while keeping all other explanatory variables at their means or modes.  
 \*\*  $P \leq 0.05$ .

and *Sun* are seven percentage points more likely to rule out ever joining the single currency than those who do not read those newspapers. These effects are also mirrored for 'fairly strong' Labour identifiers, with a five percentage point higher probability of ruling out the single currency for readers of those two newspapers. This does not necessarily mean that the pro-EU press is not having an effect on their readers. As can be seen in the table, those individuals who read no newspaper at all are six (Conservative) and four (Labour) percentage points more likely to rule out membership of the euro on principle, even when controlling for prior attitudes and a number of other predictors. Thus, it may be that the pro-EU press are influencing their readers by offering an alternative countervailing message to offset the dominant anti-euro message that prevails during this period.

Table 4 presents the results of an ordered probit regression on attitudes towards Europe accounting for information flows that individuals are receiving, which can be for, against or have mixed support for EU membership or entry to the single currency. The results confirm our expectations – that there is a statistically significant and positive relationship for Labour identifiers who read a pro-EU newspaper on both attitudes towards EU membership and the single currency, even while controlling for predispositions. For Labour supporters reading an anti-EU newspaper, and therefore receiving mixed messages about Europe, we find that there is no significant relationship between newspaper readership and attitudes towards Europe. As hypothesised, the reverse is found for Conservative identifiers. There is a significant and negative relationship for Conservatives reading an anti-EU newspaper and support for the euro. This relationship is also found for Conservatives who do not read a newspaper. The influence of the party does not have a significant effect on attitudes towards either EU membership or for the single currency when Conservative supporters read a pro-EU newspaper. Perhaps the most illustrative result we find with regard to the influence of the press on attitudes to the euro is for that of the pro-EU press on individuals with no partisan attachment, where we find a statistically significant and positive impact, even when controlling for prior opinions. This suggests that, for those who are not receiving or accepting messages from other sources, the media may well be able to influence a possible referendum on the euro for the large minority of those who are not aligned to any of the parties.

A selection of predicted probabilities of the model shown in Table 4 is presented in Table 5. These results demonstrate some of the substantive effects of the relationships shown in Table 4 and include the first differences of selected variables as calculated above for Tables 2 and 3. Labour identifiers who read a pro-EU newspaper are eight percentage points more likely to approve of Britain's membership of the EU, and Labour supporters who read no newspaper at all are six percentage points more likely to approve. However, for Labour identifiers who receive countervailing messages by reading one of the Euro-sceptic newspapers, there is no noticeable effect. This result strongly suggests that media and party effects are much greater when individuals are exposed to one prominent message. For the euro model, identification with the Conservatives is of much greater substantive significance. As we would expect, these effects are greatest when Conservative identifiers receive confirmatory influences by also reading an anti-euro newspaper, when the predicted probability of ruling out joining the single currency on principle

**Table 4: Combined Media and Party Effects on Attitudes towards the EU and the Single Currency (Ordered Probit Estimates)**

<i>Independent variables</i>	<i>Attitudes to the EU</i>		<i>Attitudes to the euro</i>	
Attitudes to Europe $t-1$	0.639	(0.039)**	–	–
Attitudes to the euro $t-1$	–	–	0.928	(0.044)**
Watched Conservative PEB	–0.004	(0.058)	–0.018	(0.061)
<b>Labour Party identification</b>				
Reads a pro-EU newspaper	0.237	(0.112)**	0.147	(0.124)
Reads an anti-EU newspaper	0.035	(0.118)	0.002	(0.129)
Reads no newspaper	0.152	(0.113)	–0.171	(0.120)
<b>Conservative Party identification</b>				
Reads a pro-EU newspaper	–0.140	(0.147)	–0.247	(0.162)
Reads an anti-EU newspaper	–0.136	(0.112)	–0.369	(0.126)**
Reads no newspaper	–0.113	(0.138)	–0.385	(0.140)**
<b>Other party identification</b>				
Reads a pro-EU newspaper	0.066	(0.200)	–0.050	(0.178)
Reads an anti-EU newspaper	–0.100	(0.156)	–0.008	(0.166)
Reads no newspaper	–0.141	(0.135)	–0.316	(0.163)*
<b>No party identification</b>				
Reads a pro-EU newspaper	–0.161	(0.205)	0.658	(0.391)*
Reads an anti-EU newspaper	–0.141	(0.175)	–0.070	(0.194)
Reads no newspaper	–0.104	(0.138)	–0.134	(0.168)
<b>Control variables</b>				
English national identity	–0.191	(0.066)**	–0.070	(0.071)
Scottish national identity	0.004	(0.112)	–0.081	(0.103)
Welsh national identity	–0.124	(0.075)*	–0.164	(0.088)*
Personal retrospective economic evaluations	0.060	(0.034)*	0.028	(0.036)
National retrospective economic evaluations	0.045	(0.037)	0.035	(0.036)
Education	0.064	(0.024)**	0.075	(0.025)**
High income	0.146	(0.087)*	0.051	(0.095)
Medium income	–0.056	(0.086)	–0.002	(0.092)
Low income	–0.025	(0.095)	0.056	(0.100)
Gender (male)	0.166	(0.062)**	0.103	(0.064)
Age	0.001	(0.002)	0.001	(0.002)
Professional	0.150	(0.092)	0.040	(0.094)
Executive/manager	0.096	(0.096)	0.178	(0.097)*
Manual worker	–0.026	(0.081)	0.139	(0.082)*
Unemployed	0.246	(0.156)	0.295	(0.212)
Correctly predicted cases (%)	48.7		59.0	
Likelihood ratio (d.f.)	538.2 (29)**		670.6 (29)**	
Log likelihood	–2465.4		–1874.0	
<i>N</i>	2021		1963	

Note: Figures are ordered probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*\*  $P \leq 0.05$ ; \*  $P \leq 0.10$ .

**Table 5: Combined Media and Party Effects on Attitudes towards the EU and the Single Currency (Predicted Probabilities)**

Independent variables	Attitudes to the EU				Attitudes to the euro				
	Strongly disapprove	Disapprove	Neither	Approve	Strongly approve	Rule out on principle	Out for 4/5 years	Join if conditions right	Definitely join
<b>Labour Party identification</b>									
Reads a pro-EU newspaper	-3.4**	-6.1**	-0.1	8.4**	1.2**	-4.3*	-2.3*	5.8*	0.8*
Reads an anti-EU newspaper	-0.4	-0.6	0.04	0.9	0.1	0.9	0.3	-1.1	-0.1
Reads no newspaper	-2.4**	-4.2**	0.2	5.7**	0.8**	1.6	0.6	-2.0	-0.2
<b>Conservative Party identification</b>									
Reads a pro-EU newspaper	4.0	4.4	-1.4	-6.3	-0.6	7.3*	1.4	-8.1*	-0.7*
Reads an anti-EU newspaper	3.0	3.6	-1.0	-5.2	-0.5	11.3**	1.7	-12.1**	-0.9**
Reads no newspaper	2.8	3.4	-0.9	-4.8	-0.5	10.9**	1.7	-11.7**	-0.9**
<b>Other party identification</b>									
Reads a pro-EU newspaper	-2.2	-3.9	-0.03	5.4	0.8	-2.4	-1.4	3.4	0.5
Reads an anti-EU newspaper	3.9	4.3	-1.4	-6.2	-0.6	2.1	0.5	-2.4	-0.2
Reads no newspaper	1.6	2.0	-0.5	-2.8	-0.3	4.5	1.2	-5.2	-0.5
<b>No party identification</b>									
Reads a pro-EU newspaper	2.7	2.3	-1.2	-3.5	-0.2	-8.7	-7.1	13.1	2.8
Reads an anti-EU newspaper	1.6	1.6	-0.7	-2.3	-0.2	1.7	0.1	-1.7	-0.1
Reads no newspaper	1.5	1.8	-0.5	-2.5	-0.2	1.0	0.1	-1.0	-0.1

Note: Figures are the first differences, expressed as percentages, when simulating a change from 0 to 1 in each independent variable while keeping all other explanatory variables at their means or modes.  
 \*\* P ≤ 0.05; \* P ≤ 0.10.

increases by twelve percentage points. These results are very similar to Conservative identifiers who read no newspaper at all. This is not unexpected, as the Conservative campaign was so dominated by opposition to the euro that it would be hard for their supporters to fail to respond to their party's cue during the campaign, even from seemingly unbiased media such as television or radio. Conservative identifiers reading a pro-euro newspaper are also more likely to hold a negative view of euro membership after the campaign. As we would expect, these effects are smaller than for supporters exposed to just a Euro-sceptical message, who are four percentage points less likely to rule out joining the single currency than Conservatives reading an anti-euro newspaper or no newspaper at all.

## Conclusion

The results of our analysis suggest that Britain's highly partisan and biased press does indeed have an influence on the attitudes of their readers towards Europe, both positive and negative. Over the past two general elections in Britain, the press has certainly aimed to elevate the issue of monetary union during the campaigns, concentrating more on coverage of this issue than those considered more important by their readers, such as health and education. Although the anti-EU press accounts for the majority of the press circulation in the UK, we find that its attempts to 'influence and persuade' are very much contingent on partisan preferences. With individuals who receive mixed messages from their political parties and from their daily newspaper, the effects of both of these opinion-leading institutions are limited. On the other hand, when information flows are dominant, through corresponding messages from both party and press, we have found that the influence of both can be considerable.

Previous studies have hypothesised that individuals evaluate the EU according to a number of criteria by which they gain or lose from integration. These studies do not assume that European citizens are extremely sophisticated, but that the costs and benefits of integration will filter through to individuals through media, parties, trades unions, personal contacts, and so on, although these links are not directly investigated. We have presented evidence from Britain in 2001 that the media and political parties have direct effects on attitudes towards the EU and on the issue of Britain joining the single European currency. This evidence could have important implications for any future referendum on adopting the euro in Britain.

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## Notes

- 1 Outside of the election campaigns, the parties also receive airtime for party political broadcasts at other times of the year.

- 2 The data and the documentation are available at <http://www.essex.ac.uk/bes>.
- 3 The *Financial Times* was subsequently dropped from this analysis, as our sample included just five readers of that newspaper.
- 4 'Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, (Scottish National/Plaid Cymru) or what?' If the answer was 'none', the respondent was then asked: 'Do you generally think of yourself as a little closer to one of the parties than the others?', and, if they did, they were asked which party.
- 5 All of the analysis here includes regional weights to account for over sampling in Scotland and Wales.
- 6 Common practice for interpreting maximum likelihood estimation estimates, such as ordered probit, is by calculating the marginal effects of selected variables of interest while holding all other independent variables at their means (Long, 1997). We have in our model a number of dummy variables, some of which are mutually exclusive, which cannot be held at their means. In these cases, we have selected modal values, which include medium level of income, manual worker, female, English national identity, and not watched a Conservative PEB.

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