Beyond the Nation-State? Examining Trends in Public Support for Governments in the European Union

Sharon E. Hoeck

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Beyond the Nation-State?

Examining Trends in Public Support for Governments in the European Union

Sharon E. Hoeck

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A recent op-ed in Germany’s Die Welt national newspaper claims that “[w]ith the exception of soccer and the Eurovision Song Contest, there’s nothing around which Europeans rally as a whole…” (Gersemann, 2011, para. 4). The European Union (EU) has no official language in the way that most nation-states do. Information distribution is therefore limited across national and regional borders. The Die Welt op-ed questions the EU’s trustworthiness, as information emerges that Greece did not meet the financial requirements to join the euro. Along with other economic barriers to integration, the op-ed notes the “missing European mind.” Not even individuals in member states’ national governments are willing to abandon national thinking for a more continental, unified mindset. The absence of this “European mind” has both contributed to and been fed by high-profile issues facing the EU.

The EU is an experiment to determine whether a diverse region accustomed to individual state governance can be controlled by a central government. The only partially comparable political transition would be the United States when it adopted the Constitution over the previous, state-dominated Articles of Confederation governing system. However, the history of animosity between nation-states in Europe is exponentially more established than the animosity between American states at the time of the unification.¹ For example, German aggression once wrecked chaos on Europe, yet Germany is currently the economic foundation of the EU. National group interests within nation-states are often at odds with state governments, such as Catalonia in Spain or Scotland in Great Britain, yet the EU is

¹The First and Second World Wars, which centered mainly on Europe, were only two of the most recent in a long line of wars between European nation-states. For example, the Hundred Years’ War between Britain and France, the Napoleonic Wars between France the rest of Europe, and the War of Austrian Succession between an alliance of Austria, Britain, and the Netherlands against Prussia are just a few of the wars that have divided Europe, creating a centuries-long history of continental war. While the American colonies had experienced minor skirmishes before the Revolutionary War, they did not have the extensive history of warfare present in Europe. European integration is therefore the first experiment of its kind.
attempting to unite all of Europe under a single flag. This effort to unify Europe is especially unique because modern European nation-states have only come into existence in the last one hundred years and because Europe has historically been a cultural, economic, and political crossroads. The integration process in this region can therefore offer great insight into how a government can unite its diverse populous under a single political system. This unity, essentially European integration, does not necessitate complete homogenization, however. Rather, European integration will primarily require the establishment of trust both between the population and the government and between the people groups within Europe.

In this paper, I will examine the existing degrees of trust between people groups in Europe and between European political structures and their citizens. This study will especially focus on the effects of the current economic crisis and the culturally heterogeneous nature of the present EU, therefore examining the extent to which the EU can move from a loosely connected supranational entity to a conglomeration of numerous identities and ideologies working towards the common goals of economic relevancy and thriving cultural society. Not only will the fulfillment of these goals mark a major step toward realizing Europe’s post-World War Two goals, but it will enable Europe to develop as a more competitive and relevant part of the global economy.

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2 The United States, for example, encompasses a wide variety of people groups and ideologies. While these ideological differences are very apparent in election years when candidates and individuals of different parties argue incessantly over whether or not the nation is on the correct course, America has been able to function as an effective political body. For example, America has come together in times of national crisis such as the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor at the beginning of the Second World War or the devastation on the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina. Despite different regions and ideologies, the United States has dominated the international scene as an effective political actor since the end of the Second World War.
Before examining the ability of the EU to unite nations under a single government system, however, we should first examine the concept of a “nation” and how cultural identities are constructed. The term “nation” is used frequently in political rhetoric, in the media, in discussions between individuals, in sporting events, etc. This concept creates unity and discord simultaneously, bringing together individuals in the same nation and excluding outsiders as different and strange. Members of the same nation often feel a connection to others in their nation, regardless of whether they have had any personal interaction with them. This identification, created in spite of a lack of actual interaction between all members of a group fosters the formation of an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). This term seeks to capture the idea that individuals in these communities ascribe to an identity—created either out of social convenience, necessity, or government action—that does not necessarily correspond with actual relationships or concrete manifestations of similarity. What, then, leads to the initial creation of these identities?

One explanation is that convenience and social or political necessity drive people to associate with one another. A nation could therefore be defined simply as a group of people who agree to live together and to give up personal sovereignty in search of a more effective and efficient means of life. Living in a community can allow individuals to enjoy a standard of living inaccessible to a more solitary way of life (Locke, 1683, p. 121; Hobbes, 1651, p. 116). This act of losing part of oneself to the community involves a moral obligation to place the needs and interests of the community above one’s own personal interests (Renan, 1929, p. 18). Individuals’ associations with the groups that they join out of convenience and necessity

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3 “Nation” is used in this section as distinct from “nation-state.” A nation is a body with a unified social and relational identity that I will explain further in this section. A nation-state is a political entity governed by a single, sovereign government.
therefore overshadow individual identity. These groups share attributes that are necessary for maintaining solidarity among members. Significant among these attributes is the facilitation and maintenance of communication throughout the community (Deutsch, 1966, p. 26).

Communication can be facilitated or blocked by factors such as territorial proximity and geographic similarity, compatible economic ideology, common experience, and common history.

The physical territory that a nation occupies is its most apparent characteristic and has the potential to significantly effect communication within the nation. This aspect of a nation facilitates communication among its members because of their relative geographic proximity and their comparable natural environments. Territorial immediacy allows the spread of ideas and concepts easily across a nation’s area. While this factor was more influential before the advent of television and the Internet, physical proximity still facilitates more uniform popular interpretations of events and communication than the more varied interpretation of individuals living in other parts of the world. This similar interpretation occurs because individuals who live in comparable geographical areas face similar problems, make similar observations, and develop similar habits. For example, inhabitants of agricultural areas are predisposed to develop relatively uniform identities as they live close to the land and its fruits. These individuals depend on the weather and on the seasons to sustain life and livelihood. An identity that develops from this environment is very different from the one that originates in a large city whose residents must contend with a world of skyscrapers and overpopulation. An individual who lives in an agricultural community would therefore be inhibited from understanding the concerns and actions of a city dweller, creating a barrier to communication (Stalin, 1947, p. 19).
Another factor that facilitates communication is a cohesive economic ideology. The period of tension between the Soviet Union and the United States in the Cold War is an example of the communications barrier established when two countries have opposing economic ideologies. The lack of effective communication between these two states developed from opposing worldviews that saw the function of the government and the economy as serving two very different purposes. The fear of one country proliferating its opposing ideology throughout the world heightened this fear of the unknown and unfamiliar, creating a situation in which communication between the two governments and people groups was impossible. Economic cooperation—or at least a willingness to acknowledge other economic systems as viable alternatives—within a community is therefore a necessary part of a community’s cohesiveness (Stalin, 1947, p. 20).

Common experience is another means of promoting communication towards constructing a unified nation. An example of the importance of common experience can be found in America just prior to its attempt to shake off British colonial rule in the mid-1700s. Although the British crown held ultimate authority, each colony had a local government to navigate its day-to-day governance. The policies and political goals of these local governments differed greatly due to the unique character of each colony. The economy of plantation-filled South Carolina, for example, was very different than the shipping- and trade-based economy in coastal Massachusetts (Rockoff & Walton, 2010, p. 55). These differences were aggravated by the physical diversity of the land that the colonies occupied, creating a situation in which individuals from different colonies could not relate to each other and over which a single government would be difficult to impose. Arguably one of the catalysts for the colonies’ unification against British rule was the Great Awakening of the 1700s. Preachers traveled across state lines, giving individuals in Georgia similar experiences to individuals in
New Hampshire and Pennsylvania (Mathews, 1969, pp. 25-26). In addition to this common social experience, the colonists were also united by the repression that they faced from the British. The committees of correspondence—set up as illegal governmental bodies to keep the colonists informed of both British offenses and colonial responses—were a manifestation of the unifying and communicative power of common repression. Communities gained experiences about which they could talk to otherwise unfamiliar individuals. Experience therefore facilitated initial communication, setting the stage for later communication and cooperation.

In much the same way that common experience contributes to the formation of a nation, common history binds groups of people together. Common history is a construct created by academia and by government influence. Therefore, while common experience constitutes personal involvement in the unifying event, common history is learned by a people through socialization facilitated by schools, education in the home, television shows, or national holidays. The United States’ common national history has unified the American people to a degree that they feel a personal identification with the state. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, for example, were an attack on the American people as a cohesive whole rather than simply on the individuals directly affected. Common history therefore creates the sense that a nation is a single, unitary actor (Deutsch, 1996, p. 26; Renan, 1929, p. 17; Anderson, 1991, p. 6). This history facilitates communication between individuals within a nation because they identify with this established actor.

All of the factors that facilitate communication become much less significant without the presence of a common language. Most states, in recognition of this principle, adopt an official language in which all of the official business of the state is conducted. Practical

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4 Also known as period effects in studies relating to public opinion, for example, in Robert S. Erikson and Kent L. Tedin’s book *American Public Opinion* (copyright 2010 by Longman).
verbal communication, then, has become the foundation of functional governments and social institutions (Deutsch, 1966, p. 28). For example, as the Catholic Church fell from its previous role as the dominant actor in European politics, the language of the Catholic Church also fell out of official use in many parts of Europe. Latin was therefore replaced by the vernacular of each region. Areas unified by common language became the tentative basis for the establishment of modern European nations in the Treaty of Westphalia (Anderson, 1991, p. 44). The effect of language-based divides on individuals can be seen in the political split in Belgium between Dutch-speaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia, both of which are regions within Belgium. These two regions have developed as effectively independent nation-states, each with a distinct economic and political identity (Billiet, Frognier & Maddens, 1992, p. 913). While the split between these two regions is aggravated by differing economic success and political goals, disagreements almost invariably occur simultaneously with language divisions. A nation’s official language is determined by tradition and history, often the initial result of geographic location, proximity of other groups, or the dictates of a ruler. The language is maintained, however, by the more organic means of tradition as parents pass their language on to their children.

The consideration of language makes the tension between community constructs and societal constructs apparent. These concepts refer to the origins of human traditions and mannerisms. Community constructs represent the elements of behavior that stemmed from the actions that a community chose for itself. For example, this concept would include pre-existing common traits that community members shared before they entered into the

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5 Historians or sociologists do not universally accept this order of language development prior to formation of modern nation-states. Eric Hobsbawm, for example, argues that, because of the relatively late development of language and regionally distinct language, nations were developed first and language followed (1992). Regardless of the order in which scholars believe these two developments took place, most would agree that language does constitute a unifying characteristic of modern nations.
community itself. In the case of Belgium, language would be a community construct in the sense that individuals within Flanders and Wallonia spoke a language common to their fellow region-members. Societal constructs refer to characteristics imposed on a group by a government or social structure. In Belgium, language could also be a social construct because the political structure of each region perpetuates the use of either French or Dutch within its respective borders. This governmental pressure reinforces the language barrier even though that barrier was not originally created by the state (Toennies, 2002, pp. 33-37).

A nation’s characteristics are therefore a conglomeration of societal and community constructs, with no clear distinction regarding when one stops and the other begins. The complexity and ambiguity of these two concepts creates a problem for bodies such as the EU that attempt to create a unified political body where there is no prior existence of community construct. To the contrary, the European continent as a whole has a history wracked with conflict among its states. Creating the necessary balance between communal and societal unity for national solidarity may therefore prove difficult for the diverse EU.

**Development of the European Union**

Examining the history of the EU’s development will shed light onto the incentives for and barriers against the formation of a unified body transcending these diverse and often warring nations. For example, Europe was able to overcome a history wrought with violent conflict and opposing ideology through the common desire to reduce the incidence of conflict on the continent. The EU was formed as a body intended to supersede the cultural and state borders of modern European nation-states. This formation was driven by the need to address the problems that had culminated after the end of the Second World War, therefore making

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6 These states, in turn, transcend more localized, subnational identities.
use of the unifying affects of the common task facing Europe of rebuilding the economy and the economic infrastructure (Cini, 2010, p. 2).

Even before World War Two, the relatively small nations of Europe were having difficulties competing economically with the seemingly unlimited natural and labor resources that countries like the United States and Soviet Russia had at their disposal. While some European nations were able compensate for this inequality by colonizing large portions of the African continent, 1945 saw the beginning of the end of global colonization, with freedom granted to most colonies. Deprived of these captive economic resources and markets, Europe needed to turn elsewhere to find the solution to its relatively small economic structure (Pugh, 2010, p. 107). By finding a solution to the economic woes in a more unified Europe, these nations confirmed the Enlightenment notion that alliances are primarily made because all involved parties recognize that the benefits of individual sovereignty are outweighed by the benefits of community (Locke, 1683, pp. 121; Hobbes, 1651, pp. 116). In the case of Europe, these communal benefits included freedom from war and increased economic success.

In order to understand peace as a motivating factor in Europe’s integration, one must realize the extent to which war was a constant reality for European nation-states. Throughout modern European history, aggression from countries such as France, Britain, or Austria threatened European stability. For example, the Hundred Years’ War disrupted the lives of Europeans as their rulers either fought alongside the British or the French or attempted to escape the ill effects of the war. Additionally, the Napoleonic Wars wreaked havoc on European governing structures and economies as nations struggled to maintain armies that could reverse the tide of Napoleon’s advance. The First and Second World Wars, therefore, were the culmination of a long history of war between European political actors. The threat of
aggression from Germany, France, and Britain or the threat of being caught in the middle a conflict between two other nations has therefore characterized much of European history.

The commonality of war in Europe caused one political analyst to label Europe in the period between the two World Wars as a “powder keg” whose disarmament was a goal toward which all could agree to work (Coudenhove-Kalergi, 1923, p. 7). While this suggestion was not heeded at the time, the observation became part of Europe’s collective history and post-World War Two European leaders acted on it. Early institutions such as the European Coal and Steel Community reflect this acknowledgement of common history as they sought to control the primary war-supporting industries. In addition to controlling these industries, this early alliance recognized that nations allied with one another are less likely to go to war with one another because of shared political and economic interests (Cini, 2010, p. 19). Europeans were therefore able to work with one another despite cultural and political differences because of their common experience and common history of frequent continental war. Germany especially was in need of economic assistance after never fully recovering in the interwar period from its First World War debts. After the First World War, Germany’s economic instability was so great that it created conditions that led to the outbreak of the Second World War. In addition to fearing economic instability, European and other Western leaders wanted to form a barrier around the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence in order to prevent communism’s spread. European political stability depended on economic growth and recovery.

Europe’s economic rebirth and reformation into an integrated regional economy therefore came as a result of a Western desire for stability and strength. America, for instance, offered Europe financing through the Marshall Plan with the stipulation that the money be distributed throughout Western Europe at the direction of an organization that
included all involved countries ("Treaty of Collaboration," 1948). This requirement ensured Germany’s involvement in the recovery process, avoiding the economic instability that occurred after the First World War. In addition to reducing the possibility of future German aggression, the United States insisted on a unified Europe in the face of communist expansion. After the Soviet Union gained a large sphere of influence in the aftermath of World War Two, American and Western leaders feared that the Soviet Union would take advantage of Europe’s weakened economic and political state to increase its communist influence (Jones & Norton, 2010, pp. 98-99). The Marshall Plan and its stipulations therefore provided one of the catalysts that began the unification process that culminated in the modern European Union (EU).

The EU was therefore created out of a recognition that the entire community, including past aggressors, could benefit economically and socially by unifying regardless of the potential involved loss of sovereignty and distinctive culture. Each nation-state within the modern EU has a vastly different culture from that of any other member state. This diversity can be seen in the newer member states. Whereas the early members of the EU were generally from Western Europe, the inclusion of nations such as Greece in the 1980s brought another cultural and political dimension to the Union. Greece, located in Eastern Europe but governed by a largely Western political ideology, brought the recent history of a military junta government to a Union committed to eliminating totalitarian governments from the continent (Tsinisizelis, 2008, p. 146). After its political and economic struggles in the aftermath of the Second World War and during the Cold War, Greece sought to regain stability through membership in the EU. Instead of shaping EU policies as Germany did, Greece sought to mold itself into a state that fit the parameters defined by the EU’s governing principles. It therefore represents a different kind of membership than the embedded, pivotal
roles of states like Germany and France. Despite these differences in history or common experience, the EU has united around democratic political ideology, in which citizens of each nation-state choose and hold accountable representative governments (Bellamy, 1997, p. 431).

In addition to cultural struggles between member states, the EU is drafting legislation to address cultural disparities and related political disagreements exist within individual member states. For example, each of Germany’s states has its own identity—evidenced most clearly in Bavaria—just as the Greek government has to contend with its divided identity between Eastern and Western ideals. Additionally, Scottish, Irish, English, and Welsh borders divide the United Kingdom. Similarly, the Catalan region of Spain is culturally distinct from other parts of the nation-state. Despite the difficulties that individual nation-states have encountered in attempting to develop a unified identity, the European Union was formed with the potential to achieve the unification that individual nation-states could not through the institution of cohesion policy. Instead of continuing the tradition of nations to treat subnational governments as inferior, cohesion policy brings supranational, national, and subnational authorities together to negotiate certain forms of legislation on equal terms. Therefore, the EU is not creating a more distant form of traditional government, but is rather involving local authorities in community-wide decisions. This policy system creates the potential for a shift in power foci away from the nation-state while placating formerly overlooked subnational demands. By involving local governments—which are traditionally closer and more attuned to popular demands (Putnam, 2007, p. 131)—the EU has taken a preliminary step toward establishing the trust between the people of Europe and the European governments
Establishing Popular Trust in the Government

Popular trust is a needed component for the survival and development of the EU and the eurozone. The trust between a government and its citizens primarily involves a public belief in the ability and willingness of the government to satisfy its needs and desires. Historical actions such as the French Revolution and the American Revolutionary War show the vulnerability of even absolutist regimes to the demands of the general populous, leaders such as Josef Stalin and Mao Zedong generated vast amounts of popular support regardless of the harm that their actions caused their citizens. Even non-totalitarian governments must violate the desires of their constituents in order to maintain stability during times of political, social, or economic upheaval. The American people, for example, forgave President Abraham Lincoln, for declaring martial law and suspending the writ of habeas corpus in the Border States during the American Civil War. Despite the vast political and ideological differences between leaders like Lincoln and leaders like Stalin and Mao, they all needed some level of popular support to succeed. These three leaders found the required approval in a “reservoir” of political good will known to some as diffuse support. This reservoir, not dependent on the government’s immediate fulfillment of popular demands, allowed the people of America, the Soviet Union, and China to overlook their political leaders’ indiscretions against popular approval.

Diffuse support allows governments to function effectively through crises that require unpopular action without facing the immediate threat of revolution. This feat can be accomplished in three ways: through government responses to popular demands (outputs), through coercion, and through the accumulation of good will (Easton, 1965 p. 273). While the first method, generating popular outputs, is an effective method to quickly increase popular support, a government cannot rely on outputs alone to generate enough support to
sustain it over extended periods of time. A government that attempted to use outputs alone to

generate approval would face popular revolution whenever a crisis arose that required it to
temporarily overlook the immediate needs and desires of its citizens (Easton, 1965, p. 275).

The second method, coercion, is not an ideal solution for any government. While
citizens granting their government minimal support under distress are preferable to those who
launch a revolt or rebellion under coercive measures, this method of gaining support is not
sustainable and can easily backfire on the government if the population determines that the
force applied by the government is excessive (Eason, 1965, p. 276). This protest against
government abuse, for example, occurred in the Soviet Union during the rebellions that
followed the Bolshevik Revolution when the Whites protested against the reforms and
coercion of the Reds. Coercion can therefore only be used in limited and desperate situations
as an intermediate solution to maintain popular political will.

The third method, good will, is the most sustainable of the three methods of
generating support. Generating good will entails the government acting in such a way that its
actions instill in its population a belief in their government’s legitimacy, invokes the good of
the community as a whole, and increases the degree to which the populous identifies with the
political community. Instead of engaging the population as a customer to be served or as an
inferior to be ruled, the generation of good will seeks to involve the individual citizen as an
invested member of the community whose success or failure is tied up in the success or
failure of the political community itself (Easton 1965, pp. 275-277).

This third method of generating support could be established by an exhibition of one
or more types of legitimacy. Individuals could be convinced of their political system’s
legitimacy through the establishment of traditional authority, which is based largely on past
experiences and historical legacy (Weber, 1947, pp. 341-358). For example, many of the old
European monarchs relied on the feudal tradition of the divine right of kings. Another basis for legitimacy is derived from the charisma with which individual leaders carry themselves (Weber, 1947, pp. 358-363). An example of this can be seen in Latin American leaders over the past century, whose machismo and confidence established them in leadership positions around the region. A third type of legitimacy is based on rational thought and legality (Weber, 1947, pp. 324-341). This type of legitimacy is often seen in democratic nations such as the United States or Western Europe, where the government’s power and legitimacy originates in an established constitution of rationally developed laws. All of these types of legitimacy require the direct or tacit support of the involved populations, further involving the population in the democratic process.

A democratic government’s effectiveness can be severely hampered if it fails to generate this support in its citizenry by investing them in the actions and communities that characterize the nation-state. To achieve this goal and to ensure that its legitimacy will endure, the government must first demonstrate its ability to act in favor of the populous and then generate good will and a cohesive political community, effectively creating a reservoir of diffuse support for itself (Easton, 1965, p. 277). The EU enjoyed a period of relatively easy governance during the 1990s and early 2000s, but the economic crisis that began in 2008 provides an arena where the existence and durability of diffuse support for governments on both the nation-state and EU levels will be tested.

This increasingly volatile economic situation is one of the most pressing concerns for the European population (European Commission, 2011, p. 23). The popular recognition of this issue and the frantic attempts of governments on both the national level and the European level to address the problems involved in the economic crisis offer a unique opportunity to analyze popular trust in European institutions. Especially in the case of Greece, no
government has been able to address immediate desires and needs of the population while maintaining the standards for membership in the eurozone community. The situation in Greece affords an opportunity to examine the amount of trust that Greeks have placed in EU institutions to help their national economy recover in the long term despite nationwide economic hardships in the short term. On the other side of the economic situation is Germany, where much of the hope for a revitalized European economy lies. The current economic crisis and the demands on Germany to participate disproportionately in attempts to rebuild Europe’s economy provides the opportunity to study the willingness of one nation’s population to disrupt its own financial security for the good of the eurozone. In both of these countries, trust in the EU and the eurozone to act in a way that is beneficial to all members of Europe is crucial for the successful recovery and continued survival of the European economic union.

**Trust Among the People**

Diffuse support for and trust in the government alone cannot foster an effectively functioning political, social, and economic system within a region as richly diverse as the EU. Diversity within a society, while not undesirable, naturally lends itself to misunderstanding and tension between people of differing cultures, ideologies, and worldviews, creating social cleavages in the populous that translate into divisive political loyalties and identifications. For the EU and the eurozone to succeed on their mission to form a supranational, pan-European government, the people groups within the EU must establish a working relationship based on some level of trust. This trust can be established both structurally through the existence of crosscutting cleavages and socially through the establishment of trust across these cleavages by increased interaction between individuals or groups in social settings.
All individuals have a tendency to identify with one group or another based on the defining characteristics of the nation or group with which they identify. This idea involves the creation of in- and out-group divisions that potentially unite individuals to fellow group members and alienate them from outsiders (Putnam, 2007, p. 142). Social cleavages are often transmitted from generation to generation (Anderson & Heath, 2000, p. 12) and have the potential to play a significant role in establishing political party affiliations and trust within a populous (Lane & Ersson, 1987). These cleavages often solidify themselves throughout generations as learned identities generate political and social behaviors such as the tendency to vote a certain way or to interact with one group of people instead of another. By acting consistently with group identities, individuals reinforce both their membership to one social group over another and reiterate the cleavages that separate them from individuals of different social group. As these cleavages are reinforced, they create increasingly divided populations.

While these cleavages can divide societies, the presence of secondary or tertiary cleavages can crosscut the divisions created by a primary cleavage. For example, baseball fans living in Boston are generally at odds with baseball fans living in New York City. The rivalry between Red Sox and the Yankees fans has increased levels of conflict between these two cities and has occasionally resulted in violent clashes between these two fan “nations.” While identification with the Red Sox or the Yankees may constitute an individual’s primary identification, religion may constitute a secondary identification. Members of both fan nations can also be part of Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Mormon, or Muslim traditions, for example. The group of Muslims that supports the Red Sox and the group that supports the Yankees would therefore be united by religious ties despite being divided by cleavages created by sports loyalties. Adding a third cleavage, Roman Catholic immigrants from
Mexico could be members of both fan nations. These individuals would therefore be divided from other Red Sox or Yankees fans by their ethnicity and from Muslims or Presbyterians by their religion, but united by their loyalty to the Red Sox over the Yankees or vice versa. While cleavages can create an enormous amount of division within an aggregate society, as long as multiple cleavages do not reinforce one another (divide the same individuals into identical groups) they can uncover similarities that can bring together diverse groups of people (Lane and Ersson, 1987, p. 19).

The borders that define opposing groups are further blurred as individuals live together. As opposing individuals live in close proximity to one another, they develop common experiences and learn to integrate their cultures and practices into increasingly homogenous societies whose heterogeneities are at least partially overshadowed by subscription to a few central values that all members of the society or nation-state accept (Putnam, 2007, p. 141). National identities or similarities between national identities can therefore be forged over time as individuals learn to live and work together to achieve a more efficient, productive life. In the relatively young EU, differing national identities have not yet realized their full potential to crosscut other national identifications.

Belgium offers one example of a country that has not used its cultural and lingual in a way that would unite its population, but has rather allowed these cleavages to destroy much of its representative government’s ability to function. Regional cleavages reinforce language cleavages that in turn reinforce cultural cleavages, creating a system in which the formation of a viable coalition government is nearly impossible. An equally diverse nation-state, the UK, has proven better equipped to bring together its distinct regional identities under a single government system. While this system has devolved somewhat over the last decade, Scotland, Wales, England, and Northern Ireland are all still answerable to the government at
Westminster. While Belgium has not been without its successful governments and the UK has not been without its conflict-ridden and ineffectual governments, examining differences between these two very different styles of social unification and political structure will grant significant guidance for creating a European Union in which various social and political factions can function together under a single government system.

**Method**

In determining the level of trust and support within the EU and the implications of the presence of this trust for the future of the Union, I have chosen to first examine Greece and Germany in terms of economic success and then to examine the United Kingdom and Belgium in terms of divisive social cleavages in popular society (Table 1).

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Table 1: Flow of Argument

Germany and Greece have similar political structures, which allow us to exclude the structure itself from an examination of the relationship between the disparities between the two nations’ degree of economic success or failure and the disparities in the two nations’
levels of public trust. Both nation-states are organized as relatively young representative democracies, with Germany’s government formed just after World War Two and Greece’s formed in 1974. These governments both separate the offices of head of state and head of government. The head of government for both nations is chosen from the majority party or coalition of parties in the legislative body. In both nations, the government dominates the legislative agenda but can be voted out of office if the legislative body loses confidence in the government’s ability to lead. In contrast to their political similarities, however, these two nations are in very different economic situations. Germany’s economy, while weak in the 1990s, implemented reforms and austerity measures under Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder (1998-2005) and has grown to be one of the only stable economies in the EU during the present economic crisis (CIA, “Germany,” 2011). Greece’s economy, in contrast, transitioned out of its previous state-controlled economy after its present parliamentary government took control from the military regime that ruled from 1967 to 1974 (CIA, “Greece,” 2011). In order to meet the membership criteria for inclusion in the eurozone, Greece sought to radically change its economic structure and situation, a reform movement that has since been revealed to have fallen short of establishing sustainable economic stability.

This disparity of economic situation has created a situation in which the German population still has a measure of trust in their national government and in the European institutions that their government is helping to support while the Greek population is reporting low levels of trust in both their national government and in European institutions. In order to examine the factors that have promoted this disparity of trust, I will examine the governmental and electoral structure and stability, the economic structure and stability, and the level of involvement in the EU for both countries. The conclusions drawn from this

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7 While the selection process for the German Chancellor and the Greek Prime Minister is slightly different, the leader of each legislature’s majority party or coalition fills both positions.
examination will explain the disparity of national trust in the EU between European nation-states (see Figure 1) and will demonstrate the means by which the EU and its member states can build diffuse support that will help them sustain popular approval through times of crisis.

Belgium and the UK, like Germany and Greece, have similar political structures, allowing us to examine the relationship between social divisions and the differences between levels of social solidarity and trust in the two nations. In terms of political structure, for example, both nations have monarchs at the head of the state whose power is largely symbolic. These monarchs do, however appoint the prime ministers of each country from the leaders of the majority parties or coalitions represented in the respective lower legislative houses. Both nations are also similarly divided into regions over which the national government has created regional governments, with Belgium divided into Wallonia, Flanders, and Brussels and the UK divided into Scotland, England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. In Belgium, effectively functioning regional governments manage the affairs of Wallonia and Flanders despite the national political turmoil present since federal elections in 2007. In
Britain, all of the regions except England have gained a measure of independent power through political devolution. The regional parliaments in both of these countries make an increasing number of decisions that govern the day-to-day life of their populations (Billiet, Frognier & Maddens, 2010, p. 930; Norton & Jones, 2007, p. 100).8

Because of the similarities in political structure between Germany and Greece, and Belgium and the UK, my analysis and research is based primarily on the qualitative method of most similar systems analysis. This method will allow my conclusions to take into account the social, political, economic, and historical reasons for the different outcomes that each of these nation-states are experiencing. I will be referencing data from both the Eurobarometer (produced by the Public Opinion Analysis sector of the European Commission) and from the European Social Survey (produced by the European Commission’s Framework Programmes, the European Science Foundation, and national funding bodies in each of the participating states) to inform my research and conclusions. I will include Eurobarometer data from late 2007, immediately before the economic crisis, and from mid-2011, in the midst of the economic crisis to inform my research on Germany and Greece. For my analysis of Belgium and the UK, I will be using data from the 2002 ESS, when the European Monetary Union was first established, and the 2010 ESS, following the inconclusive elections in both Belgium and the UK. Because I am searching for a collective identity, I will restrict my analysis to a group level when addressing attitudes within a particular nation-state and to an aggregate level when examining the level of adherence to a sense of European identification.

The Economic Crisis and Popular Political Support

While Germany and Greece share the structural similarities of representative democracies, the economic crisis has affected each nation’s political stability and

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8 Belgium and the UK differ, however, in the extent to which they have devolved power to subnational political authorities.
international image in very different ways. Germany is politically strong, for example, with a national government that commands the respect and trust of its population. Greece, in contrast, recently voted no confidence in its national government. In the context of the EU, Germany is a central player, driving much of the legislation passed in response to Europe’s current financial crisis. Despite the economic storm surrounding it, Germany has maintained a strong economy and has been able to bail out other European nations. Greece, on the other hand, is considered an outlier within the EU and has increasingly been portrayed in the media as a region around which a firewall must be erected to prevent instability from spreading into other parts of Europe. While these two nations represent two ends of the spectrum in terms of political and economic stability, they both have experiences that include valuable lessons for the EU as it attempts to overcome the current economic crisis and continue its process of integration.

More striking even than the differences between the economic situations in Germany and Greece is the amount of trust that these countries’ populations place in their national governments and in the EU government. The German government, for example, has been able to take an active role in attempting to reconcile the European economic situation, sometimes using German resources to assist in the recovery efforts. These actions have taken place without any destabilizing popular protests. In Greece, however, cooperation with EU institutions or the eurozone have led to popular riots and mass demonstrations. Germans therefore seem to place more trust in their national government to act in a way that is beneficial to the German people whereas Greeks appear to distrust their national government, a sentiment that culminated in the political overthrow of the government. An examination of popular trust in governments both on the national and supranational level and an exploration of the historical development and current state of each nation’s government will shed light on
the reasons why Germany enjoys so much more popular trust and support than does Greece. This information will provide guidance for the European Union as it attempts to gain the trust and allegiance of the European population.

Germany

A veritable Cinderella story within the European Union, Germany was one of the primary motivators of European integration because of its historical aggression toward the rest of the continent. From its beginnings as the antagonist, however, Germany has grown to become a primary part of the foundation upon which the Union now rests. The German government has assumed a leadership role within the European Union and has shouldered much of the economic burden for the bailouts that Europe’s peripheral nations have needed. German leaders have been able to accomplish these gains without disrupting the support that it receives from its citizens thus far (Bastain, 2011, pp. 17-18). The extent to which Germans trust their government to promote German interests and national prosperity, however, will be tested as the economic crisis persists (Farrell & Quiggin, 2011). For example, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has devoted much of her agenda to support the bailout of European nations, even at the expense of her own country. These efforts have only occurred because of the faith that Germans have placed in their government. The German representation system and the stability of its constitution play a significant role in determining the extent to which Germany will maintain its role in European integration. The German federal government has been remarkably stable since the end of the Second World War.

Germany’s population, for example, is politically protected by its constitution, called the Basic Law, which guarantees Germans certain rights that cannot be denied, contributing to German political stability. The inalienable rights section of the Basic Law cannot be
altered even through referendum, creating a high level of predictability within the government despite changes in leadership. This predictability has translated into political stability and popular trust in the national government (Bundesregierung, 2011). In 2011, for example, less than a quarter of Germans characterized their government as “bad” (European Commission, 2011, p. 27). This popular trust has enabled German politicians to deal more freely with European institutions without the threat of severe political backlash (Easton, 1965).

In addition to the Basic Law, the political structure of the national government has contributed to Germany’s political stability. Organized as a federal parliamentary republic, Germany is primarily ruled by a directly elected lower house out of which the Chancellor, or head of government, is appointed. This government produces much of the legislation that is then passed by the lower and upper houses. This electoral and political system creates a situation in which one party or one coalition of parties typically dominates the national legislative agenda for the Chancellor’s four-year term. (CIA, “Germany,” 2011; Bundesregierung, 2011). However, Germany’s political structure mandates national elections at least every four years, allowing the people a chance to show their disapproval of one government by voting in another. This structure ensures that the basis for German political power lies in the people, attaching them to the political structure and investing them in its success or failure.

This political structure and the system of popular involvement that it mandates was even able to withstand the reunification of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1990 and the rough economic and political waters that followed. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Germany struggled to fully integrate the previously divided countries. The German Democratic Republic (East Germany) had been ruled by two
consecutive totalitarian regimes since the beginning of the Third Reich: first under Hitler and then under the Soviet Union. The government of the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), however, was able to involve this population, so unaccustomed to political rights and responsibilities, in the representative government already established in West Germany. Political reunification proved easier than economic integration, however. The union initially drove the economy forward as the well-developed West German economy gained a new market in East Germany and East German industry gained much needed capital from western investors and consumers. Additionally, the government set about reallocating funds to the capital-starved eastern regions through a series of high taxes. Wages increased rapidly and unsustainably throughout the country and the government deficit soon exceeded the limit imposed by the European Monetary Union (European Commission, 2008). As part of the austerity measures applied by the EMU beginning in 1995, Germany sought to control wages. Wage controls slowed investment activities and ultimately resulted in an increase in unemployment.

While labor struggled during this era of reform, government-mandated wage controls brought German labor costs down by twenty percent in comparison to its competitors, decreasing prices and increasing international demand (European Commission, 2008). The German economy therefore rebounded to the point that, in 2007, three-quarters of the nation characterized their household financial situations as “good” (European Commission, 2007, p. 15). Despite this economic crisis and the changes that the German political landscape was experiencing as a result of adding East Germany to the Federal Republic, Germany did not experience any major political upheaval. This common historical memory bears testament to the ability of the German national government to guide its population through significant political and economic changes. Additionally, Germany’s economic success story, which
includes implementation of EMU-mandated austerity measures, contributed to the legitimacy of European economic principles. The German economic recovery has therefore become an example to which the EMU refers when one of its members is in dire economic straits. Further, German monetary policies of low inflation and relatively high taxes have since served as a model that European economic leaders attempt to emulate when modifying the euro (European Commission, 2008).

Germany’s economic success is further reflected in popular opinion. For example, Germans feel more that they are more able to plan their economic future than individuals in more chaotic economic situations such as those in Malta (European Commission, 2011, p. 23). This ability to plan economically reflects popular optimism for Germany’s economic future, with 81 percent of respondents in 2011 indicating that they expect the economic situation to either remain the same or improve over the next calendar year (Figure 1, p. 31). This number is slightly better even than the 77 percent of respondents who, in the fall of 2007, indicated the same optimism. Juxtaposed to this optimism, only a slim majority of respondents in 2011 believed the European economic situation would remain the same or improve. This number declined significantly, from 76 percent expressing optimism in 2007 to 54 percent in 2011 (European Commission, 2007, p. 38). This expressed trust in the German government to continue economic strength and growth despite Chancellor Merkel’s focus on the broader European economy shows the extent to which Germans trust their government’s economic direction.
Because of Germany’s continued success, resilient economic growth rate, and consistently positive public opinion, Chancellor Angela Merkel is consistently called upon to offer financial advice and support to the rest of the EMU. Articles on the websites of Britain’s The Guardian, The Economist, and the BBC appeal to Merkel to save Europe’s single currency. One article in The Economist, titled “Europe’s Currency Crisis: How to Save the Euro,” assumes that German intervention is the only way that the financial situation can be remedied (“Europe’s Currency Crisis,” 2011). While much has transpired since this article was written, the same rhetoric is still being used: build a wall around Greece and rely on German economic sustainability. This international rhetoric, lauding the German government as a model of economic and political stability, contributes further to the reservoir of diffuse support within the country.
This diffuse support for economic and political structures has prevented popular detachment from the government despite relatively low levels of popular support for the current government. In 2011, for example, the amount of trust that German respondents indicated for their national parliament and their national government is only a slim minority measuring between 30 and 40 percent. These results show a tendency to be skeptical toward the ability of any kind of government to act in a trustworthy manner, with popular trust in European institutions at the same levels as those indicated for the national government (European Commission, “Germany,” 2011, p. 2). Taken in context of German faith in the economy, in the structure of their government, and in their government’s actions in the European economic crisis, this data paints a picture of belief in the power and effectiveness of government, but not in the trustworthiness of a government unchecked by public opinions and elections.⁹

This German lack of trust in the government to act in good faith toward the general population is not unique to the German national government. Levels of popular trust in the EU are very similar to those of the national government, with 35 percent of respondents responding negatively when asked if they trusted the EU and 40 percent of respondents responding negatively when asked if they trusted the national government (European Commission, “Public Opinion,” 2011, p. 52). These results indicate that the EU is comparably legitimate to the German national government according to the German people. This conclusion is confirmed by the 52 percent of Germans indicating a feeling of attachment to the EU in the fall of 2007 (European Commission, “Public Opinion,” 2007, pp. 68) and the 73 percent of Germans indicating a feeling of citizenship in the EU in the spring of 2011.

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⁹ One way to strengthen this assertion would be to ask the German people about the importance that they place on their constitution and the Basic Law. By comparing these opinion levels to those regarding the government itself, a clear preference would be established.
Whereas the German government is closely accountable to the people, however, EU institutions are accountable to a region of which Germany is only one part. The contact that Germans have with their own government and with the EU government is very different, and has the potential to drive public trust in the EU further down unless Europe is able to increase its legitimacy in the minds of the German people.

Regardless of the expressed level of popular trust for it, the German national government is currently one of the most stable governments in Europe. Germany’s economic and political solidarity have shown resilience even after the European economic crisis in 2008. This stability has promoted civic trust in the German political structure, with only minimal losses in popular support in response to the European bailouts that the German government has made possible. The historical trust that has been built between Germans and their national political system has contributed to a reservoir of diffuse support that has thus far proved sufficient to carry the government through the current economic crisis. As long as this reservoir of diffuse support continues to be used and replenished, the German people will support their government’s actions involving European integration and involvement in the EU and EMU.

**Greece**

Greece, unlike Germany, has fallen from public favor since its initiation into the EU and the eurozone. The Greek government had originally applied for EEC membership in the early 1960s and had implemented a plan to fully integrate the country into the Union’s governing mechanisms within twenty-two years. The Greek political and economic system therefore underwent an overhaul of its design in order to allow it access into the Union. The establishment of a military dictatorship in 1967 interrupted this plan for integration, as the
EEC required that a country be governed by an established representative political system before it will consider the country’s bid to become a member. When democratic elections and a referendum overthrew the country’s military leadership in 1974, the new state leaders moved forward with the plan to integrate their nation-state into the EU. After spending years as a typical member state, however, Greece has recently become identified with the potential for the failure of the EMU and the single currency. The social alienation of Greece and the constant rhetoric involving the Greek “contagion” has the potential to diminish public support of the government and to eliminate any desire of the Greek population to identify with the EU or its institutions.

Greece’s bid for membership in the EU was not widely popular with the Greek people, as they collectively remembered the deliberate inaction of British and NATO forces when Turkey invaded Greek Cyprus (Tsinisizelis, 2008, p. 146). Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis, however, pushed through Greece’s bid for inclusion in Europe. Karamanlis saw membership in the EEC as a necessary support of the new parliamentary political structure, without which he feared the country would revert to the control of a government more reminiscent of the old parliamentary monarchy system or the more recent military dictatorship. Additionally, he saw membership in the EEC as a way in which to stimulate the growth of Greece’s economy and promote development in new sectors (Tsinisizelis, 2008, p. 148).

Karamanlis’ willingness to defy public opinion and join Europe reflects the uncertainty within the current Greek political system. This political system is similar in structure to those ruling Germany and the United Kingdom, with a popularly elected parliament from which the president appoints the prime minister. The prime minister and the cabinet ministers whom he or she appoints create the majority of the legislation that is then
passed through the parliament (CIA, “Greece,” 2011). The Greek parliament is elected through a proportional representation system in which any party that receives a minimum of 3 percent of the vote may send representatives to parliament. Greece currently has ten political parties that hold seats in its parliament. (CIA, “Greece,” 2011). Greek parties can therefore more easily gain recognition as part of the government than German parties,10 creating the potential for both increased political representation and political fractionalization within the national government.

In addition to the potential for political fractionalization, Greece’s current political structure is relatively young, with its constitution only enacted in 1975 as part of Greece’s bid to join the EU. This constitution was amended ten years later in 1986 and then again fifteen years later in 2001. In contrast to the German Basic Law, which has remained relatively constant since its initial adoption in 1949, the Greek constitution has not been able to provide its citizenry with reliable governing principles (Tsinisizelis, 2008, p. 145). This instability has created public doubt in the ability of the political system to effectively represent the interests of its people, as reflected in polling data from 2011, when 83 percent of respondents indicated a lack of trust in the national government and 82 percent of respondents indicated a lack of trust in the national parliament (European Commission, “Greece,” 2011, p. 2). These numbers reflect a troubling indication of the difficulty that the Greek political structure, formed to admit Greece into the EU, has encountered in its attempts to handle the economic crisis within its borders.

Just as Greece’s political structure and development were dictated by its goal to join the EU, so was its economic structure and development shaped by its desire to join the European Monetary Union (EMU) in the 1990s. This goal created the need for “induced

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10 German political parties must receive five percent of the vote to gain legislative seats.
modernization” designed to bring the Greek economy into alignment with EMU regulations for membership. In its conformity with the EMU, Greece appeared to be cultivating sustainable economic practices, creating a false sense of security throughout both the nation-state and Europe. Economic integration further proved problematic for the Greek economy, which had primarily exported labor, sending workers to Western Europe, the United States, and Australia. After it integrated into Europe, however, Greece became a destination for migrant workers throughout the Balkans, accumulating a large, unskilled labor force drawn to its industry, mining and utilities sectors. This influx of unskilled labor drove up unemployment and government expenses (Tsinisizelis, 2008, p. 153; “The economy,” 2006, p. 31). Despite its economic challenges—including a deficit higher than that allowed by the EMU and a public debt level far above 100 percent of the GDP—Greece managed to be accepted into the EU (Tsinisizelis, 2008, p. 149).

The belief that Greece could sustain its economic situation evaporated when the 2008 global financial crisis proved Greece’s debts unsustainable. The unemployment situation in Greece aggravated the crisis as the government accumulated 1.8 billion euro in outstanding tax obligations from individuals who did not have the money to pay their taxes. The economic hardships for individual Greeks and for the government have not seen significant improvement despite accepting the austerity measures mandated by the EU and the bailout funds provided by the European Financial Stability Facility (“Monthly Review,” 2009, p.12-13). According to the Eurobarometer survey taken in May 2011, for example, 99 percent of Greeks surveyed indicated that the economic situation of their country was “bad” with very little indication of public optimism for the future (European Commission, “Greece,” 2011, p. 1). Only 22 percent of respondents indicated that their national economic situation would improve or remain stable in the next year (Figure 2, p. 37). This high degree of pessimism did
not extend to public perceptions of other EU member states, with 48 percent of respondents predicting that the EU’s economic situation would improve in the next twelve months (Figure 2). The high approval rating for the EU reflects the stability and predictability that the EU offered in contrast to the confusion and instability of the Greek government. Despite the relative optimism in regard to the EU’s economic situation, however, both of these responses show significant decreases in optimism from the data collected in the fall of 2007, in which 57 percent and 80 percent of Greek respondents predicted that the economic situation would improve or remain constant in Greece and the EU respectively (European Commission, “Full Report,” 2007, p. 38). The austerity measures have therefore done little to assuage public fears about the economic future.

![Figure 3: Greek Expectations for Future Economic Growth (European Commission, "Greece," 2011, p. 2)](image-url)

By May 2011, Greece was on the verge of defaulting on its debts, a situation for which the Maastricht Treaty had no answer besides enforcing more unpopular austerity measures to bring the economy back into compliance with EMU standards. These austerity
measures, added to the economic crisis, have ostracized the Greek population both from the Greek national government and from the EU as doubts grow regarding the competency of either organization to improve the economy. The Greek people, for example, saw their government as one of the least effective actors in addressing the current economic crisis, with a third of respondents indicating that EU institutions were in the best position to alleviate the crisis. More troubling than Greek distrust in its own government is the significant proportion of respondents (31 percent) who indicated that they did not know whom to trust to repair the economic damage in Greece and Europe (European Commission, “Greece,” 2011, p. 3). A proportion of the population that sees no credible government intervening on its behalf betrays the level of uncertainty in the Greek population.

The European media and political rhetoric have only added to the distrust of the Greek population in its own government. Because of Greece’s recent economic failures and its increasing unemployment rate, the rest of Europe has adopted the view that the Greek economic situation is a disease that must be contained. The same article in The Economist that promoted Germany as the European savior called Greece a “contagion” for which the rest of Europe needs to develop a plan for isolation (“Europe’s Currency Crisis,” 2011). The barrage of references to the Greek economy as a disease or a fire about which a wall of isolation must be built has the potential to erode any remaining Greek approval for its own national government.

The combined pressure of Greece’s political and economic instability proved too much for the Greek government in November 2011, when parliament denied the government a confidence vote on a referendum regarding proposed austerity measures. This no confidence vote not only overthrew the current government, but also hampered the willingness of other governments to implement the unpopular austerity measures imposed by
the EU and EMU. Despite very low opinion for the government, however, Greeks appear to be content to work within the existing political system thus far. The no confidence vote ejected the government from office, but did not destroy the actual political institutions. Numerous public demonstrations have protested the decisions and actions of the national parliament, but none have protested the existence of the national parliament. Therefore, despite political turmoil, the nature of popular protests and government actions show that the Greek population has not detached itself from the government – it is still working within the existing national political system.

**Lessons from Germany and Greece**

Despite their structural similarities vis-à-vis political organization, Germany and Greece have developed into very different countries because of the level of support for each country’s national government. Germany’s durable Basic Law, for example, stands in contrast to Greece’s often-changing constitution. This fundamental difference creates a more predictable political environment within Germany upon which its citizens can rely when planning their future. The presence and organization of Greek’s future government, however, is much more uncertain as leaders struggle to balance the constraints of public opinion and obligation to the EU and EMU.

Germans see their government as a strong, functioning body operating within the guidelines of a well-established constitution and political structure, therefore reflecting both an accumulation of good will and the establishment of traditional and rational legitimacy. This popular view is established partly by Germany’s strong national government and its recent history of cool-headed action in the face of economic and political crisis. Germany’s citizens therefore see their government as strong enough to represent its interests as long as it remains accountable to the people (European Commission, “Germany,” 2011, p. 2).
Involvement in the EU for Germany is therefore seen as something to be desired: an economic and political improvement through cooperation with other countries. This positive outlook creates the popular support that the EU needs to establish itself as a socially unified body.

Greece, in contrast, displayed an inadequate reservoir of diffuse support to sustain it after the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008. The popularly perceived weakness of Greece’s national government destroyed the trust that its citizens had in its ability to uphold their interests on a national level. The vote of no confidence in late 2011 merely reinforced the popular view that Greece’s government was not able to control its own future. Involvement in a supranational body such as the EU would only intensify the feeling of exclusion in the Greek populous.

To develop further, the EU needs to develop a way to reassure concerned citizens in countries with weaker governments such as Greece that it will act in the best interest of Europe, granting careful consideration to the concerns of each region. One way to accomplish this task would be to combine elements of both Easton’s theory of diffuse support and Weber’s typology of legitimacy to create a government whose right to rule rests on political outcome, good will, and one or more origins of power. Europe is already structured to promote legal and rational legitimacy, but strong personalities such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel also have the potential to increase the legitimacy of European institutions by exhibiting a diligent commitment to working within the EU’s existing institutions and governing documents to devise a solution for the economic crisis. The dedication that has led Merkel and other EU leaders to negotiate into the early hours of the morning in order to craft agreements to maintain the integrity of the eurozone is a visible manifestation of their faith in and commitment to a unified Europe. As the EU continues to work actively throughout
Europe, it will gain a sense of traditional legitimacy that has the potential to make the EU and its institutions primary actors in European politics.

**Cultural Diversity and Popular Political Support**

In addition to its need to establish legitimacy and popular support for its political structure, the EU also needs to address the social divisions with European borders, a task more suited to an examination of Belgium and the United Kingdom. Belgium and the UK are similar in terms of political and regional structure. These structural similarities, however, do not necessarily translate into similarities in political consciousness, which can heavily influence the success or failure of a representative political system. This section of the paper will seek to explain how Belgium and the United Kingdom developed such different political climates. Why, for example, did the UK take one week to form a coalition government after the 2007 Parliamentary elections while it took Belgium 541 days to accomplish the same feat? These two nations represent two possible futures for the European Union: one in which quarreling factions hamstring the effectiveness of European institutions or one in which Europe can overpower those factions and exert its own dominance. To determine the model towards which Europe is currently heading, we must examine the fractures that can develop into chasms in the political and social identity of Belgium, the UK, and Europe.

The clearest, most black-and-white manifestations of these dividing lines are the regions that characterize both Belgium and the UK. Belgian regions divide the country into three parts: one around the capital city of Brussels, a second constituting the northern half of the country named Flanders, and a third making up the southern half of the country named Wallonia (Billiet, et al., 2006). In Britain, regional boundaries divide the country into four parts, with the western peninsula forming Wales; the southern portion of the island’s body, England; its northern counterpart, Scotland; and the northeast corner of the Irish island,
Northern Ireland. Each of these regions has a very distinct social and political identity that has posed challenges to the Belgian and British governments as they attempt to gain effective control over their respective regions. In general, where regional divides have coincided with other divides, the national governments have experienced difficulty in developing any sense of legitimacy in the minds of their citizens, a necessary condition for democracy (Lane & Ersson, 1987, p. 22; Easton, 1965, p. 278). National governments must therefore overcome regional quarrelling by introducing fracture lines that do not coincide with one another, therefore creating instances of crosscutting social cleavages.

Belgium and the UK offer two opposing outcomes of governments’ attempts to control subnational cleavages and identities. Because the European Union faces similar problems of regional divide, these two cases offer insight into how the EU can overcome traditional regional boundaries with the aim of forming a more complete union. I will therefore divide all of my data analysis along the regions of each country. My analysis will additionally examine two periods of time in both Belgium and the UK: in 2002 just after the implementation of Europe’s single currency—one of the most visible manifestations of European unity (European Commission, “Public Opinion,” 2011, pp. 31-32)—and in 2010 after the chaotic Belgian national elections and the formation of the UK’s first coalition government since the Second World War.

Belgium

The most prominent cleavage in Belgium is the language disparity between French and Dutch speakers, which reiterates the divide between regions. In 2002, for example 63.4 percent of Belgians spoke Dutch while 34.0 percent spoke French (European Social Survey Belgium, 2002). This language divide did not change significantly in 2010, with 58.7 speaking Dutch and 36.4 speaking French (ESS Belgium, 2010). These percentages become
more problematic for social unity when they reinforce the regional boundaries that are present in Belgium, with 95.6 and 91.9 percent of Flemings speaking Dutch in 2002 and 2010 respectively and 97.0 and 96.7 percent of Walloons speaking French in 2002 and 2010 respectively (ESS Belgium, 2002; ESS Belgium, 2010). In Brussels, these two languages converge in Belgium’s only officially bilingual region. Even in the city of Brussels and its immediate surroundings, however, French has increased rapidly at the expense of the Dutch population. While in 2002, 20.5 percent of respondents in Brussels cited Dutch as the language most spoken in their homes; this percentage plummeted to 3.6 percent in 2010 (ESS Belgium, 2002; ESS Belgium, 2010). French, in contrast, increased by more than ten percent from 68.2 to 78.4 percent in 2002 and 2010 respectively (ESS Belgium, 2002; ESS Belgium, 2010). This cleavage is therefore present even in the country’s capitol. These two social divides, or cleavages, are therefore reinforcing boundaries that the Belgian government must overcome to unite the nation-state.

The regional governments of Flanders and Wallonia exacerbate the alignment of the regional and linguistic divide in Belgium. A series of legislative acts promoting devolution, beginning in 1970, has given increasing power to the Flemish and Walloon governments to determine the language, educational policies, government practices, and social programs of their regions; largely without the oversight of the national government in Brussels (Billiet, et al., 2006, p. 930). Because Flanders and Wallonia declared Dutch and French to be their regional languages respectively, education in Flanders is solely conducted in Dutch while Walloons learn in French. And while there was once an elite class that spoke both languages, the regional and linguistic split has steadily eroded the presence of this bilingual population (Billiet, et al., 2006, p. 914). The two regions are therefore becoming increasingly polarized as their inhabitants identify more and more with their region or linguistic group while
distancing themselves from that group of which they are not a part (Billiet, et al., 2006, p. 914).

The structural divisions between Flanders and Wallonia have created a nation-state in which individuals do not communicate across borders. This division can be clearly seen in the division of Belgian media. For example, the television networks in Belgium began as a single entity, but divided in 1960 into two regional networks: the Belgische Radio and Televisie (BRT) in Flanders and the Radio Télévision Belge Francophone (RTBF) in Wallonia (Deprez, De Bens, Paulussen, Raeymaeckers & Tenret, 2010, para. 2.3). With the advent of cable television, the regional and linguistic divide persisted, as Wallonia and Flanders each accumulated eleven private television networks. The print media mirrored this divide, with only a limited number of publishers or editing companies involved in bilingual publishing since the 1960s (Deprez et al., 2010, para. 2.1). This media divide hinders the communication of political views, social desires and needs, and perspectives across borders.

Because Belgians remained cocooned within their linguistic, political, and regional divisions without interacting with or even encountering the media of other regions on a daily basis, distrust and misunderstanding between individuals of different groups increase. This practical example of Putnam’s contact hypothesis is reflected in the fact that over half of Belgians state that one “can’t be too careful” when dealing with other individuals, as opposed to the statement that “most people can be trusted” (ESS Belgium, 2002; ESS Belgium, 2010). Most striking is data from Wallonia, where 74.9 and 65.3 percent of respondents in 2002 and

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11 The linguistic divide in radio is less established, with nation-wide Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) maintaining a strong presence. Laws outlawing private stations during the Second World War, however, heavily influenced the development of radio. In contrast to the comparatively long history of private television and print media outlets in Belgium, private radio stations were not legalized until 1982 in Wallonia and 1987 in Flanders. Language- and region-specific stations have emerged since the 1980s, however, and generally identify their primary competitors not as stations from another region, but as the PSB stations (Deprez et al., 2010, 2.2).
2010 respectively indicated that they distrust other individuals. The response rate in the rest of Belgium was between fifty and sixty percent in favor of distrust (ESS Belgium, 2002; ESS Belgium, 2010). While not overwhelming, this underlying distrust in Belgian society is troubling for the future of a unified democratic system of government.

The dual language and regional divide in Belgium, reinforced by the media, has further implications for the organization of national political parties. Whereas many countries have political parties divided by political ideology, Belgium has two parties for most ideologies, divided by language group (see Table 2, p. 46). Therefore, if two individuals agree on social, economic, or political issues but speak different languages, each will vote for his or her own language-based political party. This divided voting system creates a more fractured political landscape than is necessary according to differences in political ideology. For example, the Flemish environmental party “Groen!” received 5.0 percent of the vote in the 2007 national election while the Francophone environmental party “Ecolo” received 5.6 percent of the vote (ESS Belgium, 2010). If these similar parties had become allies, the joint environmental party would have received the fourth highest amount of votes in the 2007 national elections. This hypothetical party would therefore have been able to control a large portion of the legislature through Belgium’s proportional representation election system (ESS Belgium, 2010). Similarly, if the Christian Democratic parties CD&V and CdH had become allies, they would have controlled almost a fifth of the legislature instead of the 12.0 and 4.9 percent that they respectively control now (ESS Belgium, 2010).

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12 Because of the division in Belgian society between regions, the “people” to whom respondents were referring is unclear. For example, is the split between Flanders and Wallonia so profound that respondents were referencing a lack of trust within their own region? Or were they also thinking of individuals in Belgium’s other regions? Or were they thinking of the European population? Or people in general? Depending on the scope of the respondents’ thought process when answering the question, this data could reveal more in terms of popular trust within Wallonia or Flanders or in terms of popular trust between Wallonia and Flanders.
Belgian’s political parties therefore have the potential to crosscut the linguistic and regional barriers that divide the nation. However, because political parties are regionalized and because the regions in Belgium are so contained, relatively few Flemings know of their political allies in Wallonia and vice versa (Billiet et al., 2006, pp. 913-914). These political parties have therefore become reinforcements for the divisions brought on by language and region.

The number of political parties in Belgium and the inconsistency in their popular support has undermined the federal government’s stability. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the aftermath of the 2007 election. With no single party achieving a plurality of the votes, Belgian politicians negotiated to form a coalition that could govern the country. This negotiation produced a government that promptly failed, followed by more failed governments and continued negotiation until the EU mandated that Belgium form a government in early December 2011. Five-hundred and forty-one days after the 2007 elections, Elio Di Rupo became the first Francophone Prime Minister in over forty years. The political uncertainty from this lengthy delay drove satisfaction ratings for the national
government down, from 48.9 percent responding positively in 2002 and only 32.4 percent responding positively in 2010. The response “extremely dissatisfied” more than tripled from 3.7 to 12.3 percent in 2002 and 2010 respectively (ESS Belgium, 2002; ESS Belgium, 2010). These national-level findings are consistent across the regions, even including Brussels, which would theoretically tend to favor the federal government because of its close physical proximity (ESS Belgium, 2002; ESS Belgium, 2010).

Possibly even more striking in this political crisis than the raw data is a sentiment expressed by Guardian reporter Laurens de Vos in February 2011. De Vos reported that despite the political deadlock, “few people [were] upset about the situation. This is partly due to the fact that regional governments are still working” (de Vos, 2011. Emphasis added). Because so much power has devolved to the regional governments, the everyday lives of individual Belgians were not interrupted. In the end, the EU, not the domestic population, put a stop to the cycle of failed governments and renewed negotiations. The unimportance of the national government to the people over whom it is meant to rule calls into question the democratic legitimacy of the government. With the strength and relative autonomy of the regional governments, one can legitimately question the necessity of the national government.

In the midst of this political unrest and popular disapproval for the national government, however, Belgians do hold a relatively high opinion of the European Parliament. Across Belgium, for example, popular trust in the national parliament decreased between 2002 and 2010 while popular trust in the European Parliament increased. In Flanders and Brussels particularly, popular trust in the national parliament fell by more than ten percentage points while trust in the European Parliament increased at a more modest rate (ESS Belgium, 2002; ESS Belgium, 2010). Despite the current economic crisis and the multiple levels of
government separating European institutions from the individuals they ultimately represent, Belgians trust Europe more than their own government. This trend reflects the impact that political unrest in the national government has made on the Belgian population in contrast to the more stable European political system. Additionally, the Belgian government has been traditionally supportive of European integration, participating in many of the predecessors to the modern EU and serving as host for the European Parliament, which meets in Brussels. By supporting Europe, the Belgian leaders avoided creating a situation in which government on the national level competed with government on the supranational level for popular support. For Belgians, then, preference for the EU may not reflect a complete rejection of national authority, but rather a recognition of Europe’s political stability relative to the current situation in the national government. Further, the EU has expressed a commitment to working with subnational governments through its program of cohesion policy, a program that includes all levels of European government in the legislation process. Especially in Belgium, where subnational governments play a significant role in the management of the country, this policy program brings a potentially distant supranational government much closer to the people.

Belgium’s preference for a supranational body above a national representative body ultimately reflects the turmoil that the Belgian national government and political leaders are experiencing juxtaposed with relative European stability. While the EU is moving steadily toward the economic and political integration of Europe, Belgians do not know whether their country is moving toward official partition or whether its motto, Eendracht maakt macht (“Strength through Unity”), will remain true. The actions of the European institutions can therefore be more easily predicted through its stated integration goals while the Belgian
government remains unpredictable, creating a natural hesitancy in the Belgian populous to trust its own government.

**United Kingdom**

In contrast to Belgium’s political situation, the United Kingdom (UK) has enjoyed relative political stability for the majority of its history as a constitutional monarchy despite having many of the same structural divisions that characterize Belgium. Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, for example, have all made efforts to promote home rule over the national government in London. The most divisive of these efforts took place during the late twentieth century in Northern Ireland. This struggle—commonly referred to as “the Troubles”—saw violent clashes between Catholic Irish nationalists and British law enforcement officers and the Protestant minority. This religious divide translated into a political and social divide as Catholics favored Irish culture and voted as a single block for Irish separatism and Protestants favored British culture and voted in favor of the British national government. These quarrels were largely resolved in the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, where British Prime Minister Tony Blair brought all groups to the negotiating table, giving the region more power in its own subnational parliament and mandating political inclusion for all communities regardless of religious belief (Pugh, 2008, pp. 332-333, 376-377). Blair and his government were therefore able to bridge political divisions within Northern Ireland and set up a regional government that catered to local wishes while still under the direct control of the British government. The legacy of devolution that Blair began in Northern Ireland spread to grant Wales its own National Assembly and Scotland its own Parliament. These governments, however, remain closely tied to the national government, creating a stronger bond within the UK than is present in Belgium.
This unity is partly caused by lingual unity in the United Kingdom. As of 2010, 92.6 percent of all UK inhabitants spoke English (ESS United Kingdom, 2010). This overwhelming majority is true across the four regions despite the fact that Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have their own traditional languages. These Celtic languages are very different from the English most commonly spoken today and still have minority status in their respective regions. For example, approximately ten percent of Scottish and Welsh respondents indicated Scots and Welsh respectively as the language most often spoken in their homes (ESS United Kingdom, 2010). These percentages have increased since 2002, reflecting the initiatives of the Scottish and Welsh parliaments to promote education in their traditional languages. To this end, the Welsh parliament operates its sessions in both English and Gaelic. Despite the recent resurgence, these languages show no sign of overtaking English as the dominant language of the UK. The English language creates a bridge that allows individuals from each region to communicate with their counterparts in other regions, realizing commonalities and similar ideologies.

This single language across the UK’s regions mirrors the political party system that also crosses regional dividing lines. The UK’s plurality voting system—in which parties must win support from a concentrated group of voters in a district to win parliamentary seats—encourages parties to extend their appeal and influence beyond a single region. The Parliament in London has therefore been formed primarily by three major parties: Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat (ESS United Kingdom, 2002; ESS United Kingdom, 2010). In 2002, Labour received the highest proportion of votes with 47.0 percent, with the Conservative party in second (29.0) and the Liberal Democrat party in third with

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13 This percentage is 4.2 percentage points less than that of 2002, largely because of increased immigration from other parts of the EU as well as the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

14 In contrast, a proportional representation system such as Belgium allows parties to total the number of votes they received across the country to determine legislative representation.
16.4 percent (ESS United Kingdom, 2002). The 2007 election was much more even, with Conservative and Labour receiving 37.4 and 31.4 respectively and the Liberal Democrats receiving 21.9 (ESS United Kingdom, 2010). Because no party received enough votes to form an effective government, the Conservative party allied with the Liberal Democrats to form a coalition, the UK’s first since the Second World War. The UK made this transition quickly and without excessive political turmoil thanks largely to its nation-wide political party system.\textsuperscript{15}

Despite Britain’s unified political party system, popular satisfaction with the national government is relatively low across the nation. Throughout Britain, between fifty and seventy-five percent of the population indicate a negative response when asked their satisfaction with the national government. This negative opinion is most easily seen in Scotland, where 71.3 percent indicated that they did not feel satisfied with the government in 2010, down only slightly from the 73.4 percent who responded negatively in 2002 (ESS 2002, 2010). Additionally, Welsh negative opinion increased more than ten percentage points from 59.3 in 2002 to 71.6 in 2010 (ESS United Kingdom, 2002; ESS United Kingdom, 2010). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the region in which the national government won the most support was Northern Ireland, where opinion improved. The British government has devolved more power to Northern Ireland than to any other subnational entity, granting the region the political influence and relative autonomy that it desired. Despite low opinion in the remainder of the country, the UK’s population has not detached itself from its strong national institutions. For example, individuals across the nation continue to vote in national elections,\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15} The nationalist parties of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland do receive small but significant portions of the vote in each region. Plaid Cymru in Wales, the Scottish National Party in Scotland, and the Ulster Unionist, Democratic Unionist, and Alliance Parties in Northern Ireland received between fifteen and forty percent of the 2007 vote in their regions (ESS United Kingdom, 2010). In all but Northern Ireland, however, at least one of the larger national parties (Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat) received more votes than any of the regional parties.
with 69.1 percent of the national population voting in the last two national elections (ESS United Kingdom, 2002; ESS United Kingdom, 2010). Therefore, although individuals are generally not satisfied with the direction of the government, they are continuing to work within the established system to improve their government, showing a persistence of diffuse support.

This institutional support stands in sharp contrast to feelings throughout the UK regarding the European Union (see Figure 1, p. 24). The UK’s strong national government and unified political parties stand together in their rejection of complete assimilation into the EU, creating a rhetorical history of political leaders such as Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher, and Gordon Brown who opposed European integration (Churchill, 1946, p. 27; Thatcher, 1988; Jones & Norton, 2010, p. 99). Unlike in Belgium, therefore, British citizens have historically been given a choice between placing faith in their national government and rejecting this tradition of strong government in favor of supranational authority. The meager level of trust that the aggregate British population places in the European Parliament (EP) illustrates the preference for national government. With the exception of Northern Ireland, 80 percent or more of respondents in each region within the UK indicated a negative sentiment when asked if they trusted the EP in 2010 (ESS United Kingdom, 2010). These levels of distrust increased between 2002 and 2010. In Wales, for example, where only 74.4 percent distrusted the EP in 2002, this number increased to ninety percent in 2010 (ESS United Kingdom, 2002; ESS United Kingdom, 2010).

This overwhelmingly negative opinion of the EU is characteristic of Britain, which was the most reluctant of the European nations to join the EU. Britain’s geographical location and its uniquely long democratic political legacy set it apart physically and ideologically

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16 In Northern Ireland, 61.2 responded negatively.
from the rest of the European continent (Churchill, 1946, p. 27). Additionally, none of the three major political parties have supported membership in the Union. The Labour Party, for example, supported a full withdrawal from the European Union as recently as 1983. Labour’s rejection of integration occurred primarily because the working classes, whom they represented, believed that they would lose influence and representation in a larger European community (Jones & Norton, 2010, p. 99). This fear of a loss of voice is not uncommon throughout the EU, as individuals find little comfort in a government with which they rarely come into contact. The only dissenting opinion in this rejection of supranational government comes from separatist movements in Northern Ireland and Scotland. In Scotland, for example, the government is calling a referendum in 2014 regarding whether the region should formally break with the UK and become its own country. Individuals who are involved with this movement may see EU involvement as a positive development because of Europe’s commitment to subnational governments through cohesion policy programs. In the aggregate, however, Britons do not support further political involvement in Europe.

In addition to the political losses that the UK has traditionally opposed, economic issues have plagued any attempt by UK leaders to join the eurozone. The latest effort to join the euro, led by Tony Blair, was easily blocked by Gordon Brown, Blair’s Chancellor of the Exchequer (Jones & Norton, 2010, p. 99). This effort failed prior to the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008. Since the debt crises in Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Italy, the UK has sought to distance itself further from the EU, refusing to participate in the negotiations to amend the European constitution to allow for greater economic freedoms within the eurozone. British economic integration into the eurozone therefore appears to be an unattainable fiction as long as the present circumstances persist.
Despite the divided history and continued importance of regional political and social identities in the UK, the strength of the national government has traditionally overcome separatist and supranational movements and retained much of its sovereignty. The predominance of national political parties over separatist parties has ensured political dialogue and political inclusion across the nation regardless of other regional and cultural divisions.

**Lessons from Belgium and the United Kingdom**

The varying levels of popular support and social cohesiveness between Belgium and the United Kingdom offer valuable insights for European leaders as they attempt to move toward European integration. These insights are most easily seen by determining the factors that have made the UK so much more successful than Belgium as a stable governing force over a society filled with social cleavages. The two most vital factors that differentiate the UK from Belgium are the UK’s plurality voting system and its single language. These two differences have been able to unite and transcend differing political ideologies, social and cultural allegiances, and historical memories. In contrast, Belgium’s attempt to bring all of these differences under one nationality failed because of cleavages that were left to consistently reinforce one another unchecked. Linguistic, geographical, and political barriers were allowed to divide the Belgian people into the same groups multiple times over. These differences have led to the establishment of a British government that is more durable and predictable than its Belgian counterpart, a difference that has greatly increased Britain’s political stability over that of Belgium.

If the EU wants to pursue further integration, therefore, it must act to follow the UK’s lead over the more conciliatory Belgian model. Despite the number of divisions within British society and politics, these cleavages crosscut one another, providing individuals the
ability to communicate with and to better understand members of other groups. Lane and Ersson’s theory of crosscutting cleavages has, in this case, demonstrated its ability to unite individuals across social and political boundaries. As part of its legislative reform, therefore, Europe should determine ways in which it can create groups that cross the linguistic, regional, and political boundaries that have divided nations such as Belgium. For example, Europe should continue to promote bilingual and intercultural education programs. Europe has already begun establishing these educational opportunities through university, volunteering, and research exchange programs that allow individuals to find positions throughout the EU (Europa, “Education and Training”). In addition to providing educational and professional contacts and connections, these initiatives also provide opportunities for social interaction as students or professionals are interacting with individuals from other countries directly. The EU has additionally made efforts at social interaction through events such as the Eurovision Song Contest. Through these programs, European leaders have initiated the process of establishing a united supranational society.

Europe might also benefit by forming a supranational party system to bring together people of similar political ideologies from all parts of the Union. The EU already has significant resources in place to ensure that European citizens can have a voice in policy-making. For example, the European Citizens’ Initiative states that any substantial group of citizens (one million or more from a range of member states) may propose legislation that will then be seriously considered by the EP (Europa, “Have your say on EU policies”). However, working toward forming European political parties would allow citizens of Belgium to connect with citizens of similar political ideologies in Greece to a greater extent than would a petition. Similar political ideologies already exist within Europe, especially with the large number of socially conservative and economically progressive Christian Democratic
parties present throughout the continent. Political parties are generally more durable and provide more organizational structure, with the potential to create a more sustainable and long-term form of social capital. Europe can therefore take steps toward forming the crosscutting cleavages that will lay the foundation for increased European social solidarity through the establishment of new initiatives such as political parties as well as the further development of existing programs such as Eurovision or educational exchange programs.

European integration has additionally been affected by the attitudes of national governments toward a supranational authority. For example, Belgium, as one of the founding nations of the EU, has been invested in its actions since the beginning. This investment is strongly reinforced by the location of the EU’s headquarters in Brussels alongside the Belgian national government. The UK, in contrast, resisted entry into the EU during most of the Union’s formative years. When it joined, therefore, the UK demanded exception from large portions of European law, including social legislation aimed at a leveling of the cultural playing field across the continent and economic legislation aimed at establishing a common marketplace and a common currency. The UK has resisted involvement in any reform legislation that would compromise its national sovereignty, including a recent refusal to take part in an effort to amend the EU’s economic legislation, making economic requirements for eurozone membership more lenient. This resistance has been driven by a reluctance of political leaders to surrender sovereignty (Jones & Norton, 2010) and the resulting high levels of popular distrust (ESS United Kingdom, 2002; ESS United Kingdom, 2010). One way to circumvent the animosity toward Europe in countries like the UK is to emphasize programs, such as cohesion policy, that give increased recognition and power to subnational groups. Cohesion policy can provide subnational groups in Europe the recognition and legitimacy that their national governments are either unwilling or unable to give them. This solution is
not as applicable in countries such as Belgium, where the national and government has traditionally deferred to the EU and to its regional governments to determine its actions and direction as a nation-state.

Implications for Further European Integration

Despite European efforts at unification and integration, the nation-state will remain a significant level of analysis for social, political, and economic movements. The established tensions between national and subnational government levels are an example of how Europe may develop on its present trajectory. For example, Belgium has not been able to establish a national identity that supersedes the subnational identity of a Flemming or Walloon. While there are organizations that connect members of different subnational groups—such as the monarchy (Billiet, et al., 2006, p. 919)—the identifier that comes from an individual’s region such as “Flemming” or “Walloon” is either equally important or more important than the “Belgian” identifier (Beerten, Billiet & Maddens, 2003, p. 246; ESS Belgium, 2002; ESS Belgium, 2010). National identities, therefore, will continue to be a factor in European policy making and social interactions.

These diverse national identities do not preclude the EU from becoming a strong actor in European and global affairs, however. While Belgium’s social divisions have prevented the Belgian national government from establishing an effective centralized government, these social divisions are also present in the United Kingdom and in Germany, where national governments are strong and well established. In order to develop a strong political structure, therefore, the EU must emphasize ideologies and identifications that cross national and subnational barriers, an effort that has the potential to extend from purely social and identity issues into establishing popular support and trust in the institutions that sponsor those cross-national ties.
The EU, to establish itself as a sustainable actor in Europe, must acquire the support of the European peoples by establishing a legitimate claim to power. One way to establish this legitimacy is to engage in social projects—such as those that would promote the cross-national relationships mentioned above—that provide Europeans with tangible benefits credited directly to EU institutions. For example, if a student was able to receive funding for study through an exchange program subsidized by the EU, that student might have more positive feelings toward the European institutions, creating a reservoir of diffuse support for the EU in that student’s mind. Europe can additionally promote interregional communication through continental events such as the Eurovision Song Contest. Similar to American Idol, Eurovision brings together musicians from around the continent in an event that exposes Europeans to the cultures and behaviors of the rest of the European community.

While communication and social integration can increase individuals’ investment in the EU, negative outputs have the potential to diminish the trust that voters place in Europe. For example, individuals in Greece see the EU and the EMU as institutions that are worsening Greece’s economic crisis. These popular views have not only decreased support for EU institutions, but also for the national government (European Commission, “Greece,” 2011, p. 2). Greeks therefore see little positive government action or potential for action on any level, drastically increasing political instability. The EU must therefore seek ways to regulate and neutralize negative outcomes and the resulting negative political opinion. In the case of Greece, the bailouts provided by the European Financial Stability Facility were not enough to assuage Greek fears or to foster optimism in the bleak economic realities of individuals’ lives. These bailouts did show European commitment to helping Greece rebuild.

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17 This task could be accomplished, for example, through effective public relations campaigns that work to expose the populous to more positive aspects of a government’s actions. The media can therefore be a powerful tool and ally in the hands of a government.
its economy, but popular protests in the Greek capitol revealed that the benefits did not overshadow the negative effects of austerity measures on the general population.

While the opinions of the general public do significantly impact the success and legitimacy of European institutions, my research was not able to specifically explore the role of national governments in formulating the opinions of the citizen regarding the EU or EMU. For example, the UK ranks last in the number of inhabitants who consider themselves to be European citizens (Figure 1, p. 24). If this data were examined only in the context of this paper’s conclusions that political stability and popular trust on the national level play a significant role in popular support of the EU, it would seem counterintuitive. Greece and Belgium, both of which experienced much higher levels of political instability, rank above the UK in the number of inhabitants identifying in some way with the EU. However, the lack of support from the national government for involvement in the EU has played an important role in fostering Euroskepticism in the British population. The national government, through its unwillingness to associate itself with the EU, has approved (albeit tacitly) its citizens to work and demonstrate against the EU. While some individuals within the UK support integration, therefore, a large and vocal contingent of the population argue against UK involvement in European affairs. In the UK, this movement has its roots in the rhetoric of historical figures such as Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who asserted that Britain must remain separate from Europe. Churchill cited the UK’s historical role as an empire and a leader in industrial development quite apart from European traditions and alliances (Churchill, 1946). This history has played a significant role in promoting anti-European affiliation within the UK, a component of national identity that the EU could and should use to its advantage when promoting its importance and legitimacy.
The EU can use common history to promote involvement in the EU and EMU. The EU has established itself over the past sixty years as a significant actor both in global politics and the global economy. The European organizations from which the EU descended played pivotal roles in funding and promoting economic recovery after the Second World War and sustaining Europe through the challenges of the Cold War. These experiences and memories already exist in the European mind and the EU should make use of this memory to increase its claim to traditional legitimacy and its reservoir of diffuse support. All member states within the EU must also join the efforts of Germany and France to sustain the EU through the current financial crisis, which provides Europe with an important opportunity to define and establish itself in the modern economic and global environment both in the minds of world leaders and in the minds and hearts of European citizens.
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