Time Bomb?
The Dynamic Effect of News and Symbols on the Political Identity of European Citizens

Michael Bruter
London School of Economics and Political Science

Based on a three-wave, six-country comparative panel study experiment with 1,197 participants, this article shows how in the long term, political institutions and the media can affect the European identity of citizens. It shows not only that exposure to good or bad news on Europe and to symbols of the European Union has an effect on European identity but also that news works as a powerful time bomb. It suggests that whereas increasingly cynical European citizens first resist perceived attempts of political manipulation, the effect of news ultimately kicks in and so influences citizens’ European identity with remarkable efficiency in the long term. The 2.5-year study demonstrates this time bomb effect of news, as well as an immediate but growing effect of political symbols on citizens’ identity.

Keywords: identity; European Union; media; symbols; Europe; experiment; panel study

In the spring of 2005, citizens of France and the Netherlands voted against a proposed new European Union (EU) constitution that most analysts had originally expected them to endorse. Interpretations of this surprising outcome have sparked controversy. Some suggest that voters merely reacted to domestic politics and uninspiring “yes” campaigns, whereas others claim that the result stemmed instead from a general distrust in the EU or in political institutions. Regardless of what political science will identify as their cause, these results, the ensuing crisis, and the new questions that they have opened regarding the future of an “ever-closer” (Dinan, 2005) political union have shaken our understanding of the relationship between institutions, the media, and citizens in the EU. They also raise the crucial question of whether a mass European identity of the people is emerging to mirror to the “ongoing, progressive” identity of Europe (Caporaso, 2005), given that in the absence of fully democratic institutional structures, an
underlying identity has been deemed by many a necessary precondition to the furthering of an increasingly political and institutionalized project (Bruter, 2005). Finally, the constitution setback makes it crucial to figure out why some citizens feel more European than others and whether institutions and the media can influence and shape—either positively or negatively—the political identity of individuals. Indeed, the fascinating question of why and how some citizens progressively become European at heart has tremendous implications for our understanding of complex multiple identities in the EU and beyond.

This article precisely tackles the puzzle of whether institutions and the media can influence, impede, or encourage the development of citizens’ European identity over time. As such, it differs from most existing studies in political communication and persuasion, in two ways: its dependent variable and its methodology. With regard to the former, it focuses on a little-known effect of political communication: an effect not on political behavior or attitudes but on a layer that is deeper and deemed less volatile over time by the social psychology literature—namely, citizens’ political identity (Breakwell, 2004). The research design of this article is also radically different from that of most studies because it uses data rarely available to political scientists: a three-wave comparative experimental panel study design, which ran in six West European countries over a period of 2.5 years \( n = 1,197 \). Specifically, the data are used to explore how media messages and symbols of Europe affect citizens’ European identity over time. The article analyzes the effect of media messages and exposure to symbols of Europe on citizens’ European identity (a) after being exposed to news on and symbols of Europe and the EU for 2 years and (b) in the longer term, 6 months after the end of the experiment. It shows how important symbols are to the emergence of a new identity and, crucially and counterintuitively, how news works as a delayed but dreadfully efficient time bomb on a widely cynical European citizenry.

**Background and Model: Shaping European Identity**

### Civic and Cultural Components of European Identity

Political identities are remarkably difficult to measure. Burgess summarizes the paradox of capturing an individual’s identity by saying that it is “prisoner of language” (as cited Herrmann, Risse, & Brewer, 2004). Identity is spontaneously expressed rather than analytically conceived; its
expression is so contextualized that we cannot use it as a pure qualitative measure of individuals’ identities (Meinhof & Galasinski, 2005), because an expression of identity is not universal but tailored to the assumed expectations of the interlocutor. So, when asked “Where are you from?” a Londoner will say “from Britain” to a German interlocutor, “from London” to a Brit, and “from Hackney” to a fellow Londoner, without these variations betraying any identity difference. The main variables used in surveys that ask respondents whether they feel, say, Italian or European or both, how much so, and how these various political identities compare are all problematic because of this language prison and because of serious issues of comparability: “Yes, I feel European” or “I feel 5” on a 0–7 scale of European identity can mean very different things between respondents in terms of the intensity and nature of one’s identity. Similarly, the Eurobarometer version of the Moreno Scale (which runs from British-only to European-only via British-and-European and European-and-British) assumes a latent tension, which is disproved by evidence of positive correlations between multiple identities (Bruter, 2005; Hooghe & Marks, 2001, 2004).

To avoid these problems, researchers must rely on a conceptualization of political identity that does not arbitrarily assume a tension between various identities, and they must measure identity beyond self-evaluation, in ways that are directly comparable across individuals. This article relies on two conceptually and empirically different components of the political identities of individuals, as defined in my earlier work (Bruter, 2003, 2005) and as used by Herrmann et al. (2004) and Meinhof and Galasinski (2005). These components, referred to as civic and cultural, cover two important aspects of any political identity. Civic identity relates to a citizen’s identification with a political system, which defines his condition as a political being and determines his duties and rights; by contrast, cultural identity is conceived as a citizen’s identification with a human community to which he feels he belongs to.

The two dimensions, often superimposed in national contexts, overlap less in the European context, namely, because a European civic identity is more likely to reinforce the legitimacy of the EU as a political system whereas a cultural identity is more likely to simply reflect the existence of a shared historical and cultural heritage (Wintle, 1996). Of course, many other theories of identity have been proposed, such as the distinction among affective, cognitive, and evaluative layers of identity (Cerutti & Lucarelli, 2008). However, this framework is mainly used to characterize the objective and subjective identities of a political system (Meyer, 2002).
Psychologists and discourse analysts have long recognized that at the individual level, identity does not necessarily imply positive evaluations but can be equally based on shame, for instance (Wodak, 1999). In this sense, de Vries and van Kersbergen (2007) have shown how support and allegiance are, if anything, consequences rather than part of individuals’ identities, whereas Habermas’s model (1992) arguably implies a similarity causality from identity to affect.

Political identities are not only complex to capture; their ability to evolve, if largely documented by the literature (e.g., Duchesne & Frognier, 1995; Herrmann et al., 2004), is also not yet well understood. As such, the present article is interested in the effect of two types of elites that conceivably have an interest in encouraging or impeding the development of new identities: political systems and the mass media.

Good News, Bad News, and the Emergence of a Mass European Identity

Since the late 1960s, the influence of political communication in general, and positive and negative news in particular, has attracted increasing attention. Following the experimental breakthrough of Iyengar, Peters, and Kinder (1982), news has been shown to affect behavior, including electoral choice (Bartels, 1993; Sanders & Norris, 2005) and turnout (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995); attitudes, including partisan identification (Evans & Norris, 1999; Norris, Sanders, Curtice, Scammell, & Semetko, 1999) and opinion on EU integration (De Vreese & Boomgaarten, 2006a; de Vreese & Semetko, 2004; Gerstlè, Magni-Berton, & Piar, 2004; Karp, Banducci, & Bowler, 2003); and, finally, beliefs, namely through framing (i.e., interacting with predisposition; Sniderman, Hagendoom, & Prior, 2004). Yet, although McLeod, Kosicki, and McLeod (2002) show that scholars have found four main types of individual effects of political communication—cognitive, behavioral, perceptual, and on opinion—they suggest that research has slowly recentered on indirect effects via deeper attitudes and beliefs, in the hierarchy of Hurwitz and Peffley (1987).

Our model assesses whether news affects an even deeper layer—specifically, that of political identity. This represents the ultimate test regarding the extent of news influence. In my earlier work (Bruter, 2003), I highlight such an effect, but my findings do not test the long-term impact of message on identities—a concept that, unlike behavior in an election, has no natural “use-by date.”
With regard to actual news, we now know a lot about how the media frame (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) and connote Europe. Peter, Semetko, and de Vreese (2003) have shown that whereas most television coverage is neutral, much of the rest is negative, although this varies across countries. In this article, I choose to look precisely at the impact of positive and negative news while keeping themes constant across groups. These themes represent frames often used in the media (e.g., economy, morality; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Regarding the impact of good and bad news, Zaller (1992, 1996) shows that when citizens are exposed to one-sided news, its effect on their perceptions and behavior is no less than massive. Moreover, de Vreese and Boomgaarten (2006b) found that news on EU integration (in this case, looking at the Danish media coverage of EU enlargement) can at times be as close to being one-sided as conceivable. The question regarding the impact of one-sided news on European identity is thus interesting not only in purely abstract terms but also in its realistic consequences. Indeed, whereas both Zaller and de Vreese and Boomgaarten accept that sophistication can partly limit the influence of one-sided news, such news remains highly potent.

This hypothesized effect of good and bad news on European individuals’ identity is thus not a simple, logical extension of the existing communication literature but a new and, in a way, far more ambitious claim. It analytically implies that something as deep and apparently stable as identity is in fact affected by specific political outcomes in the long run. The claim mirrors the logic of Wodak (1999, 2002) and Meinhof and Galasinski (2005), who show how in a context of crisis and alienation, citizens may end up reacting by actually feeling less Austrian (Wodak, 1999, 2002) or German (Meinhof & Galasinski, 2005)—that is, by reforming their identities. Further examples deal with the identity reactions of minorities who felt alienated by the stance of their compatriots or elites, such as the few remaining Polish Jews after the Shoah or some British Muslims in a context of international tension (Parekh, 2002).

The hypothesized link between news and identity strives on the existing literature via specific and diffuse support (Caldeira & Gibson, 1995). Following Easton’s conceptualization, Caldeira and Gibson interpret diffuse support (their definition of legitimacy) as a reservoir of goodwill that makes citizens accept the legitimacy of institutions that make decisions that they do not support; however, neither their theory nor their results exclude the possibility that an extended series of unpopular decisions will damage, on the long run, the diffuse support for a given institution. In fact, a logical derivation of their analysis is that a series of bad outcomes will ultimately affect
diffuse support for a given institution. After all, continuous conditions of draught affect the state of a reservoir unless it rains promptly. I suggest that European identity follows the same logic: A long, systematic series of perceived good or bad news on Europe will ultimately alter the level of European identity of individuals. For this reason—and in line with the existing literature that shows that news primarily affects the images formed by citizens of their political system rather than their human community (Bruter, 2003, 2005)—this effect is expected to affect the civic dimension of European identity. Thus, Hypothesis 1 can be stated as follows:

**Hypothesis 1a:** The exposure of European citizens to good or bad news on Europe will influence their level of European identity.

**Hypothesis 1b:** This effect primarily affects the civic component of citizens’ European identity.

### Symbols of European Integration and European Identity

The second component of the model relates to the expected impact that symbols of Europe have on citizens’ European identity. For a long time, European institutions have provided the EU and its predecessors (mostly, the Council of Europe) with prominent symbols: European flag and anthem, day of Europe, European banknotes, passports, and now drivers’ licenses. European institutions have openly admitted a hope that such symbols would stimulate a mass European identity (e.g., European Commission, 1993). Structuralist models provide a theoretical logic to this hope (Billig, 1995; Castoriadis, 1975); accordingly, identity proceeds when individuals identify with the images they form of their political systems (Castoriadis, 1975). Thus, the “official” symbols of a community channel and influence the images formed in citizens’ minds, therefore affecting the likeliness of their identification with it. With this in mind, many symbol-hungry leaders designed flags and anthems (for newly independent central European states) and citizenship ceremonies (in the United States and the United Kingdom).

In the case of the EU, symbols were selected to convey the values and meanings that EU institutions wanted to project that reflect the idea of Europe. They ostensibly convey positive, seductive perceptions of Europe, to which people will identify. Past research has shown that positive values, such as peace, harmony, friendship, are now spontaneously associated with some of the main symbols of European integration, such as the flag, anthem, and common passport (Wintle, 1996); so, one can expect these symbols to reinforce European identity. The same literature suggests that
symbols predominantly affect cultural European identity, by providing citizens with shared images that reinforce their perceptions of being closer as a people (Bruter, 2005). Hypothesis 2 can therefore be stated as follows:

**Hypothesis 2a:** Exposure to symbols of European integration stimulates the development of a European identity by individual European citizens.

**Hypothesis 2b:** This effect primarily affects the cultural component of European identity.

**Time, Cynicism, and the Time Bomb Model**

We now come to the dynamic component of the model. When institutions and the media generate stimuli that affect political identities, they sow the seeds of a dynamic that may assume different shapes. If any impact is to be found, it may follow one of four scenarios over 2.5 years:

- **Undisturbed effect:** effect between \( t_0 \) and \( t_{+24} \) (see note 2) and then stability between \( t_{+24} \) and \( t_{+30} \).
- **Artificial experimental effect:** effect between \( t_0 \) and \( t_{+24} \), then decline/cancellation of the effect between \( t_{+24} \) and \( t_{+30} \).
- **Effect reinforced by priming:** effect between \( t_0 \) and \( t_{+24} \), then further similar effect between \( t_{+24} \) and \( t_{+30} \).
- **Modified sleeper effect:** no effect between \( t_0 \) and \( t_{+24} \) and then effect between \( t_{+24} \) and \( t_{+30} \) (see note 3).

The first model suggests that experimental effects, far from being artificial, are both immediate and definitive. The second model represents a pessimistic experimental approach (for criticisms, see Brannigan, 2004); that is, it would confirm experimental effects as an artifact, because strong initial effects would decrease as respondents become no longer systematically exposed to specific news and symbols. The third model represents experimental effects reinforced over time by priming; it is my hypothesized effect of symbols on identity. Although political scientists have focused mostly on the impact of priming on the importance associated with specific issues in voters’ evaluations (e.g., Krosnick & Kinder, 1990), those in the psychology and media literatures think of priming far more broadly, as an effect of “a preceding stimulus on subsequent perceptions” (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Dillman-Carpenter, 2002). Psychologists in particular recognize four types of priming effects (Tulving & Craik, 2000; Tulving & Schacter, 1990), including perceptual priming, the function of which is to “improve identification of perceptual objects” (Tulving & Schacter, 1990).
This process, based on recognition and implicit memory, has shown that respondents who are exposed to specific stimuli become more likely to notice them in everyday life. Applied to our model of symbols and the structuralist link developed earlier between image and identification, this priming effect should result in respondents’ not only continuing to identify after the end of the experiment but doing so in greater degrees. If the hypothesis is correct, it would show that the experimental effect of symbols on identity, far from being short-lived, would actually accelerate over time.

The final model is apparently the most counterintuitive of all; it involves the effect that news will have over time as an extension of a sleeper effect in the context of a vastly cynical European public. Since the 1940s, the social psychology and political communication literatures have experienced controversy regarding whether the impact of messages takes the form of a sleeper effect and, if so, under what conditions. The sleeper effect was first described by Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield (1949), who realized that the impact of printed news on citizens’ opinions evolved differently when authored by reliable and unreliable sources. They showed that whereas news from reliable sources has a strong impact at first, which diminishes later, news from unreliable sources has a stronger effect after some time. The pattern has been confirmed in varying contexts by Hovland and Weiss (1952), Capon and Hulbert (1973), Pratkanis et al. (1988), Allen and Stiff (1989), and Priester et al. (1999), among others. Interestingly, Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof, and Oegema (2006) have recently shown that a sleeper effect does not need news to emanate from a singularly distrusted source—in this case, negative news regarding the 2002 Dutch parliamentary elections. The authors showed that negative news seemed to have no effect at first but, rather, registered its effect quite significantly after 2 months. Despite numerous occurrences, the sleeper effect is still treated as being rather mysterious. Controversies pertain to the psychological mechanisms that underlie the effect and the conditions under which it occurs. The original argument—that the effect may be caused by a tendency to forget the source of information faster than its contents—was soon disproved and attention focused instead on the effect of immediate discounting cues as people are exposed to news, and on the boldness of the arguments proposed. The various experiments used to test the sleeper effect’s validity tended to have short designs (e.g., Pratkanis et al., 1988) and construe the effect as an exceptional paradoxical effect of specific news. Here, instead, building up on the insight of Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2006), our model suggests (a) a generalized sleeper effect in a context of widespread cynicism of European citizens regarding the way that they are informed and (b) a long-term effect on
identity rather than a short-term effect on behavior. In other words, I open
the question regarding the systematic effects that enable news to act as a
time bomb.

The current European context is indeed unprecedented. After continu-
ally losing trust in their parties, politicians, and bureaucrats, Europeans
have increasingly extended their mistrust to nonpolitical institutions and
the media (BBC, 2005). The changing perception of the media, from coun-
terpower to target of cynicism, is occurring throughout the Western world.
However, World Value Survey data suggest that the scope of European
distrust is not only unprecedented but also unmatched anywhere else in the
world. With regard to political institutions, by 2005 only 31% of Europeans
believed that their country was governed by the will of the people, against
37% of North Americans (BBC, 2005).4

However, differences in cynicism toward nonpolitical institutions, such
as religious institutions and the media, have become greater in recent years.
Regarding religious institutions, a difference is expected between North
America (38% of which trust) and the traditionally secular Europe (12%).
However, when it comes to the media, the contrasts are strong. In 2005 only
12% of Europeans claimed to trust the media, compared to 15% of North
Americans (29% in the Asia Pacific, 48% in Africa; BBC, 2005). The
World Value Survey series shows that confidence in the press in Great
Britain has plummeted from 30% in 1981 to 16% in 1999.

Interestingly, a number of scholars have looked at the responsibility of
the media in this growing cynicism in general (Pharr & Putnam, 2000) and
in relation to strategic coverage (de Vreese, 2005) and negative campaign-
ing with contradictory results in the United Kingdom (Norris et al., 1999;
Sanders & Norris, 2005) and the United States (Cappella & Jamieson,
1997). The generalized sleeper effect model developed above thus logically
leads to the time bomb hypothesis, whereby cynicism does not work as a
vaccine against the more insidious effects of media manipulation but,
instead, merely delays the impact of news. Early resistance to manipulation
(at t_{24}) will give way to a time bomb in the form of strong effects at t_{30}.
The priming effect of symbols and the time bomb effect of news thus lead
to the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 3:* The effect of symbols will be immediate but will grow because of
priming effects.

*Hypothesis 4:* The effect of news on Europe on the level of European identity of
respondents will work as a time bomb—negligible while respondents are
being interviewed in the course of the experiment treatment but distinctly
strong after a 6-month lag.
Method

Why an Experimental Panel Study Design?

Research in political communication has long identified experimental designs as one of the most obvious ways to measure citizens’ reactions to political messages and images. Experiments allow researchers to measure the impact of news on individuals, with three useful controls that survey data lack. First, one knows for sure what news the participants are exposed to. By contrast, basing an analysis on respondents’ answers to questions about what they read or hear implies uncertainty (e.g., did the respondent buy the paper on a day when it contained particularly important messages?). Second, while an experiment is being administered, researchers can normally ensure that respondents are not being exposed to other messages, although this does not apply to messages that the respondents were exposed to before the experiment. By contrast, respondents to a survey will omit some influences (channels they occasionally follow without paying attention or without wanting to admit it), and they will be vague about their attentiveness, discussion, and so on, which may all matter (Just et al., 1996). Finally, experiments allow us to control for self-selection effects, which are important when it comes to news (Zaller, 2001). At the same time, the big cost of experiments is their artificiality. They usually focus on a relatively short period of time because people cannot really be kept in experimental conditions for a long time; furthermore, such studies are suspected of measuring an immediate effect at its unnatural and thus unlikely peak, with problems of generalizability and external validity. This is a concern when it comes to assessing the influence of news on something as deep as political identity.

To test the dynamic hypotheses (Hypotheses 3 and 4), I use an experimental panel study design, instead of a traditional one-shot experiment. The 2.5-year study included 2 years of experimental treatment and a final 6-month resting period before the third questionnaire. The design respects two of the three advantages of experiments detailed above: knowing what news participants are exposed to and being able to treat this news exogenously (given that it is not due to self-selection). However, the design relaxes the last traditional experimental assumption: Of course, respondents were exposed to other news during the long experiment. To limit this problem, respondents were randomly allocated into the four experimental groups. The sample was distinct in that it was (a) larger than that used in much of the literature \((n = 1,197)\); (b) comparative, with respondents from six countries; (c) significantly more diverse than that found in
many experiments, in terms of geography (at least four regions per country),
gender, age, and socioprofessional categories, and (d) started at two
points—2 years apart—in each location. All these safeguards are intended to
improve the validity and generalizability of the results. For instance, many
experiments legitimately rely on limited locations (Ansolabehere & Iyengar,
1995; Sanders & Norris, 2005) and even student samples.

By contrast, with our varied samples and six-country comparison, we
can verify that any experimental effect will not be an artifact of a microcos-
mic contextual reality. In other words, although numbers are too low to
draw firm conclusions from comparative differences (as explained later),
comparative similarities will strengthen the value of hypothetical findings
by validating them beyond context, as is traditional with most different
systems designs (Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Przeworski & Teune, 1970).
Similarly, the division of all experimental groups in each country into two
subgroups, exposed to the experiment at two different times, was important
to confirm that any observed effect would not be caused by a systematic
impact of the news on Europe in a given period, particularly when consid-
ering the 6-month lag between the second and third waves of the survey. As
such, like countries and sociodemographic background, timing can be used
as a control variable in all models, and it has no statistically significant
impact on any of them, thereby suggesting that the effects that we identify
are general rather than context specific.

Most of all, this panel study design, though more costly and more com-
plex to organize than one-shot experiments, aimed to avoid the risk of
measuring short-term reactions. Instead, data measure respondents answers
before the start of the experiment, after the end of the 24-month experi-
ment, and 6 months after the end of the experiment.

The Experiment

After being randomly assigned to one of four experimental groups, each
respondent received a biweekly newsletter for 24 months. It was based on
articles published in European newspapers (daily and weekly), and it was
illustrated with some drawings and photographs. The newsletter was four
pages long. The first page focused on non-European international news (the
same for all respondents). The fourth page included some unusual news
(again, the same for all respondents), such as the story of a man faced with
a camel in his garden in Alaska or the latest controversy on the real height
of Mount Everest. The two intermediary pages represented the experi-
trial stimulus per se. They included news on Europe and the EU, which was
systematically positive or negative, depending on the experimental group. The choice of positive/negative news respected a certain balance among economic, political and institutional, social, and other news and between news on Europe and news on the EU.\textsuperscript{11}

In addition to text, each newsletter included three photographs or (occasionally) drawings. Here again, the respondents were orthogonally divided into two groups, systematically exposed to one of two types of photographs: either symbols of Europe and the EU (map of Europe, European flag, passport, etc.), or placebo photographs (people, landscapes, etc.). Three coders blindly assessed the connotation of every item of material included in the newsletters (positive, negative, international and other news, European and neutral photographs). Only elements unanimously coded by all three researchers were used in the newsletters. Table 1 and Figure 1 summarize the four experimental groups, based on one type of news on Europe and one type of photograph.

The Questionnaires

The questionnaire was written in each necessary language and is reproduced in the appendix (in English). It includes two measures of general European identity, six measures of civic identity, and four measures of cultural identity. The questionnaire also includes control variables measuring levels of national, regional, and local identity and, in the context of the pretest questionnaire, support for and perceived benefits of EU integration, as well as demographic and political control variables (age, gender, party preferences, etc.). Details on the operationalization of the resulting general, civic, and cultural identity variables are provided later.\textsuperscript{12}

Countries and Respondents

The study was conducted before the 2004 enlargement, when the EU consisted of 15 member states. The panel was conducted in six member states. As explained earlier, this is not so much to find differences between the countries as it is to ensure the external validity of the experimental results across contexts, which is why the article does not discuss comparative univariate distributions but verifies that causal relationships are verified across countries. Given the great variety of EU members states (even pre-2004), the study includes the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, and Sweden. These countries represent various ages of European integration: founding members (France, Germany, Belgium), the
Figure 1
Experimental Model: Groups Divided by Type of News and Photograph

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photographs</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Symbols</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placebo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newsletter Contents</th>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Description and Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common news</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral: 1 page</td>
<td>1–4</td>
<td>Results of the general elections in Japan, mango production in Brazil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unusual: 1 page</td>
<td>1–4</td>
<td>A man faces a camel in his garden in Alaska, a scientist discovers a galaxy shaped as a heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased news</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive: 2 pages</td>
<td>1, 2</td>
<td>Agreement found between the heads of state to jointly fight drug trafficking and its first results; Europe now the continent where citizens have the highest levels of general knowledge; Airbus overtakes Boeing as no. 1 world airplane manufacturer; Euro is up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative: 2 pages</td>
<td>3, 4</td>
<td>European Union heads of state still cannot agree on a common position to jointly fight organized crime from the former Eastern bloc; science knowledge in Europe still below that of East Asian countries; Boeing wins a large order in China against Airbus; Euro slumps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbols</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
<td>European passport, flag, map of Europe, banknotes, drawing of a European dove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Placebo</td>
<td>2, 4</td>
<td>Camel, landscape of Brazilian rainforest, people on the beach, trees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
enlargements of 1973 (United Kingdom), 1986 (Portugal), and 1995 (Sweden)—as well as East Germany within the German sample. This is important because some models (Bruter, 2005; Hix, 2005) claim that the time when a country joined the EU has an impact on public attitudes toward integration. Second, the countries chosen include member states large (France, Germany, United Kingdom) and small (Belgium, Sweden, Portugal), given that some authors claim that small states have a different relationship to the EU (Thorhallsson, 2000). Third, the study includes some traditionally pro-European countries (Belgium, France, Portugal, and Germany) and Euro skeptic countries (United Kingdom, Sweden). Finally, it includes relatively rich and relatively poor states. In short, I maximized variance to provide the harshest possible test of the general validity of the model.

The starting samples included about 200 respondents per country, for a total of 1,197. The return rates over the three waves were rather high for this type of study (Table 2), despite a minimal incentive—a book voucher of about three to four euros (four to five dollars), depending on the country. Return rates were slightly lower in Portugal. Despite the limited dropout rates, country-specific analyses must be considered with extreme caution. For experimental purposes, samples need not be representative (Brannigan, 2004), but this study used diversified samples, though making no exception. Full randomization tests were conducted showing no significant difference across groups. Tests were also performed confirming no significant difference in experimental effects across gender, social, and demographic groups. The only exception is age: Younger and older citizens proved slightly more influenceable than other generations. Age and gender are included as control variables in all equations.

**Confirming the Civic and Cultural Dimensions of European Identity**

The first finding of the article concerns the hypothesis that European identity can be divided into civic and cultural components. The measurement proposed is validated by an exploratory factor analysis of 10 items, first without rotation and then with varimax rotation. In both the unrotated model and the rotated model, the result is a straightforward two-factor solution that, beyond doubt, confirms the existence of a civic dimension and a cultural dimension (Table 3). The 6 civic items clearly load onto one factor that explains 46.9% of the total variance in the 10 items. The 4 cultural
items all load onto a second factor, which explains about 18.8% of the total variance in the 10 items. In the unrotated solution, only one cultural item marginally loads onto the civic factor (but less so than on the cultural factor): Cultural 3, which measures the total number of cultural references provided by respondents when asked what being a citizen of Europe means to them. However, this score is constrained by the answer to Civic 4 (“Does being a citizen of Europe mean anything to you?”) because the following civic item (Civic 5) and cultural item (Cultural 3) are proposed only if the Civic 4 item was answered positively (yes, to some extent or yes, it means a lot). Thus, the loading of .44 of Cultural 3 on the civic factor in the unrotated solution clearly represents a measurement artifact. The rotated solution further validates the model. All items unambiguously load onto the expected factor. All together, civic and cultural factors explain two thirds of the total variance and fully confirm the civic and cultural dimensions of European identity.

For the purposes of the analysis and measurement of the dependent variables, separate factor analyses of civic and cultural items are run for each wave. All six factor analyses result in clear one-factor solutions, explaining between 51.3% and 66.4% (civic items) and between 42.9% and 54.8% (cultural items) of total variance. The resulting factor scores are used as dependent variables in all regressions. General identity is operationalized as a mean index of the two general identity items. General European identity is far more correlated with civic identity (.63) than with cultural identity (.38), whereas the correlation between civic and cultural identities is .50. Thus, when asked general questions about European identity, respondents spontaneously think of their Europeanness in mostly civic terms; that is, being European is now clearly associated with EU citizenship rather than a cultural reality.
In terms of processes of identity change, this article tests four general hypotheses (six including the subhypotheses): good and bad news on Europe have an effect on levels of European identity (Hypothesis 1), particularly on its civic component (Hypothesis 1b); symbols of Europe and the EU have an impact of European identity (Hypothesis 2a), particularly on its cultural component (Hypothesis 2b); symbols have an immediate effect, which then amplifies over time (Hypothesis 3); and news has a time bomb effect—that is, no immediate effect but a strong effect after a lag (Hypothesis 4). The findings are enlightening on all accounts.
The hypotheses are tested using a series of ordinary least squares regressions. In total, six models are tested where the dependent variables are as follows: general European identity at the end of the 24-month experimental treatment (Model 1) and again after a 6-month gap without experimental treatment (Model 2); civic European identity after 24 months (Model 3) and 30 months (Model 4); and finally, cultural European identity at the same time points (Model 5 and Model 6). Ordinary least squares straightforwardly tested the effects of the stimuli while fully controlling for pretest levels of European identity, support for European integration, and other variables (e.g., gender). However, giving existing debates in the literature, the models were also run using generalized least squares\(^1\) with entirely similar results and statistically significant variables. The regressions are run for the whole sample, with country dummies, and then within each country. Country-specific regressions must be considered with caution because of the sample size.

**Symbols of Europe and European identity**

The model hypothesizes an immediate and durable impact of European symbols on the evolution of participants’ European identity—particularly, its cultural component. The results are remarkably straightforward. Table 4 clearly shows that consistent exposure to symbols of Europe and the EU (flag, maps, euro banknotes, etc.) makes people feel more European over time and confirms that symbols have a strong and dominant effect on the cultural component of citizens’ European identity. The variable also has a statistically significant effect on the general (self-placed) identity of citizens, although it is much less strong this time. The table also gives a clear sense regarding the timing of the European symbols’ effect on citizens’ general identity: Symbols act faster than news but become less dominant over time. With regard to the civic component of European identity, the coefficient for the full sample is not statistically significant. When the sample is broken down by country, the effect of symbols on the civic component of European identity matters for the German sample—and to a certain extent, the French one—but not elsewhere (Ta).

More generally, the comparative analysis confirms that the effect of exposure to symbols of Europe is stronger in some countries than in others. With regard to regressions of the cultural component of European identity, only one country dummy (Table 4) has a statistically significant effect in each wave: in Wave 2, France (positively), and in Wave 3, Sweden (negatively). Similarly, regarding regressions within countries (Table 5), the
effect of symbols on cultural identity, though statistically significant everywhere, appears to be stronger in some national samples than in others, thereby suggesting different vulnerability to symbols. This is particularly the case in Sweden, Germany (even more so among East German participants), and Belgium. For general European identity, the same three national samples seem most sensitive to the effects of symbols. Indeed, for the Belgian respondents, symbols matter almost as much as news when it comes to explaining general European identity at $t_{30}$.

The timing effect of symbols is also extremely interesting. Our findings show that although the effect of exposure to symbols of Europe seems immediate, it reinforces after citizens stop being subjected to the dense experimental stimulus. This confirms the expected priming effect (Hypothesis 3), whereby those who are regularly exposed to symbols of Europe for a period of time notice them more in their daily life afterward. Thus, the coefficient corresponding to the effect of symbols on citizens’ identity 6 months after receiving the last newsletter is even higher than it is at $t_{24}$. This timing is similar across all countries. This postexperiment acceleration gives a sense of the potential long-term value of institutional symbolic campaigns.

The Effect of Positive and Negative News on Europe

Hypothesis 2a states that positive and negative news on Europe will affect European identity—particularly, its civic component (Hypothesis 2b)—whereas Hypothesis 4 claims that this effect will be delayed until after the lag that followed the end of the experiment. This hypothesis has significant implications for our understanding the impact of political communication on increasingly cynical citizens. First, the panel study experiment confirms that over time, news on Europe has an impact on citizens’ levels of European identity. This effect is strong on civic European identity but to a lesser extent on general identity (Table 4). Cultural European identity is less affected by good and bad news on Europe, except for the French and Portuguese samples, for which the relationship is substantial in the third wave (Table 5).

Even more interesting is the finding that although the effects of European symbols are more or less immediate, news has virtually no effect on citizens’ levels of European identity while they are being exposed to the biased news, as illustrated by Figure 2. Instead, its unmistakable effect only kicks in during the months that follow the reception of the last newsletter. What is more, when the effect of news does develop, it is stronger than that of
Table 4  
Global Impact of News and Symbols at the End of the Experiment and After the 6-Month Lag

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Identity</th>
<th>Civic Identity</th>
<th>Cultural Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$t_{+24}$</td>
<td>$t_{+30}$</td>
<td>$t_{+24}$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$b$ (SE)</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$b$ (SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbols</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.07**</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.00</td>
<td>-.05*</td>
<td>-.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.05)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-EU</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.03)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DV at $t_0$</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.07*</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.09)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.15)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Results are ordinary least squares regression coefficients, with standard error in parentheses. Country dummies were entered in the equation, but only those that are statistically significant at .05 or better are shown; dashes (—) indicate nonsignificance. Omitted category for the country dummies is Germany. n = 902 ($t_{+24}$), 761 ($t_{+30}$). $t_{+24}$ = posttest, at 24 months; $t_{+30}$ = second posttest, at 30 months. EU = European Union; DV = dependent variable. *p < .05. **p < .01.
### Table 5

**Impact of News and Symbols on European Identity by Country**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>UK</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Belgium</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>Portugal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
<td>.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbols</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control $t_0$</td>
<td>.79**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.70**</td>
<td>.79**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.75**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbols</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control $t_0$</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.43**</td>
<td>.38*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.37</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbols</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control $t_0$</td>
<td>.80**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.64**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.92**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.61**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.74**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbols</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.20*</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control $t_0$</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbols</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.25*</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control $t_0$</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.61**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.49</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wave 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.27*</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.28*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbols</td>
<td>.32*</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
<td>.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control $t_0$</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.31*</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
<td>.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Results are standardized ordinary least squares regression coefficients. 
*p < .05. **p < .01.
Figure 2
Evolution of European Identity Over Time

2A - GENERAL

2B - CIVIC

2C - CULTURAL
symbols and stronger than that of all the control variables (including preexperimental levels of European identity and attitudes toward EU integration). By contrast, when the effect of news on citizens’ identity is measured straight after the experimental treatment, it is almost null on the whole. A mild effect persists among the Portuguese and French samples. By contrast, among the Brits (the most cynical European public overall; BBC, 2005), there is a statistically significant negative effect of news on levels of civic and general European identities at $t_{+24}$, as if respondents were trying to counterbalance the biased news to which they were exposed via the newsletter (Table 5).

Does this mean that European citizens are globally immune to the influence of manipulative mass media? The three-wave experiment vigorously suggests the contrary, as shown by the strong effect measured after the 6-month clearing period. This effect, stronger than ever, kicks in everywhere, including in the British and Swedish samples where citizens originally showed high resistance to what they read (Table 5). In fact, the time bomb finding questions the possibility of a paradoxical link between (a) the capacity of increasingly sophisticated and cynical citizens to resist what they regard as biased news and so discount journalistic manipulation while being exposed to it and (b) subconscious vulnerability to this bias when they lower their guard (Figures 2A and 2B).

As an extreme illustration of this paradox, the general and civic European identities of the highly “manipulation-resistant” Swedish sample (at $t_{+24}$) are most strongly affected by news at $t_{+30}$ (Table 5). In fact, although the comparative differences between the various countries show that news on Europe has a strong lagged effect on citizens’ identity everywhere, the lower the effect at $t_{+24}$, the higher it is at $t_{+30}$. Thus, the effect increases far more in the Swedish and British samples, where news seemed to have a counterproductive effect at first, than it does in the French sample, where the barrier of cynicism is weaker and where good and bad news matter right away (even though the effect accelerates there, too). In some countries, the long-term effect of news on civic identity is nothing less than overwhelming.

**Discussion: Cynical Citizens, Politics, and the Media**

Beyond the clear impact of both news and symbols on European identity, the lagged effect of news is particularly consequential. The article hypothesized that the effect of symbols on European identity would be immediate and yet accelerate over time as a result of priming mechanisms, whereas the
effect of news would be weak at first, because of Europeans’ cynicism, but strong later, after respondents lowered their guard. Both results are overwhelmingly confirmed, shedding light on a true time bomb phenomenon.

Where symbols are concerned, the implications of the growth of their immediate initial impact, well after the experiment, are important. The results show that respondents increasingly notice—or react to—European symbols in real life, thus underlying the long-term importance of symbolic campaigns on identity. The results may also explain a number of cross-national patterns of European identity levels observed in the literature (Bruter, 2005; Herrmann et al., 2004). The mechanism unveiled is also the ultimate test of the likely effects of civic education at school and the role of symbols for emerging, transforming, and threatened political identities. The findings suggest that such campaigns can be effective and that, for example, acquainting young children to the concept and symbols of Europe is likely to make them feel significantly and durably more European than previous generations. Similarly, the results validate the choice of symbolic and educational campaigns in countries where a changing population has led some to fear a progressive weakening of national unity.

By contrast, and consistent with our model, priming theory alone cannot explain the sequence of news effects on European identity over time. Indeed, it could not account for, nor has it ever shown, the evolution from a small, statistically significant negative impact after the end of an experiment to a very strong, statistically significant positive impact 6 months later. Similarly, sleeper effect models have never uncovered an effect as general as the one analyzed here. Thus, this paradoxical evolution begs for a new understanding of news impact in a context of outstanding European cynicism, even though further individual-level tests are needed to confirm the explanation that I propose. We know that an increasing proportion of citizens distrust the media and that some explicitly claim to discount bias in the news that they receive. However, we show that despite this qualified reading strategy, the effect of news resounds over time—even more impressively when participants are questioned again, 6 months after the end of their systematic exposure to biased news. It is precisely the conjunction of the respondents’ claims about their sophisticated way to read news (and low regression coefficients at Wave 2) and the most obvious effect of this news at Wave 3 that best defines the time bomb effect of news, as suggested here. Although our findings are straightforward in claiming that cynicism does not protect citizens’ identity from media effects, the notion that it would subconsciously make them even more vulnerable to news is far more contentious and evoked here only as a truly plausible possibility. Among the
indications supporting this interpretation are sleeper effects, which we know are reinforced by skepticism, and our results, according to which, countries with the highest levels of cynicism toward the media tend to register both the lowest news effect at $t_{+24}$ and the highest at $t_{+30}$. However, the causality between cynicism and vulnerability is not tested at the individual level, and problems of ecological inference prevent us from safely deriving individual-level links from these aggregate-level findings. One should also consider possible alternative explanations. For instance, the effect noticed here might have been true at a time of lower cynicism but simply not diagnosed because of the absence of panel design experiments. Postexperiment volatility might also be linked to the low salience of EU news. However, both explanations would leave major questions unanswered. A generalized sleeper effect without preexisting skepticism, if not cynicism, would contradict all the existing literature on the sleeper effect, whereas salience-based models would still not explain high resistance to news at $t_{+24}$. Two more alternatives should be discussed: first, the possibility that real news created the counterintuitive evolution of European identity, posttest; second, priming effects, which might have paradoxically further reinforced the effects of media bias in the everyday EU news respondents, are exposed to after the end of the experiment.

Both explanations can, however, be ruled out thanks to the split start date across groups—that is, respondents were exposed to different “real” news between $t_{+24}$ and $t_{+30}$—and because of the symmetry of the postexperimental evolution between treatment groups (i.e., for positive and negative news). Indeed, had these two models been correct, the evolution between $t_{+24}$ and $t_{+30}$ would be parallel, not symmetric. This dynamic causality is further emphasized by the fully developed models of European civic and cultural identities over time (Figure 3). These figures deconstruct how the immediate and lagged effects of news and symbols combine to progressively affect ever changing identities. Incidentally; they also emphasize how cultural identity (identification to a community) is globally more volatile than civic identity (identification to a political system) in the long run.

This article has shown that the growing cynicism of Europeans toward political institutions and the mass media requires us to change our understanding of the depth and timing of media effects. It shows that at the aggregate level at least, cynicism does not work as an efficient vaccine against political persuasion and manipulation, and it paints a blunt picture of how increasingly cynical citizens are still paradoxically influenced by the very journalistic sources they distrust. The result is a fragile, contrasted, and quite extraordinary equilibrium between resistant and gullible reactions.
Figure 3
Summary of the Three-Wave Model

2A - Civic Identity Model

Valid N= 829 (t_{+24}), 740 (t_{+30})

Other controls included in the equation: Age, sex, support for EU, country dummies.

2B - Cultural Identity Model:

N = 843, 732
to manipulation. It should also encourage our discipline to reflect on the methodological usefulness of generalizing an extra, lagged posttest wave in a number of experimental models when the nature and strength of stimuli allow as much.

Moreover, this new light, shed on the coexistence of sophistication and vulnerability to manipulation, somewhat pulverizes the answer of many American and European journalists to accusations of misinforming the public, which, they claim, is illogical insofar as sophisticated and cynical citizens will treat journalistic messages with a critical spirit that immunizes them against manipulation. Instead, this article shows, for instance, that British citizens’ knowing that their mass media are Euroskeptic (particularly, the tabloids) does not undermine in any way the ability of said media to make British citizens feel significantly less European than others. Instead, what is so interesting about the time bomb effect is that it asks whether the very sophistication and cynicism of modern-day citizens make them even more vulnerable to the influences to which they think to be immune.

Appendix: Pretest Questionnaire–United Kingdom

This is the pretest questionnaire for the United Kingdom. Posttest questionnaire included all the identity questions but not the demographics; other questionnaires were all equivalent and in the language of the country. Note that the presentation of the questionnaire here differs from what the respondents were given and that variables codes have been added here for convenience.

DATE:  
RESPONDENT ID:  

We would like to thank you for your participation in our survey. This survey is totally anonymous and is strictly designed for academic use. It has no commercial, political or media-related purposes whatsoever.

Please read each question and all the possible answers very carefully before answering. You might find some questions strange or redundant but we intend to use all of them so, please, answer every one, if possible.

For some questions, you will need to write down the answer. For some others, you must simply circle the answer that best corresponds to your view. Finally, in certain cases, circle all the possibilities that apply to you. We appreciate your efforts to write legibly and are grateful for your time.

(continued)
Appendix (continued)

Q1: Please, indicate your age.
Age: year-old.

Q2: Please, indicate your gender.
1. Female 2. Male

Q3: What village/town/city do you come from?
Town: County:

Q4: Which of these academic qualifications best describes you?
(Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Less than GCSE’s
2. GCSE’s, professional qualification, or equivalent
3. A levels or equivalent
4. Some university or diploma
5. Undergraduate degree
6. Postgraduate degree

Q5: Which of these socio-professional categories best describes you?
(Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Farmer.
2. Factory worker, blue collar.
3. Shop owner, workman, craftsman.
4. Clerk, employee.
5. Middle-management, school-teacher, nurse.
7. Unemployed.
8. Retired.
9. Student
10. Other.

Q6: On a left to right scale, how would you describe yourself?
(Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Strongly left.
2. Somewhat left.
3. Moderate, slightly leaning to the left.
4. Moderate – impossible to classify.
5. Moderate, slightly leaning to the right.
6. Somewhat right.
7. Strongly right.

(continued)
Appendix (continued)

Q7: Which of the following newspapers do you read at least twice a month? (Please, choose ALL that apply)
   1. The Times/Sunday Times
   2. The Independent/Independent on Sunday
   3. The Guardian/Observer
   4. The Daily Telegraph/Sunday Telegraph
   5. The Sun
   6. The Mirror
   7. The Daily Mail
   8. The Financial Times
   9. The Daily Express
   10. A local/regional newspaper.
   11. Other national newspaper.

Q8: In general, are you in favour or against the efforts being made to unify Europe? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
   1. Very much in favour.
   2. Somewhat in favour.
   3. Neither in favour nor against / I don’t know.
   4. Somewhat against.
   5. Very much against.

Q9: Please, look at these people. No 1 is standing still while No7 is running as fast as possible. Which best corresponds to what you would like for the European Union? (Choose ONE ONLY)

Q10: Generally speaking, do you think that the United Kingdom’s membership of the EU has been very positive, somewhat positive, neither positive nor negative, somewhat negative or very negative? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
   1. Very positive
   2. Somewhat positive
   3. Neither positive nor negative
   4. Somewhat negative
   5. Very negative

(continued)
Appendix (continued)

Q11: Have you ever lived in another European country for more than 2 months? Where? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. No, never.
2. Yes for 2 months to 1 year: _____________________
3. Yes, for more than a year: _____________________

Q12: In the past five years, have you travelled to another European country? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Yes, three times or more.
2. Yes, once or twice.
3. No.

Q13: Have you ever lived in a non-European country for more than 2 months? Where?
1. No, never.
2. Yes for 2 months to 1 year: _____________________
3. Yes, for more than a year: _____________________

Q14: In general, would you say that you are satisfied with the way democracy works in the United Kingdom? (Please, choose ONE ONLY) Are you…?
1. Very dissatisfied.
2. Somewhat dissatisfied.
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied / I don’t know.
4. Somewhat satisfied.
5. Very satisfied.

Q15: In general, would you say that you are satisfied with your life? (Please, choose ONE ONLY) Are you…?
1. Very dissatisfied.
2. Somewhat dissatisfied.
3. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied / I don’t know.
4. Somewhat satisfied.
5. Very satisfied.

Q16: Here is a list of the main political parties that compete in major elections in Britain, which would you say you feel closest too? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Labour
2. Liberal-Democrat
3. Conservative

(continued)
Appendix (continued)

4. UK Independence Party
5. Green Party
6. British National Party
7. Scottish National Party (SNP)
8. Plaid Cymru
9. Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)
10. Sinn Fein
11. Social Democrat Labour Party (SDLP)
12. Ulster Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)
13. Other

Q17: Did anyone in your family come from another European country?
1. Yes 2. Other

Q18: Do you speak any foreign language? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Yes, 3 or more foreign languages.
2. Yes, 2 foreign languages.
3. Yes, 1 foreign language.
4. No.

Q19: In general, would you say that you consider yourself a citizen of Europe?
(Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Yes, very much.
2. Yes, to some extent.
3. I don’t know.
4. Not really.
5. Not at all.

Q20: Since 1985, citizens from all the countries of the European Union have had a common ‘European’ passport on which both the name of their country and ‘European Union’ is written. Do you think that this is a good thing? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Yes, a very good thing.
2. Yes, a rather good thing.
3. It doesn’t matter at all.
4. No, a rather bad thing.
5. No, a very bad thing.

(continued)
Appendix (continued)

Q21: Here is a list of some of the games that will be featured at the next Women’s Volley-Ball World Championship in June. Could you say which team you would rather won each of these games? (Please choose ONE team for each of the four games)

A – Ghana vs Denmark:
1. Ghana
2. Denmark

B – Italy vs USA:
1. Italy
2. USA

C – Spain vs China:
1. Spain
2. China

D – Saudi Arabia vs Republic of Ireland:
1. Saudi Arabia
2. Republic of Ireland

E – Fiji vs Slovakia
1. Fiji
2. Slovakia

Q22: What would best describe your reaction if you saw someone burning a European flag? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. I would be shocked and hurt.
2. I would be shocked but not hurt.
3. I would not mind.
4. I would be happy.

Q23: What would best describe your reaction if you saw someone burning the Union Jack? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. I would be shocked and hurt.
2. I would be shocked but not hurt.
3. I would not mind.
4. I would be happy.

Q24: On a scale of one to seven, one meaning that you do not identify with Europe at all, and seven meaning that you identify very strongly with Europe, would you say that you…? (Please, circle ONE NUMBER ONLY)
1. (Do not identify with Europe at all)
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7. (Identify very strongly with Europe)

Q25: Applying the same scale as in question 6 to Britain, would you say that you…? (Please, circle ONE NUMBER ONLY)
1. (Do not identify with Europe at all)
2.

(continued)
Appendix (continued)

3.  
4.  
5.  
6.  
7. (Identify very strongly with Britain)

Q26: Still applying the same scale as in question 6 to your region, would you say that you…? (Please, circle ONE NUMBER ONLY)
1. (Do not identify with Europe at all)
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  
6.  
7. (Identify very strongly with your region)

Q27: Still applying the same scale as in question 6 to your city / town / village, would you say that you…? (Please, circle ONE NUMBER ONLY)
1. (Do not identify with Europe at all)
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  
6.  
7. (Identify very strongly with your city/town/village)

Q28: Some say that in spite of their numerous differences, Europeans share a ‘common heritage’ that makes them slightly closer to one another than they are to, say, Japanese or Chilean people. Do you…?
(Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Strongly disagree with this view.
2. Somewhat disagree with this view.
3. Neither agree nor disagree with this view / I don’t know.
4. Somewhat agree with this view.
5. Strongly agree with this view.

(continued)
Appendix (continued)

Q29: A group of athletes from all the countries of the European Union have proposed that at the Sydney Olympics, whenever an athlete/team from the European Union wins a gold medal, the ‘Ode to Joy’, the European anthem, should be played after, and in addition to, their national anthem. Do you think that this would be a good idea? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Yes, a very good idea.
2. Yes, a rather good idea.
3. Neither a good idea nor a bad idea.
4. No, a rather bad idea.
5. No a very bad idea.

Q30: When the heads of state/government of a European Union country (such as Queen Elizabeth II, Tony Blair, the French President or the German Chancellor) make a speech on TV, both the national flag and the European one appear behind them. Do you think that this is a good thing? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Yes, a very good thing.
2. Yes, a rather good thing.
3. Neither a good thing nor a bad thing / It doesn’t matter at all.
4. No, a rather bad thing.
5. No, a very bad thing.

Q31: Does being a ‘Citizen of the European Union’ mean anything for you? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Yes, it means a lot.
2. Yes, it means something.
3. No, it does not mean anything.

Q32: If you answered yes to question 13, would you say that, among other things, it means…? (Please, choose AS MANY AS APPLY)
1. A shared European heritage.
2. The right to vote in the European Parliament elections.
3. Common institutions.
4. A common European history.
5. A common European flag, European anthem, European passport.
6. The right to travel to another EU country without passing through customs.
7. The right to travel to another EU country without having to show your passport/ID.
8. Some common ideals.
9. To be a member of the ‘European family’.

(continued)
Appendix (continued)

Q33: Would you say that you feel closer to fellow Europeans than, say, to Chinese, Australian, or American people? (Please, choose ONE ONLY)
1. Yes, strongly.
2. Yes, to some extent.
3. I don’t know.
4. No, not really.
5. No, not at all.

Notes

1. In the case of Austria, Wodak (1999) suggests that postwar shame might have acted as a paradoxical point of crystallization of Austrian identity. Similarly, one can think of a number of situations whereby identity is revealed by embarrassment rather than positive affect: As a Frenchman living in Britain, I am painfully reminded of my national identity when prejudiced compatriots keep complaining about the (wrongly) supposed mediocrity of food and wine in the country where I live. As another example, a Norwegian colleague once told me that he never feels as Norwegian as he does when he is onboard a plane and his compatriots clearly try to get drunk before the plane even leaves the tarmac. In both cases, this is said without any affection.

2. As explained later, the three-wave design includes three questionnaires: pretest ($t_0$), posttest ($t_{+24}$), and a third test, which follows a 6-month resting period after the end of the experiment ($t_{+30}$).

3. A variation: effect in one direction (between $t_0$ and $t_{+24}$) and in the opposite direction (between $t_{+24}$ and $t_{+30}$).

4. Thirty-three percent in Africa, 29% in the Asia Pacific.

5. In traditional one-shot experiments, however, this advantage is always limited to the short time of the experiment, without prejudice to what the respondent might have heard, read, or seen just moments before and which may still influence their attitudes (a variation on some of the criticisms of Hovland, 1959). Moreover, many recent Web-based rather than lab-based experiments, such as those mentioned by Iyengar (2002), have relaxed this assumption while gaining in terms of sample size and design quality.

6. There are some exceptions—for example, Sanders and Norris (2005) use a sample size of 919, as well as quota sampling—but most political science experiments use small sample sizes, namely between 25 and 250 respondents (e.g., Iyengar, Peters, & Kindner, 1982; Nelson, Clawson, & Oxley, 1997; Wittmer, 1992).

7. The experiment did not aim at using a fully representative sample, because the literature considers it unnecessary. However, as it turned out, the sample, which was recruited from professional quota lists, was highly varied in sociodemographic terms. The gender balance is only slightly biased toward women: 58% women and 42% men. The median age of the sample is 40.0, with a standard deviation of 16.8. The youngest respondent is 18 and the oldest 89. The sample has a slight overrepresentation of young people: 27.3% were less than 25 years old at the start of the experiment, 27.0% between 25 and 39, 31.3% between 40 and 59, and
the remaining 14.4% aged 60 and older. Geographical spread almost reflects census data, with all the major regions of the six included countries represented and with an almost fair representation of communities of various sizes (slight bias toward larger cities). The representation of the various socioeconomic categories also almost mirrors census data but for an overrepresentation of students and wealthy social categories and an underrepresentation of unemployed citizens.

8. The results of the experiments started 2 years apart were fully similar; that is, the variable corresponding to the starting year, included as control, has no statistically significant effect in any of the models tested. In addition to comprising the questionnaires, the study included focus groups centered on what participants meant by Europe and European identity and on their perception of the news they read and the photographs they were shown in the newsletter. The discussion also dealt with their perceptions of news on Europe in real life and European Union symbols. It further invited them to react to the experiment itself, given that it was conceived as part of the debriefing exercise.


10. There is no exact science behind either the 24-month stimulus or the 6-month lag, but it is conceived as a sufficient time to develop a consistent stimulus and as a sufficient comparison to uses in the literature. Indeed, Monroe (1978) conceives a 2-year period as a natural basis to expect citizens to fully absorb economic information. Similarly, a 6-month lag is rather traditional in panel studies. For instance, it is often used in the National Election Study in the United States (in reference to the first two waves of the 1980 panel, see Markus, 1982) and the British Election Study (in reference to the panel waves between 1994 and 1997, see CREST, 1998). It is also the pivotal lag used by Milavsky, Kessler, Stipp, and Rubens (1982), who tested multiple-wave gaps in their study of television and aggression.

11. An additional, smaller control group was sent a newsletter without news on Europe and without photographs at all.

12. Cronbach’s alpha varies from .80 to .83 for the civic items and from .68 to .73 for the cultural ones.

13. Tests of differences of process between the East and West German subsamples were run and proved insignificant.

14. Moreover, the study includes three major players of European integration—France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—which, though arguably the most widely studied by political scientists, keep puzzling our discipline (van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996).

15. General identity represents the respondents’ spontaneous identity self-placement and is therefore different in essence from the civic and cultural components, which are measured by specific criteria.

16. With the exception of the Civic 6 item, because the question was not asked to all respondents in all waves.

17. There is a large debate in the literature on how a panel effect is best measured (e.g., Beck & Katz, 1995; Hecock, 2006). Here, there is no reason to suspect heteroscedastic error, particularly when considering the split starting dates for each group in each country. However, only three time points are included; as such, to avoid any unnecessary methodological controversy, all the models were tested using a generalized estimating equations extension of generalized least squares instead of ordinary least squares with full controls. The results were fully comparable, with the same variables appearing statistically significant and important in the two models.
References


Michael Bruter is a senior lecturer in European political science at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His work includes books such as *Citizens of Europe?* (2005), *Encyclopaedia of European Elections* (2007, with Yves Deloye), and *The Future of Our Democracies?* (2009, with Sarah Harrison), as well as articles in major political science journals and chapters on European identity, political behavior, political participation, elections, and the extreme right. He received his doctorate from the University of Houston and was lecturer in European politics at the University of Hull before joining the London School of Economics in 2001. He holds visiting positions in a number of universities, including the Université Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, the Australian National University (Canberra), the Institute of Political Studies (Strasbourg, France), and the University of Melbourne. In the past 5 years, he has obtained over a dozen external grants from a variety of sources, including the Economic and Social Research Council and the Leverhulme Trust.