



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Evaluating the EU: the influence of national institutional quality, media and interpersonal communication on EU democratic performance evaluations

Desmet, P.B.L.

Publication date
2013

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Desmet, P. B. L. (2013). *Evaluating the EU: the influence of national institutional quality, media and interpersonal communication on EU democratic performance evaluations*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Chapter



1

Second-Order Institutions: National Institutional Quality as a Yardstick for EU Evaluation

A version of this chapter was published in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 19(7), 1071-1088.

Evaluations of the democratic performance of European institutions vary across individuals and member states. Research suggests that opinion formation on the performance of a democratic regime is contingent on a cost-benefit assessment people make about the regime (Alvarez & Franklin, 1994). These individual cost-benefit assessments can be based on various considerations, such as evaluations of political performance (Klingemann & Fuchs, 1995; Rose & Mishler, 2002), economic performance (Lewis-Beck, 1988; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Rose, Mishler, & Haerpfer, 1998) and expectations of governance in the near future (Stokes, 2001; Echegaray & Elordi, 2001).

The European supranational polity is different from national democratic systems in many ways and the formation of opinions at the European level is therefore likely to be different from the national level. European decision-making becomes attractive when benefits can be generated, or when the difference between the performance of national and European institutions is unfavorable for the nation-state (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000). The balance between perceptions of supranational and national institutions may be crucial for evaluations of the EU democratic performance. Therefore, one needs to take the characteristics of national institutions into account to further the understanding of citizens' evaluations of the quality of the EU's democratic process. Previous research used subjective indicators such as institutional trust (Karp, Banducci, & Bowler, 2003) or objective measures of corruption (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000) to account for these national characteristics. This study contributes to the existing literature by incorporating specific institutional characteristics into one single indicator of national institutional quality. As such, I provide an objective measure of national institutional quality as a contextual determinant for individual assessments of the quality of EU democratic performance.

Furthermore, I deploy political knowledge as a moderator in this process. The main effect of political knowledge on EU evaluations has been studied by many scholars, yielding mixed results (for an overview, see Karp et al., 2003). To date, no attempt has been made to study the impact of political knowledge as a moderator of the effect of national institutional quality on EU evaluations. According to Rohrschneider (2002), the contrast in institutional quality between the two levels increases the salience of the EU's democratic deficit. Higher levels of domestic political knowledge can strengthen the effect of this relation between the national and supranational level.

In short, this chapter aims to make several contributions, at the analytical, the theoretical and the societal level. I make an analytical contribution by incorporating specific institutional characteristics into one single indicator of national institutional quality, and by deploying political knowledge as a moderator within this process. At the theoretical level, I try to explain how individual judgments are formed and influenced, both by individual and national contextual factors. At the societal level, it is important to fully understand the way individual assessments of the democratic performance of the EU are formed and influenced, in order to deal appropriately with the concerns of the European population.

The impact of *objective differences* in institutional quality between countries on EU evaluations is the main focus of this study. After defining democratic performance evaluations of the EU as a distinct dimension of EU attitudes, I will articulate my expectations about the impact of differences in national institutional quality on EU democratic performance evaluations. In a next step, I will link these differences between countries to the potential impact of political knowledge on EU evaluations,

addressing the key question: *does political knowledge condition the effect of national institutional quality on democratic performance evaluations of the EU?*

Democratic Performance at the European Level

Attitudes towards European governance are structured along related but distinct dimensions (Rohrschneider, 2002; Scheuer, 2005). They can be directed towards different objects, and they can be of affective or utilitarian nature (Boomgaarden, Schuck, Elenbaas, & De Vreese, 2011). This distinction is partially based on Easton's model of system support (1975). Easton differentiates between three different objects of political support: the community, the regime and the authorities, and two modes of support: specific and diffuse. Whereas specific support depends on the output of politics and policies, diffuse support varies between different objects of support. Lindberg and Scheingold (1970) differentiated between affective and utilitarian support for respectively vague ideals and policy interests. To fully capture the multi-dimensionality of EU attitudes, studies of public opinion about the EU should reflect on these different types of support. A recent analysis of Boomgaarden et al. (2011) resulted in five distinct dimensions. In this study, I set out to explain democratic performance, which concerns the evaluation of the actual functioning of a democratic political system. It contains judgments about the quality of European institutions and democratic procedures. In line with Rohrschneider (2002), Scheuer (2005) suggested that citizens do not connect their evaluations of EU democratic performance with their political support for further integration. These evaluations serve as building blocks towards future support, and are as such crucial considerations in the process of opinion formation (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Rohrschneider, 2002). I pursue this line of work and assess evaluations of democratic performance above and beyond general EU support.

Antecedents of Democratic Performance Evaluations in the EU

Previous studies have suggested different views on the question whether EU opinions are conditioned by the European or the national environment. Some scholars consider the EU to be the most important actor determining people's opinions about the European policy level (Gabel, 1998a; Gabel, 1998b; Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993). EU events and policies are crucial for creating and influencing evaluations. According to Gabel (1998a), more information and higher awareness lead to non-conditional views of the EU. Support then will be developed in response to the EU performance itself, and consequently the public will agree to cede national sovereignty regardless of its assessment of the nation-state. By attributing losses or benefits to the European level, citizens evaluate whether European institutions are working satisfactorily (Kritzinger, 2003). Other scholars regard the nation-state as the central factor influencing public opinion about the supranational level (Janssen, 1991; Martinotti & Stefanizzi, 1995; Anderson, 1998). Lack of interest, knowledge and information (Anderson, 1998; Meyer, 1999; Bennett, 1996) prevents people from developing EU specific opinions. Furthermore, the perception of national factors is more direct and more immediate (Kritzinger, 2003). "For most people, this means that they rely on what they know and think about domestic politics" (Anderson, 1998, p. 576). Compared to the national level, the European policy level is considered of minor importance, or "second-order" (Schmitt, 2005).

A similar pattern can be found in the literature on actual voting behavior. Schmitt (2005) found confirmation for the longstanding second-order national election model (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) in the European Parliamentary (EP) elections of 2004. Due to a lack of information about the EU, citizens use cognitive shortcuts from national politics to determine their EP vote (Schmitt, 2005). As such, national politics remains the central issue in EP elections. However, recent findings suggest that European issues increasingly matter in EP elections. Studies from the EP elections in 1999 (van der Brug, van der Eijk, & Franklin, 2007), 2004 (de Vries & Tillman, 2011), and 2009 (de Vries, van der Brug, van Egmond, & van der Eijk, 2011) demonstrate that EU attitudes affect vote choice in EU elections. Confirmation for this ‘Europe matters’ model can also be found in the EU referendum literature on the importance of EU attitudes for voting (Hobolt, 2009).

Recent studies have suggested a third option, with the interplay between national and European factors as the central determinant (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000; Rohrschneider, 2002; Burgoon, 2009). In a study of social welfare politics, Burgoon (2009) compared three perspectives on how provisions at one level affect support at the other. First, provisions at the national level could dampen support for European-level policies; second, provisions at the European level could undermine support for national welfare policies; and finally, the two could have separate politics, with little influence on one another. Additionally, Burgoon suggested a fourth perspective, treating both levels as imperfect substitutes:

“This view comes closest to Sanchez-Cuenca’s claim (2000) that citizens are mindful of how EU governance has opportunity costs for national governance, judging such costs as lower to the extent that national governance is found lacking owing to, for instance, corruption” (Burgoon, 2009, p. 433).

If the European level and the national level are, indeed, imperfect substitutes, then provisions at one level will *indirectly* affect demand at another level. Although Burgoon based his claim only on the social welfare domain, his claim might be generalizable to the quality of national and supranational institutions in general.

National Institutional Quality

Many authors agree that institutional quality matters for democratic evaluation (Almond & Verba, 1964; Klingeman & Fuchs, 1995; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Klingeman, 1999; Rose & Mishler, 2002; Blais & Gelinau, 2007; Aarts & Thomassen, 2008; Wagner, Schneider, & Halla, 2009). Wagner et al. (2009) established a positive correlation between high-quality institutions and satisfaction with national democracy. They used six institutional characteristics: rule of law, corruption, shadow economy, regulation of political executive recruitment, regulation of political participation and checks and balances. Do these measures of national institutional quality have a similar influence on the evaluation of institutions at a higher (supranational) level, the EU?

According to Sanchez-Cuenca (2000), EU support depends on the interplay between national and supranational politics, which is “based on the effect of popular perceptions about national and supranational institutions: the worse citizens’ opinions of national institutions and the better their opinion of supranational ones, the stronger their support for European integration” (p. 169).

I expect a similar effect on the evaluation of European democratic performance. The institutional quality within a country provides a framework that is unique for every country. National institutions then function as a yardstick for democratic evaluation at a higher level. Similarly, Rohrschneider (2002) argued that the quality of national institutions affects the effect of perceived democracy deficit on EU support. “The quality of national institutions affects how much weight individuals attach to flaws of EU institutions” (p. 465). In countries with high-quality institutions, the contrast in institutional quality between the two levels increases the salience of the EU’s democratic deficit, which in turn increases the probability that this issue would influence citizens’ evaluations of the democratic performance of the EU. In countries where the difference in institutional quality is balanced in favor of the EU, the structures of the EU can be perceived as an asset, rather than a liability. “The quality of national institutions enhances the odds that the EU’s democracy deficit becomes politicized” (Rohrschneider, 2002, p. 466).

Rohrschneider drew a parallel with the young Central and Eastern European democracies: “One general lesson, then, is that citizens judge new institutions against their experience with the regime that is to be replaced” (p. 472). Evaluations of the EU are indirectly shaped by the quality of national institutions; in a similar way as evaluations of former regimes affect support for democracies in Central Europe (Mishler & Rose, 1997). The better national institutions are, the more critical citizens will be when evaluating supranational institutions. An earlier attempt to study the EU attitudes within Eastern and Central European countries has been done by Christin (2005). He elaborated on the effect of political and economical reforms in Eastern European countries on attitudes towards the EU during the 1990s, before these countries became EU members. His results confirmed the expectation that efficient democratic performance at the national level enhances the existence of skepticism towards the European democratic performance (Christin, 2005). Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) found evidence for a direct effect of national institutional quality on EU support. He stated that higher levels of corruption at the national level directly increase EU support. In this article, I move beyond this focus on corruption and apply the same logic to six national institutional characteristics. I expect a contrasting effect of institutional quality on citizens’ EU performance evaluations.

Hypothesis 1: The higher the quality of citizens’ national institutions is, the more negative their evaluations of the EU’s democratic performance will be.

Political knowledge: know more, like more?

Several studies have shown that political knowledge is related to institutional characteristics, such as political efficacy and political support (Almond & Verba, 1964; Weatherford, 1991). Scholars studying the main effect of political knowledge on EU evaluations have reported mixed results (Karp et al., 2003). Depending on the theoretical argument, one could expect positive or negative effects of political knowledge on democratic performance evaluations of the EU. Most studies did not distinguish between domestic political knowledge and EU specific knowledge. However, the domain-specificity is crucial: even individuals who are well informed in general do not necessarily hold or gain knowledge in specific domains, such as EU level policies (McGraw & Pinney, 1990). In this study, I treat the national and supranational policy level as imperfect substitutes (Burgoon, 2009;

Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000). Therefore, I need to distinguish between knowledge of domestic politics and knowledge of European politics.

I expect that domestic political knowledge moderates the effect of national institutional quality on democratic performance evaluations of the EU. The more citizens in countries with high institutional quality are aware of their domestic politics, and therefore of the difference between domestic and supranational institutions, the less positive they will be about the European institutions. When national institutional quality is low, domestic political knowledge will have a positive effect on those evaluations. In these countries, the balance is in favor of the supranational level. Awareness of the flaws of one's own domestic institutions makes evaluations of supranational institutions more positive. Hypothesis 2: The higher the level of citizens' national political knowledge is, the larger the negative effect of national institutional quality will be on citizens' evaluations of the EU's democratic performance.

Method

Data

I rely on data from a voter survey¹ conducted in the context of the EP elections of 2009 in 21 member states². The survey was conducted using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI). It included a number of items measuring individual perceptions and evaluations concerning democratic satisfaction, political trust, efficacy, knowledge, interest and participation. It was held in twenty-one of the current European member states. As such, testing aggregate- and individual-level variables simultaneously is possible.

To assess whether institutional quality at national level affects democratic performance evaluations of the EU, country-level data are added to the dataset. Kaufmann, Kraay, and Zoido-Labaton (2002) filtered out six aggregate governance indicators from a large variety of partly overlapping governance indicator databases. On a yearly basis, the World Bank provides a Governance Index based on those indicators. I used the 2008 data (The World Bank Group, 2010) on the indicators.

Measures

Dependent variable. In the extant literature, democratic performance evaluations of the EU have been operationalized in several ways. Some scholars used support for integration (Janssen, 1991; Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000) to test citizens' attitudes towards the EU. Other scholars used satisfaction with (European) democracy (SWD) as their variable of interest (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Karp et al., 2003; Aarts & Thomassen, 2008). Boomgaarden et al. (2011) distinguished the democratic performance dimension from four other dimensions of EU attitudes. I will use this democratic performance scale of four items (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.828; Explained variance = 66 %; Eigenvalue = 2.64) as the dependent variable, measuring evaluation of the EU's democratic performance. As such, I constructed an adequate measure of democratic performance evaluations at the European level, firstly, because I use four items instead of one, secondly, because the four items load nicely on the same com-

ponent of EU attitudes, and thirdly, because the separate items are more precise measures of EU performance evaluation. The first item measures the satisfaction with European democracy: *How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in the European Union?* Respondents could choose between seven categories, ranging from ‘not at all satisfied’ (1) to ‘very satisfied’ (7). For the other three items, respondents had to indicate to what extent they agreed with the following statements: (a) *The European Union functions according to democratic principles.* (b) *The decision making process in the European Union is transparent.* (c) *The European Union functions well as it is.* Again, respondents could choose between seven answer categories, ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ (1) till ‘strongly agree’ (7). By averaging the responses to these items, I created a democratic performance scale³, ranging from 1 to 7 (see Table I.1).

Table 1.1 Descriptives of Dependent and Independent Variables From Panel Survey Data

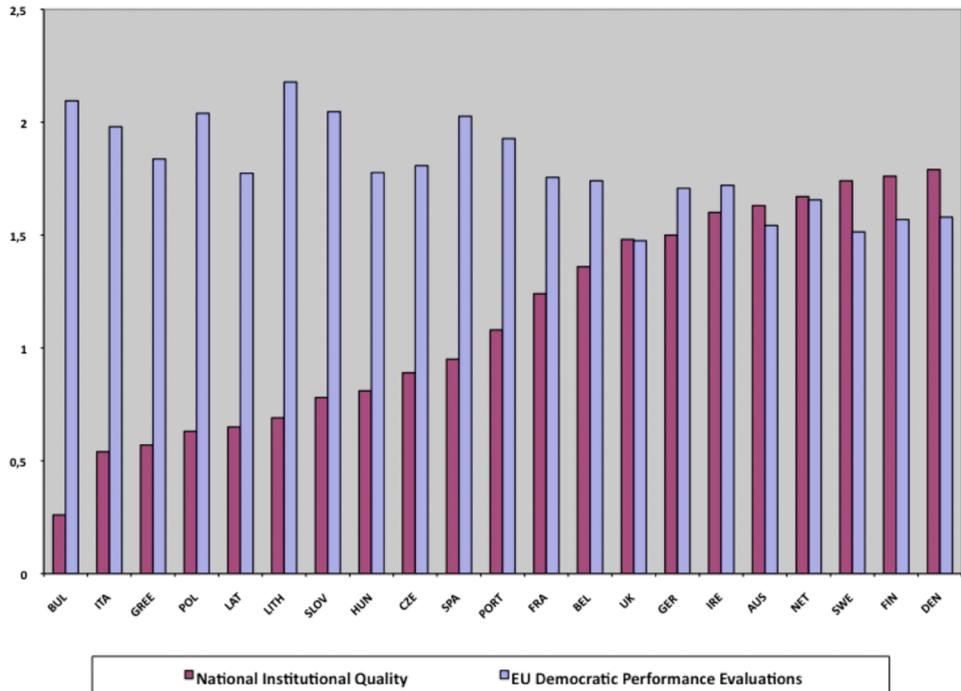
Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Democratic performance (D.V.)	32411	1	7	3.5913	1.20386
Domestic political knowledge	32411	0	1	0.7175	0.35258
Political knowledge EU	32411	0	1	0.54	0.668
SwND	32411	1	7	3.74	1.690
Benefits membership EU	32410	1	7	4.34	1.809
Media use	32411	0	18.87	3.65	3.04176
Education	32411	1	3	1.86	0.942
Age	32411	16	92	38.75	13.198
Gender	32411	0	1	0.54	0.498

Independent variables

Institutional quality. As mentioned earlier, I develop an indicator of good governance, using the six measures used by the World Bank in their Governance Index. Kaufmann et al. (2002) define governance broadly as the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. They flesh out six indicators of good governance from the large variety of indicator databases. ‘*Voice and accountability*’ captures the process in which authority is selected and/or replaced. It includes aspects of the political context such as civil liberties, political rights and independence of the media. ‘*Political instability and violence*’ taps into the likelihood of wrenching changes in government, which has a direct effect on the continuity of policies. ‘*Government effectiveness*’ measures the quality of public service provision, the competence of civil servants and the credibility of the government. ‘*Regulatory burden*’ is focused on the existence of market-unfriendly policies and burdens imposed by regulation. ‘*Rule of law*’ measures the extent to which the agents abide by the rules of society and have confidence in the judiciary. ‘*Control for corruption*’ measures how successful a country is in keeping the exercise of public power for private gains at a minimum (Kaufman et al., 2002). As these indicators are partially overlapping, the estimate of quality of governance for each country is the mean of these six indicators. As such, I created a unique objective measure of national institutional quality (Eigenvalue=5.12; Ex-

plained variance=85.33%; Cronbach's Alpha=0.94). The scores for each country in Figure I.1 indicate that national institutions of Bulgaria have the lowest score (0.26) and that institutional quality is the highest in Denmark (1.80).

Figure I.1 Quality of Institutions and Satisfaction with European Democracy, per Country



Note. Institutional Quality: N = 21. Mean = 1.12. St. Deviation = 0.47. Democratic Performance Evaluations: N = 32410. Mean = 3.67. St. Deviation = 1.24. For graphical representation, values of democratic performance evaluations have been divided by factor 2.

Domestic political knowledge. The second independent variable is domestic political knowledge. I make a distinction between domestic political knowledge and EU specific political knowledge. To measure domestic political knowledge, I use two multiple-choice questions on factual knowledge of the national political system (see Appendix). A “don’t know” option was included. Incorrect and don’t know answers were coded 0, correct answers were coded 1 (for descriptive statistics of the variables used, see Table I.1). After summing the scores for each individual, I divided them by two for analytical convenience.

Satisfaction with National Democracy. Due to a lack of knowledge, people may fail to distinguish between the national and the supranational level. While more knowledgeable citizens have a greater store of EU information available, low-knowledge citizens tend to use evaluations of national governments (Martinotti & Stefanizzi, 1995; Karp et al., 2003). This is in line with theories of survey

item response: citizens' responses to survey questions are based on the most salient and immediate considerations available (Zaller, 1992, p. 49-51). As such, the effect of satisfaction with national democracy potentially wipes out the indirect effect of domestic political knowledge on EU evaluations. Therefore, I control for satisfaction with national democracy. I used the original satisfaction with democracy measure: *"Regardless of who is in government, on the whole, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way democracy works in [COUNTRY]?"* Note that I mention explicitly that this democratic evaluation should not include the performance of the current government. Again, this item is measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, with 4 as the middle category.

Control variables⁴

Benefits of EU membership. Previous research suggested that individual levels of EU support are positively related to perceived economic benefits a member state derives from EU membership (Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Karp et al., 2003). Similarly, perceived costs and benefits of EU membership for one's own country are likely to also affect evaluations of the EU's democratic performance. I therefore control for this effect. As in the Eurobarometer, respondents are asked to assess whether their country benefits from its EU membership. *"[COUNTRY] has on balance benefited from being a member of the European Union."* This item is measured on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, with 4 as the middle category.

EU specific knowledge. To measure EU specific political knowledge, I asked two multiple-choice questions about the recent institutional reforms in the EU (see Appendix). I followed the same coding procedure as used for the domestic political questions⁵.

Socio-economic Background. Three variables were included to control for other potentially confounding factors: age, gender and education (Karp et al., 2003). I used a dummy for education dividing the respondents in three groups: low education, middle education and high education, which generally boils down to the completion of primary school (low), high school (middle) and university/college (high).

GDP per capita⁶. On the country level, I included GDP per capita as a control measure of economic wealth, which is likely to be correlated with lower levels of satisfaction with European institutions (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000).

Net benefit EU membership. The net transfers from the EU to the country can be a good predictor for EU support (Karp et al., 2003). Therefore, I included the net benefit (percentage of GDP) each country gets from EU membership as a control measure.

Years of EU membership. Awareness of the difference between national and European institutional quality can depend on the number of years a country has been member of the EU. Therefore, I control for the years of EU membership per country.

Analysis

To test the hypotheses formulated above, I employ multilevel modeling techniques. I do not use the more common approach of estimating ordinary (OLS) regression models, as the assumption of independence of the residuals, fundamental to OLS regression analysis, is violated. This is because the values of the dependent variable are more similar among citizens within countries than among citizens in different countries. Eleven percent of the variance of the dependent variable (significantly different from zero, $p < .05$), can be attributed to this nesting of citizens within countries. If I ignored this nested structure of the data, I would underestimate the standard errors of the regression coefficients, which might lead us to find relationships to be statistically significant even if they are not (so-called 'type-1 errors'). Multilevel modeling remedies this problem (e.g., Snijders & Bosker, 1999; Goldstein, 2003). I distinguish between two levels of analysis, the individual level and the country level, and simultaneously estimate effects at both levels as well as cross-level interaction effects.

Results

The results are displayed in Table I.2. The random effects model (Model 2.1) shows the negative effect of national institutional quality on evaluations of democratic performance. A difference of one unit in institutional quality, for example between Poland (0.63) and Austria (1.63), causes a decrease in EU democratic performance evaluations between Poland and Austria of 0.466 (significant at the $p = 0.01$ level) on a scale from 1 to 7. These results support the first hypothesis: national institutional quality has a significant negative effect on EU democratic performance evaluations. I controlled for the effect of perceived costs and benefits of EU membership for one's own country. The results show that those perceived benefits have a significant ($p < 0.01$) effect ($b = 0.274$) on democratic performance evaluations of the EU. Citizens perceiving their country's benefits as optimal (7) are far more satisfied with EU democratic performance than those who perceive those benefits as minimal (1): their evaluation of EU democratic performance is 1.644 higher on a seven-point scale. Furthermore, I controlled for the net benefits each country acquires from EU membership, and for the effect of economic wealth on EU democratic performance evaluations. Neither of those control variables had a significant effect, nor did the inclusion of those variables alter the results.

Table 1.2 Effects of Individual- and Country-Level Variables on Democratic Performance Evaluations of the EU: Multi Level Model Estimates

Independent variable	Model 2.1	Model 2.2
Constant	2.188*** (0.072)	2.198*** (0.075)
Institutional Quality (n=21)	- 0.466** (0.049)	- 0.472** (0.052)
Political knowledge (dom)	-0.012 (0.054)	0.319** (0.073)
Political knowledge (EU)	0.014* (0.008)	0.014* (0.008)
<u>Control:</u>		
Education	-0.033*** (0.006)	-0.033*** (0.006)
Gender	0.118*** (0.011)	0.118*** (0.011)
Age	-0.007*** (0.000)	-0.007*** (0.000)
Media use	0.008*** (0.002)	0.008*** (0.002)
Satisfaction with Nat Dem	0.257*** (0.012)	0.256*** (0.012)
Benefits of EU member	0.274*** (0.003)	0.273*** (0.003)
<u>Interactions:</u>		
Pol know(dom) * Inst Qual		-0.297** (0.055)
Pol know(dom) * SwND	-0.029* (0.010)	-0.028* (0.010)
-2*log	86861.696	86844.471

Note. Standard errors are in parentheses. *** p < 0.001 ; ** p < 0.01; * p < 0.05. N=32411

In a next step, I added the interaction of domestic political knowledge with national institutional quality to test hypothesis 2. The results are displayed in the second column (Model 2.2) of Table I.2, which indicates that the interaction between domestic political knowledge and institutional quality has a significant ($p < 0.01$) negative effect ($b = -0.297$) on EU democratic performance evaluations⁷. The negative effect of national institutional quality on EU evaluations increases as the level of domestic political knowledge increases. Furthermore, the model fit significantly ($2 * LL$ decreases 17 points) improves when this interaction is added. This result confirms the expected moderating effect of domestic political knowledge on the linkage between national institutional quality and EU evaluations (hypothesis two). I controlled for the interaction between satisfaction with national democracy and domestic political knowledge, which had, as theoretically expected, a significant ($p < 0.05$) negative effect ($b = -0.028$)⁸.

Discussion

The aim of this study was twofold: assessing the influence of the quality of institutions at the national level on democratic performance evaluations of the EU, and exploring the moderating effect of political knowledge on the influence of institutional quality on those evaluations. As Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) showed, evaluations of a supranational policy level depend on the interplay between national and supranational institutions. I combined survey data about citizens' perceptions of political performance with objective measures of national institutional quality from 21 EU member states.

With these data, I constructed a multilevel model, which enabled me to examine the differential impact of national institutional quality on evaluations of the EU's democratic performance, and the role political knowledge plays with regard to this effect.

I found support for the first hypothesis: there is a negative relation between national institutional quality and democratic performance evaluation of the EU. Higher institutional quality at the national level has a negative effect on the evaluation of European governance. Danish citizens, for instance, are in general more critical towards EU performance than, say, Bulgarians. Being confronted with low-quality institutions at the national level makes citizens more positive about European institutions. People might be more willing to adopt supranational policy when the difference between the performance of national and European institutions is unfavorable for the nation-state. As Sanchez-Cuenca (2000) stated, the interplay between supranational and national institutions is crucial for evaluations of the EU's democratic performance. Sanchez-Cuenca tested this hypothesis using corruption as an indicator of institutional quality at the national level. Other scholars used subjective measures of institutional quality, such as trust and satisfaction with national democracy (Karp et al., 2003). In this study, I combined six indicators of good governance (Kaufmann et al., 2002) into one indicator of national institutional quality. By using an objective indicator, accounting for a wide range of institutional characteristics, I established a linkage between contextual factors at the national level and citizens' perceptions of EU governance. These results also indicate the existence of different perceptions across countries, both on the actual performance of European institutions, and on the expectations citizens have towards those institutions. This finding is important, as it demonstrates that legitimacy concerns should also be acknowledged differentially across countries. The overall pattern of these country differences can be perceived as a division between East and West, or as a division between new and old members, because of differential familiarity levels with the EU, stemming from a (lack of a) socialization process. I tested for both categorizations, but neither the East-West divide, nor the old-new categorization was significant. Still, the fact that Eastern Europeans appear more satisfied with EU democratic performance leaves us with some questions this study cannot answer. Is this only temporal? Will this pattern (from 2009) persist when citizens in the new member states get more acquainted with the European institutions? Only future research can provide answers on these questions.

A second aim of this study was to explore the moderating effect of political knowledge on the effect of institutional quality on democratic performance evaluations of the EU. The multilevel dataset enabled us to explore this linkage for the first time. The results support hypothesis two: the effect of national institutional quality on EU evaluations is moderated by domestic political knowledge. The negative effect of national institutional quality increases as levels of domestic political knowledge increase. This finding has several implications. First, it strengthens the support for the first hypothesis. National institutional quality has a stronger effect for those who know more about national politics. The more citizens know about their own national politics, the more they use this knowledge as a yardstick for evaluation at supranational level. Apart from a differential approach across countries, one should as well differentiate within each country in attempting to deal with legitimacy issues. Furthermore, these results confirm the importance of distinguishing between different types of knowledge.

Further research should incorporate a direct assessment of political knowledge in the specific domain of EU level politics.

This chapter has established a clear linkage between national institutional quality and democratic performance evaluations of the European institutions. National institutional quality indeed serves as a yardstick for EU evaluation. Furthermore, I have demonstrated for the first time that domestic political knowledge moderates the effect of national institutions on EU evaluations, and as such, that European institutions are, indeed, 'second-order institutions'. In the next chapter, the impact of an election campaign, and more specifically of political information from media and interpersonal communication on EU evaluations will be studied.

Footnotes

- ¹ The study was funded by the Dutch National Science Foundation (VICI grant) and additional grants from the Danish Science Foundation, the University of Amsterdam, and the Swedish Riksbanken Foundation. For more information and documentation, see de Vreese, van Spanje, Schuck, Boomgaarden, Vliegenthart, Azrout, and Elenbaas (2010).
- ² The countries were the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Ireland, Austria, Portugal, Belgium (Flanders and Wallonia), Netherlands, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, and Bulgaria. The country selection includes larger and smaller member states, countries from North, South, East and West, and long term and new members of the Union. The country selection was finalized based on feasibility.
- ³ This factor analysis was performed with the same data in a different study (Boomgaarden et al., 2011), where more information on the different dimensions of EU attitudes can be found.
- ⁴ I also added a dummy variable (post-communist member states versus other member states) to the analysis to test for democratic history. Adding this variable did not change the results significantly.
- ⁵ In view of the VIF values, there are no problems associated with multicollinearity between domestic political knowledge and EU specific political knowledge.
- ⁶ In view of the VIF values, there are no problems associated with multicollinearity between GDP per capita and national institutional quality.
- ⁷ For analytical reasons, I centered the values of both political knowledge and institutional quality around their mean.
- ⁸ I am aware that multicollinearity between both interactions could be a problem here as the tolerance levels (VIF) are high. However, I choose to add this control interaction for theoretical reasons, making this model more conservative and the results more convincing.